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Authors

Yang, Lawrence
Maitland, Padma

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Lawrence Yang and Padma Maitland

Urban Pilgrimage

“How pleasant to hold in mind, through the crevasses of our moods, at three in the afternoon when lassitude and despair threaten, that there is always a plane taking off for somewhere, for Baudelaire’s ‘Anywhere! Anywhere!’: Trieste, Zurich, Paris.”

—Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*

A list of city names is enough to evoke the wonder of travel. “Trieste, Zurich, Paris.”—the closing line of James Joyce’s classic *Ulysses*—provides, as Alain de Botton writes, a record of the book’s production and the cosmopolitanism it grew out of. “Cairo, Bombay, Shanghai” traces other passages, trade routes perhaps or the wandering imagination of oriental fantasies similar to those that run through “Rome, Jerusalem, Mecca.” Thus listed, cities act like nodes along longer lines of travel. While some networks forge the outlines of territory, others trace less grounded modes of connection. The itineraries of travel, scribbled on parchment, etched in stone, or uploaded online, simply serve to recall journeys between places and the connections made and then subsumed within them.

A record of people’s names is, similarly, enough to prompt travel. The knowledge that someone was there, in that cafe, on that street,

Opposite: Model by Brooke Hair and Nancy Mei from *Dense Ecologies/City and Bay*.

in that church, can cause us to get on a train or plane, or just walk around the corner, to be there, where someone else once was. Today, a post on Facebook or Twitter alerts us to the presence of others at a particular place, leaving a digital impression of movements through time and space. Does some affective presence linger there, where a person tagged a photo or tagged a map, for us to discover? At least, it might move us to journey there.

Pilgrimage is a chance to participate—through fiction or through memory, if there can be a distinction between them—in the special significance of a place. The dynamism and grandeur of cities grows out of the movement beyond, between, and within them, the flux of people, ideas, and goods mingling to forge unique experiences and identities. While traditionally directed towards religious sites, or across hallowed grounds, what is pilgrimage in a more secular context? Similarly, while religious sites used to anchor cities, what are the new nodes of urban life? Rethinking pilgrimage in the urban context offers a way to consider how the modes for experiencing and understanding transformation through travel have changed or remained the same. Similarly, reemphasizing the role of pilgrimage in the contemporary city asks us to question where meaning in the urban context lies, and the new circuits that define and affirm value in the city through movement to and from sites of attraction and interest.

The connection between pilgrimage and the city is an historical one, but the need to resituate its historicity within contemporary global itineraries has never been more urgent. Contemporary neoliberal economies have fostered new capital and human flows towards secularized cities of iconicity, which tourists and terrorists alike now target. With emerging media networks and new forms of urbanism, pilgrimage today produces topographies that demand that we relocate the journey of sacredness within trans-medial environments.

Victor Turner famously discussed how community identities break down during pilgrimage to form a new community of travelers. Digital media functions similarly, allowing people to connect across vast distances. As old identities are discarded, new ones are forged and special emphasis is given to the status imparted by the new modes that connect us, whether through the movement of people or information. Perhaps, physical and virtual movements are now the best record of our own personal allegiances; places traveled to and websites visited both indicate something about where our interest lies. Calling these things pilgrimage reflects the transformative value we place on experiences gained elsewhere.

Pilgrimage can run counter to the normative paradigms of country, territory, and state. The Latin root for pilgrim, *peregrinus*, means foreigner, reminding us that pilgrims cross boundaries that are geographical, political, cultural, and mythical. Pilgrims go seeking and, as Rebecca Solnit has observed, when en route, they take on a separate citizenship as wanderers who are ready for radical otherness and singularity. The emerging pilgrimage city similarly exists within a global network of urban centers, connected literally and figuratively through the movement of people and things. Each city struggles to be unique while still associated with other major cosmopolitan centers. Like Foucault's genealogy or Deleuze's rhizome, itinerary defines an elusive plane through which singular experiences are linked and constellated.

Literature, film, and art combine with social and technological innovations to forge imaginaries of the city. When linked to movement, mediums of representation suggest a process of change through exploration analogous to the process of pilgrimage. The Paris of Baudelaire's *flâneur* famously united the urban experience through the promenade, binding together art, fantasy, fashion, and a burgeoning

public sphere. In the 1960s, the Situationist International proposed a similar process of *détournement*, coining the idea of an urban *dérive* as a means to rediscover the lost experiences of their city through an urban meandering. Coopted by social radicals in the late 60s and 70s, personal experience became central to urban life and global experiences. Like the *détournement* of the Situationists, the itinerary of pilgrimage is a mission for transformation through locomotion, disorienting the wanderer and then establishing them within a renewed sense of their place in the world.

Patterns of movement define belief, core perspectives writing themselves into the growth and development of urban environments and the daily practices of those who live in them. More than just a single journey, pilgrimage is a pull towards a site. It is the defining sentiment of the cultural, political, and religious ideologies that organize social structures. Emphasizing urban pilgrimage binds new patterns of growth and experience to latent historical models and precedents of pilgrimage in the city.

Systems of movement relate institutions to ideologies of places and the moral issues that define them. Contemporary pilgrimage practices, if put within the broader affective polity and mediasphere, relate to the recent scholarly engagements with crisis and infrastructure. Pilgrimage, after all, relies on the virtual network of rumors, legends, and the discursive field around it. Within such networks, the flow of images, information, affect, and belief find their channels of articulation and modes of expression akin to processes of movement and return. In this sense, urban systems, and the crises created by their malfunction, give rise to a potential dystopian mode of pilgrimage.

New media exacerbates the situation, transforming the means through which we understand urban environments and offering new

platforms for defining community. The recent events of Arab Spring or Black Lives Matter demonstrate the incredible power of social media to mobilize people virtually and physically. The gathered bodies of social protest in the urban square or suburban park are surprisingly similar to the collection of pilgrims around holy sites. Such parallels demand new approaches towards the relationship between movement, congregation, and belief, especially within urban environments.

Patterns of movement express cultural value. The cooption of pilgrimage routes and places by tourists further questions the motives behind travel and the preservation of historical and religious sites. However, the experience of tourism is often at odds with the traditional requirement of a pilgrimage journey—that it be arduous. With ease of travel, brought on by the advent of trains, planes, and cars, what remains of pilgrimage is the intentionality of a trip, the expressed desire both for reaching a specific destination as well as the potential for a transformative experience once there. What if new urban pilgrimage is driven by consumerist desire rather than spiritual aspirations? The rhetoric of taste offers one method for considering alternative forms of urbanization while the escape from urban metropolises another. Patterns of pilgrimage map the city; global tourism and urban mobility map the same routes differently. Studying the shift from pilgrimage to tourism reveals the role of institutions and infrastructure in defining the aspirations and realities of new sites of pilgrimage.

There is a tension between the reproducibility of urban experience through media and the constant quest for singular experiences. This is mirrored in the multiplicity of themed cities and buildings around the world. The boom of replica architecture—towns and cities based on iconic Euro-American cities and monuments in rural China—shows that the homage paid to global urban centers not only produces

uncanny objects of desire, but suggests new analytical positions that challenge the center-periphery paradigm of pilgrimage topographies. On the other hand, the obsession with singular urban experiences also creates a cult of aesthetics around ruins in post-industrial cities such as Detroit and Berlin—newly sacred sites that draw filmmakers and photographers to pay homage to the new urban sublime. What is the relationship between reproducible and singular urban experiences? What role does media play in facilitating between the two? If the death and fragmentation of cities can become the source of representation, attraction, and even projects of preservation, how do we map out the relationship between representations of cities and pilgrimage to them?

Pilgrimage, as a particular form of travel, is directed movement in search of transformative experience. It can be driven towards a specific destination, or itinerant. It can be short-lived or long endured, but it is the coupling of experiential qualities with a reflexive trend to narrativize the path taken that gives pilgrimage its unique qualities and endows it with a particular importance around the creation of place and identity. This issue of *Room One Thousand*, a special issue sponsored by the Global Urban Humanities Initiative at Berkeley, considers the relationship between pilgrimage—understood broadly as itinerancy or mobility—and urban environments. In particular, it asks what pulls us to a place and how our experience of travel impacts how we understand and know a city. The pieces within it form a broad history of pilgrimage around the world. They consider ancient pilgrimage sites, like Kanchipuram, and new routes, like Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. They compare new technologies for the experience of travel, like GeoGuessr, alongside new methodologies for studying the affective process of medieval pilgrimage cities. Some offer new understandings of what pilgrimage is or can be, while others help to define pilgrimage in the city by showing us what it is not.

The essays in this issue represent a diversity of approaches and methods, including pilgrimage accounts, digital mappings, photography, drawing, and film. Some are longer research projects, parts of dissertations or multi-year studies, while some are narratives, reflections on personal engagements with pilgrimage. Throughout the issue, there are also a series of “thought pieces.” Kept short, they are not meant to be exhaustive studies, but rather first ventures into a topic to inspire conversation and perhaps suggest future lines of inquiry.

We have grouped the essays into three subsections: Routes, Temporary Urbanism, and the Traveled Voice. While each of the pieces could fall into any one of the categories, and each of the categories could, in themselves, be a focus of future study, we felt this arrangement was a way to begin a conversation about how multiple approaches could come together and suggest avenues for further study. Taken together, we hope that this kaleidoscope of pieces will suggest some new facets to what we are calling Urban Pilgrimage.