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Interactive comment on "Intercultural interaction and "situational places": a perspective for urban cultural geography within and beyond the performative turn" *by* P. Dirksmeier and I. Helbrecht

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(1) Overview: The authors present in their paper exiting new ideas and theoretical approaches to think intercultural encounters from a geographical perspective. By drawing on performance theories, the paper offers an innovative approach how to look at the constitution of the city from a different angle. Dirksmeier and Helbrecht argue that the quantitative increase of global connectivity in the last decades has lead to new qualities of global interaction. They suggest the term "situational place", which focuses on the situated and instantaneous character of apparently coincidental encounters be-

tween culturally different strangers in an urban setting. As intercultural encounters occur above all in multiethnic cities, the authors plead for new ways of theorizing moments of cultural encounter within cultural urban geography. Due to their emphasis on practice, performance theories are considered as a suitable frame for addressing questions of everyday urban encounters. Drawing on Thrift's definition of performance as "engineering of the moment" (2003: 2012), the authors show how the fluidity and instantaneousness of performances are both a strength and weakness (p. 3) – I would rather say 'challenge' – of performance theories.

(2) Performance studies: In a first step, the authors introduce the genealogy and semantics of performance theories in human geography and wider social science to the reader in a very sophisticated, but sometimes, rather lengthy fashion. It remains rather unclear why the authors outline the three different strategies in university studies before they present the state of the art of performance in urban geography (Suggestion: shorten section 2 by either addressing the three strategies in university performances studies later on in the paper or removing them completely).

(3) Performance in human geography: In a second step, the "event character of the human lifeworld" (p. 4) is considered as a link for the engagement of human geographies with performance theories, stressing the importance of social environments for performative behaviour (Suggestion: The structure of the paper would become clearer if the third paragraph of p. 4 ("Performance as an event . . .") functioned as link to section 3).

(4) Performance in urban geography: In a third step, the authors – finally – come up with the intersection of performance theories and urban geography. They exemplify their argument that "urban space is produced through bodily performances" (p. 6) by drawing on the studies of de Certeau (1984), Pile (1996) and Grosz (1998). In the following they argue, however, that the cited studies rather focused on the individual body performances than the interactions between bodies. The authors claim that their proposed research focus, which looks at intercultural interactions from a performative perspective, "trespass into the new area of research" (p. 7). In a very narrow sense of

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conceptualising this topic they might be right. But I would like to make the argument that it might be worth looking beyond the narrow limits of the specific intersection between performance theory, intercultural interactions and the city. The research area loses some of its novelty if we look into the literature of feminist urban geographies where sexualised and gendered interactions within the city have been a major focus (see e.g. McDowell 1995, Longhurst 2000, Hubbard 2000). Analogously, it is worth looking at geographies of race/racism, critical whiteness studies (e.g. Shaw 2007) as well as geographies of ethnicities to get some inspiration how they frame intercultural encounters (see e.g. Clayton 2008, 2009, Dwyer/Bressey 2008). (Suggestion: incorporate broader body of literature).

(5) World society: In the second part of the paper (section 4) the reader expects and is in fact really curious about methodological approaches how to research those fluid and instantaneous urban encounters (a question the authors have already addressed on more general grounds in the paper Dirksmeier/Helbrecht 2008) and to read about empirical findings of the actual performances of intercultural encounters. Instead of doing so, the authors draw on the role of world society and culture within contemporary world society. In a first moment, the reader is somehow puzzled in what way Luhmann's conceptualisation of world society and nation state might contribute to the performative understanding of everyday encounter in urban spaces (I don't want to say that it does not, however, I would like to point out that the theoretical argument at this point becomes rather overloaded). (Suggestion: rethink importance of Luhmann's world society for the argument as a whole and shorten these paragraphs).

(6) Culture: On the contrary, the discussion around the significance and understanding of culture as structural attribute of world society helps the reader to delve into the material of intercultural encounters. The hint to Stichweh's definition of culture as place-time bounded and the understanding of culture as diacritical praxis (Boeckler/Berndt 2005) give first insights why performance theories present a rewarding way of conceptualising urban intercultural encounters. I seriously believe that the paper might improve in

quality by expanding the ideas around these conceptualisations of culture and by relating them in a more extended and profound way with the concept of 'situation place'. Although the authors try to define their concept of culture throughout page 9, it stays rather unclear how "people with different cultural backgrounds or beliefs" (p. 9) are conceptualised. Later on, the authors refer to Amin's work on multiethnic cities (p. 12) and speak about "cultures or ethnic groups". It stays unclear to me if the authors regard culture and ethnicity as synonymous within their research or if not, how they differentiate between both concepts. (Suggestion: clarify both terms).

(7) Performative urban geographies: The identified shift from a rather static approach in urban geography towards the focus on the "fluid and ephemeral encounters" (p. 9) is certainly a new substantial contribution within the field of urban geography. Therefore, I would like to encourage the authors to elaborate further on their innovative approach to a cultural urban geography – and I am sure they will do so – by thinking through their project of performative intercultural encounters through a broader lens of theories (see above) and further thinking through methodological and empirical challenges of such a project. (Suggestion: see suggestion 4).

(8) Situational place: In section 4.2 Dirksmeier and Helbrecht finally develop their idea of 'situational places' as a possible framing of spatialised encounters. While they draw on Massey's notion of space/place, they do not clearly draw out – at least in my opinion – in what way their concept of 'situational places' goes beyond Massey's conceptualisation. At first glance the suggested term seems rather familiar to me as at least a range of feminist geographers have developed similar approaches by emphasising that places are brought into being through performative interactions (Gregson/Rose 2000). Swiss feminist geographers have developed Massey's concept of space as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" and suggest the term "TatOrt" in order to emphasise openness, fluidity and practice (see e.g. Bieri 2007; Büchler/Richter 2010; Fredrich et al. 2007). Their work might be a fruitful inspiration for developing further the concept of 'situational place'. (Suggestion: clarify differences and commonalities with Massey's

concept of relational place).

(9) Overall evaluation and major revisions: The authors definitely make a convincing argument in their paper that performance theories present a rewarding theoretical approach to grasp complex relations between culture, interaction and urban place. The theoretical foundation of the paper and the elaboration of the arguments are truly persuasive. It seem to me, however, that in order to develop its full potential, the paper at this moment (due to the temporary state of the research project which appears to be in an initial phase) could possibly go into two directions: either to focus rather on the bibliographic review, relating the state of the art in performance studies with cultural urban geographies and (inter)cultural studies or to support the theoretical argument with first empirical findings or empirical examples from other studies. After commenting the paper as a whole, I would like to suggest some specific issues: Further suggestions/ enquiries: (1) Scale: Drawing on Amin's (2000) work in British cities, the authors bring up questions of scale when researching intercultural encounters. Doreen Massey's and Sallie Marston's work might be excellent points to start from when thinking through questions of scale addressed already in page 9.

(2) Political implications: Another important issue would be to develop further political implications of such a research agenda. It is certainly true that "cities need places which allow schismogenesis or cultural contact to occur without formal restrictions" (p. 12). It would be interesting to examine, how these kinds of places would need to look, how urban architecture and planning have to change in order to facilitate "schismogenesis-friendly" places. Certainly all these questions might be addressed in an upcoming (empirical) research project.

(3) Questions of authority: Although the authors do touch questions of authority (p. 11), the importance of the research agenda could be stressed by emphasising questions of hegemony/subalternisation regarding practices of encounter. Drawing on postcolonial, queer and especially critical whiteness studies (especially when applying research within Western cities) might help to look at the culturalised performances from a differ-

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entiated perspective. As the authors have integrated postcolonial approaches in their former work (Dirksmeier 2010), I would welcome a reflection on questions of authority within the performances of encounter.

(4) Intersectionality: While reading the paper, I was wondering why cultural belonging/ethnicity (see general comment nr. 6) is stressed so much. In doing so, other (bodily marked) differences which could play a major role in initial encounters are neglected. Although the authors discuss in detail why culture seems to them a crucial component in the constitution of the city, the neglect of other visible body markers such as gender, class, disability etc. should at least be made explicit. To integrate intersectional thinking in the research agenda could be a rewarding step (see Valentine 2007 and especially 2008).

(5) Performance – performativity: I guess there is a reason, why the authors focus on performances rather than performativity. In my opinion, however, performativity does play a major role in initial encounters. Following Gregson's and Rose's (2000) argument that performance and performativity – "the citational practices which reproduce and/or subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances" (p. 434) – are connected through the saturation of performances with power, it is rather unclear to me, how performativity can not be addressed within the range of this paper. Clearly, initial encounters are framed by and at the same time (re)produce performative discourses around the different 'Other' regarding stereotyped cultural backgrounds, heteronormativity and classisms etc.

(6) (Cultural) urban geography: Differences between urban geography and cultural urban geography should be made explicit.

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