Full Length Article

A road scheme, the state, and the détournement of urban space: Henri Lefebvre and competing publics in postwar Hyde Park, London☆

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ABSTRACT

Henri Lefebvre develops the term, détournement, to help analyse how certain events can make urban spaces more 'plastic' and uncertain and thus more readily malleable for appropriation by groups and organisations. In the literature, however, there has less been discussion about how events of détournement can lead to often intense dialogue and internal divisions within and between state departments, and between the state and groups in civil society about how these uncertain spaces can be moulded strategically to suit certain agendas and projects. This paper starts to fill this scholarly gap by applying Lefebvre's insights to examine the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme in London, 1955–1962. This road scheme built a dual carriageway system between Hyde Park Corner and Marble Arch and unintentionally generated a moment of détournement in the surrounding spaces. The paper explores how four distinct publics emerged around the road scheme to discuss and elicit support for their respective agendas on how these uncertain spaces might be 'stabilised' once more. The four publics were: a 'civic public' assembled by the London County Council; a 'local amenities public' created by the Royal Fine Arts Commission; a 'national heritage public' assembled by the Ministry of Works; and a 'free speech public' constructed by defenders of Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. The paper demonstrates how a road scheme can generate competing claims to publicness, which not only incorporate the state, but also open up strategic opportunities for progressive movements to extend and develop their rights to the city.

1. Introduction

In 1946, continual heavy traffic flows at connected intersections between Hyde Park Corner in the south-east corner of Hyde Park, central London, and the north-east corner of Hyde Park next to the Marble Arch monument near the entrance to Oxford Street had prompted engineers in the London County Council (LCC), the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, Westminster City Council, and the road traffic branch of the Metropolitan Police to jointly consider possibilities to re-model and enlarge the junctions, roads and roundabouts at these spaces.[1] In-depth planning to redesign the intersections commenced in the mid-1950s (Rayfield & Clayton, 1964). The final agreed layout became known as the Park Lane Improvement Scheme and comprised a newly built dual carriageway in Park Lane along the east side of Hyde Park, new

roundabout systems and pedestrian subways (The National Archives [TNA]: HLG 79/1062). The scheme was given the green light by the Cabinet in October 1957 and officially unveiled to the public the same month (TNA: T 228/664). Construction of the road commenced three years later in 1960 and took around two years to complete. The new road design was finally opened by the Seventh Duke of Wellington in October 1962. Fig. 1 is a map of the north-east corner of Hyde Park from the late 1950s and it details some changes to this space produced by the road scheme.

The article explores this major road scheme in central London and does so by drawing upon the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre. As is well-known, Lefebvre argues that place under capitalism is mediated through 'abstract space' – space sliced up into commercial units to be exchanged and sold for profit. To make it attractive to buyers, abstract space is also

[1] Hyde Park is the largest Royal Park in central London. Henry VIII established Hyde Park as a royal hunting ground. It was eventually opened to the public in 1637 by Charles I (see Roberts, 2001). Marble Arch was modelled on the Arc de Triomphe du Carrouse in Paris and originally designed as an entrance to Buckingham Palace. Completed in 1833, it was eventually relocated in 1851 to the northeast corner of Hyde Park primarily to open up more space for the expansion of Buckingham Palace (see Robinson, 1999).

permeated with distinctive visual and symbolic styles, practices, objects and social relations. At the same time, abstract space comes up against communities and groups that seek to appropriate this space for their own use, rights and social needs in and against commercialisation and the profit motive. Importantly, for Lefebvre, the dialectical tussle between exchange-value and use-value also creates different publics with degrees of publicness that articulate these agendas, commercial interests and community entitlements and rights. To give one illustration, commercial spaces are made alluring to investors through publicness associated with the likes of policy brochures, words, images, symbols, concepts, plans, and networks operating at different spatial scales, which can be used to further the aims and goals of local neoliberal governance projects.

According to Lefebvre, the state is also a vital player in skirmishes between these publics. To analyse these tussles, Lefebvre advances a strategic-relational view of the state. He argues the state is a contradictory entity comprised by a collection of institutions and state departments that regularly become enmeshed in strategic disagreements among themselves about how they might advance the interests of hegemonic agendas and projects. This is because the capitalist state is not a unified entity, but is instead a social relation that reflects and refracts conflicts, interests and struggles among hegemonic and counter-hegemonic political parties, political and civil society groups, institutions and organisations. As a result, states will invariably operate through strategically-selective modes of representation located in different spatial scales, which favour some strategic actors, state allies and state partners over and above others (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 113; see also Jessop, 2002; Poulantzas, 1973). Crucially, these strategic conflicts, dilemmas, and practices between different forces in and beyond the state sometimes and unintentionally go on to produce moments of détournement in urban space. For Lefebvre, détournement occurs when the space in a specific place is rendered 'plastic' insofar that it becomes ambiguous and uncertain. Space loses its 'normal' identity and so can be potentially 'hijacked' by different groups and to try to construct distinctive publics around and about the space in question. Détournement therefore refers to a space in a transitional moment – a moment when a space might become a new dominant space or a new oppositional space (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 98).

The paper employs these theoretical insights to show that the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme created its own moment of
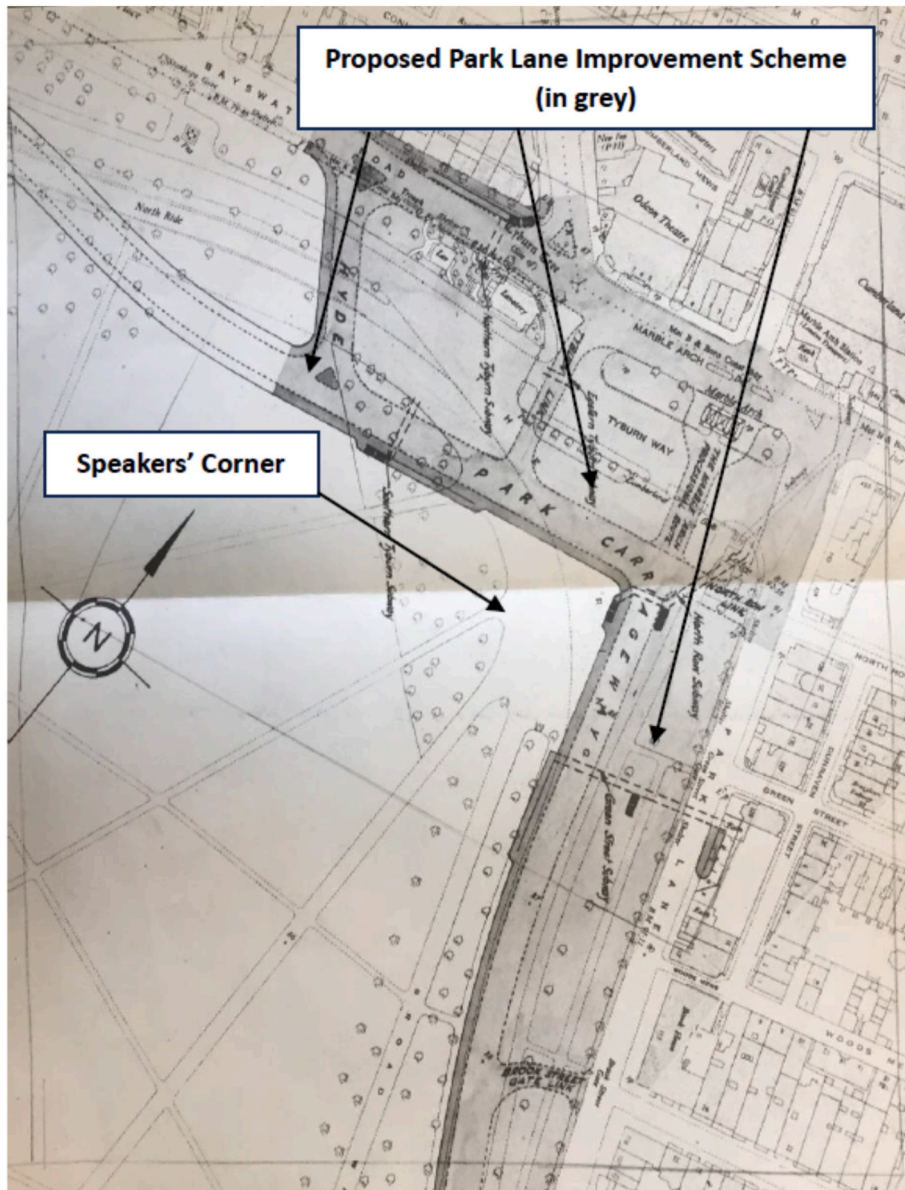

Fig. 1. North-east corner of Hyde Park. Used with permission from The National Archives, File no. WORK 16/2004.

détournement in the spaces immediately surrounding the road scheme. These spatial uncertainties began in the mid-1950s when information about redesign plans became known to a variety of civil society organisations, such as the Royal Fine Arts Commission. Once the plans officially went public two years later, the ambiguous nature and plasticity of the spaces intensified, which was driven, in part, by further dialogue about the scheme from a number of groups and organisations. Many of these groups and organisations sought to assemble their own respective publics and degrees of publicness about the road scheme in order to articulate their own agendas and projects in civil society. Four assembled publics around the road scheme in particular were notable at the time, not least because they also gained coverage to varying measures in mainstream media publics. First, the road scheme was employed by the LCC to assemble and construct a 'civic public' based in constructed London civic pride and public improvement in and against a national Conservative government. Second, a 'local amenities public' was produced by the state partner, the Royal Fine Arts Commission, which argued that the road works would negatively 'encroach' on the natural beauty of nearby green and park spaces. Third, the Ministry of Works strove to assemble a 'national heritage public', which claimed the road scheme would have a negative impact on surrounding buildings and monuments of national cultural importance. Finally, regulars at the world-famous place for free speech, Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, along with their allies the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), took elements from these already existing publics, but then added their own narratives to argue that the road scheme would literary 'pollute' popular and ordinary people's exercise of free speech in the park.

Broadly speaking, the article therefore explores how different publics will try to use the strategic opportunities opened up by the plasticity and spatial paradoxes of détournement to re-order and represent the objects, relations and symbols within these spaces in a manner congruent with their own respective public. For example, the détournement of a place can often provide conditions for a group or organisation to construct a new utopic image for spaces within this place in order to then convince selective others of the inescapable force of their respective public (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 98). The paper subsequently focuses on conflicts and dialogue between groups and organisations seeking to create their own publics around détournement because this is a relatively under-researched area in the literature. There is thus less emphasis in the article on space that has been successfully détourned, or momentarily subverted of its original function and meaning, in order to focus instead on the formation of competing publics and their respective attempts to employ the moment of détournement to détourn space. We begin the paper by first outlining some of Lefebvre's theoretical ideas, which will prove pertinent for the sections that follow.

2. Spatial publics, détournement and the strategic state

Three theoretical areas discussed by Lefebvre are especially relevant when analysing the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme. First, Lefebvre argues that capitalism produces abstract space. Through the likes of 'calculation, planning, programming' (Lefebvre, 1997, p. 307), space is carved up into fragments, sites and units for the commercial purpose of gaining exchange-value (Lefebvre, 2016, p. 91; see also Charnock & Ribera-Fumaz, 2011). Similar to more contemporary geographers (see Akkar, 2005; Christophers, 2016; Iveson, 2007; Mitchell & Staeheli, 2005; Smith, 2021), Lefebvre also argues that abstract spaces are concretised in urban place through different degrees of publicness. Publics are part of the 'practico-sensible and … immediate' unique qualities of abstract space (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 79) and are often produced, for example, by states, local authorities, private business interests, and quangos, as well as produced through degrees of publicness by the likes of narratives, documents, buildings, and symbols, to generate exchange-value (Lefebvre, 1971, pp. 105–110; 1997: 310 and 342).

But publics are also animated by the actions of ordinary people who mobilise together in urban spaces, draw upon different objects, such as parks, media, buildings, roads, signs and images, in order to push forward their own customs and rights to the city, whether these are rights of gender, rights of sexuality, right to housing, right to education and training, right to work, the right of people's culture and heritage, the rights of ethnic identities, the right to leisure or the right to health (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 157). While urban space therefore contains isotopic elements of sameness – for instance, neighbourhoods built through equivalent housing complexes – there is also difference and heterotopy at play (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 39). Publics are subsequently not homogenous entities as such in urban space, but are materialised through a 'system of objects' and spatial relations (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 21; see also Terzi & Tonnelat, 2017). Generating novel 'entangle situations', these objects and relations can potentially create new publics and publicness in distinctive places (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 36; on assemblages of space and objects, see also Allen & Cochrane, 2010; Amin, 2008; McFarlane, 2011).

Second, Lefebvre is also attuned to how the state is itself a strategic-relational entity that internalises a 'knot of contradictions' from civil society insofar that the state refracts, in its own way, the struggles between and competing agendas among social classes, social groups, and among competing 'fractions' of capital (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 113). What this implies, for Lefebvre, is that the state is far from a monolithic entity. It is, instead, an 'ensemble … of institutions', but 'cannot be reduced to any one of them' (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 220). That is to say, the state is 'the site of the relation of forces' (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 113) at particular moment in time, or conjuncture, in which state apparatuses, politicians, governance bodies, civil society groups, and others, jostle with one another to promote their respective agenda. Furthermore, Lefebvre argues that the state represents a struggle among state departments over spatial policies and politics linked to conflicts between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 93; see also Brenner et al., 2011; Jessop, 2016; MacLeod, 2020; Poulantzas, 2000). Normally, a hegemonic bloc led by a political party and its allies will evolve around a state project, such as the postwar Keynesian welfare state project. The political grouping will also endeavour to mediate and influence certain institutions that govern, develop and represent urban spaces. A hegemonic project therefore pushes 'itself into the built domain: roads and highways, the general organization of traffic and transport, the urban fabric and neutral spaces, "nature preserves," sites', and so forth (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 79). 'Institutional space' is thus a term coined by Lefebvre of 'systematized action' by a hegemonic state project to entrench its agenda within selective institutions in urban spaces (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 79; see also Jones, 2019).

Third, Lefebvre is interested in the spaces of détournement. Writing in 1956, Guy Debord and Gil Wolman claimed that elements within different contexts can be combined in novels ways to create new and often comical and subversive combinations of the original meanings of these elements (Debord & Wolman, 1956). In this respect, détournement represents a 'hijacking' of an element from a context, distorting it by taking it away from its normal purpose and re-routing the original meaning of the element to evoke new and emotional meanings and images (Sandlin & Callahan, 2009, p. 91). Détournement seeks to expose what are often thought by some to be banal everyday images and routines in a context so that new images and materials can be borne that escape conformity to become more 'authentic' to people's lives (Elias, 2010). For example, forms of détournement have been employed by contemporary activists to subvert familiar commercial brand images in public spaces (Kiziltunali, 2020).

Lefebvre, however, has a slightly different take on détournement. For Lefebvre, détournement is neither strictly dominant space nor an oppositional space. It is, rather, ambiguous space – an 'interim moment' of uncertainty. This is a space of *plasticity* in which the 'hardened and signified functionality' that one expects of a recognised and known place gives way to a 'transitional and paradoxical moment' *before* it assumes another and new signified functionality (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 98). This is a

point when the original form, functions and structures of a prevailing space start to lose and 'outlive their original purpose' due to certain events (Lefebvre, 1997, p. 167). At this point, a space can then be momentarily subverted (détourned) by a group. A commercial building that falls vacant due to an economic downturn might then for a time be 'diverted' into a festival gathering space for young people before the building is created afresh into a new commercial identity (Lefebvre, 1997, p. 167).

Importantly, spatial paradoxes (détournement) that emerge in a place because of certain events often then lead to the formation of competing publics that engage in heightened debates with one another in, around and about how these plastic spaces can be used to reveal new potentialities and new possibilities. As part of this process, these competing publics will seek to *appropriate* certain objects and relations to try to transform them into what Latour (2005: 6–13) terms as an 'assembly' or 'gathering' for a select number of groups and organisations around 'matters of concern' about these spatial paradoxes (see also Clarke et al., 2014; Honig, 2017). Arguably, however, Lefebvre's views are more comprehensive than these other 'materiality' and 'relational' perspectives. For example, Lefebvre employs a relational perspective, but he also highlights two further points. First, he is interested in how abstract space will attempt to 'constrain, structure and connect space' through state hegemonic projects and associated territorial governance (Buser, 2012, p. 283). Second, Lefebvre focuses on how conflicts, dialogue and struggles occur *between* state apparatuses as well as on how conflicts and struggles over spatial policies occur between hegemonic state projects and counter-hegemonic groups. This article thus concentrates in the main on competing publics constructed around a moment of détournement as this is an area relatively neglected in the literature. There is subsequently less space given in the article as to whether the space in question is détourned (or momentarily subverted).

Taken together, the three areas highlighted above also have an added advantage insofar they can begin to address some well-known criticisms that have been directed towards Lefebvre's theoretical insights. One notable criticism suggests that Lefebvre counterposes abstract space to 'differential space'. After all, argues Purcell (2022), Lefebvre notes that abstract space in cities draws in differences within its homogenising machine, but in so doing, abstract space then unintentionally gives sustenance to the very forces in civil society – community activists, for example – to organise and raise their voices in a public context on issues of dissent about abstract planning issues. For Purcell, Lefebvre is therefore in danger here of presenting a simple binary opposition between 'concrete' resistance from groups towards 'abstract' space (Purcell, 2022, p. 3053). Arguably, however, it is Purcell who presents a somewhat dualistic account of Lefebvre in order to then make his critical albeit sympathetic observations. As already noted, abstract space for Lefebvre is *internally* constituted through difference and spatial uniqueness. Dialectically, one cannot separate the two.[2] Abstract and concrete are thus fused together and not, as Purcell seems to imply, separated realms for Lefebvre that only then interact with one another under contingent empirical conditions. These observations lead into a related difficulty with Purcell's description of Lefebvre. According to Purcell, Lefebvre also underlines how a centralised and interventionist state imposes a 'spatial order' on civil society congruent with the exchange-value status of quantified abstract space. Yet, as we now know, Lefebvre is more circumspect in his views on the state. He outlines a more sophisticated strategic-relational position on the state. Uncertain spaces of détournement, moreover, are often competed over by different state apparatuses, departments and counter-hegemonic projects.

We now apply these theoretical insights to analyse the emergence of four publics that came to be assembled in and around the Park Lane

Road Improvement Scheme. We start, first, by looking at civic publics produced by the London County Council (LCC).

3. Civic publics

Formed in 1889, the LCC was controlled by Labour Party Councillors from 1934 until its eventual disbandment in 1965. Such electoral triumphs meant that tensions were continually evident across this period between the LCC leadership and different Conservative administrations (see Parker, 1999, p. 53). Part of the reason for Labour's electoral successes on the LCC lay in its ability to mobilise a sense of civic pride for London. Shapely (2013) notes that civic pride emerged during the Victorian era and was structured around the likes of architecture, use of public space, public improvement schemes, new housing, municipal parks, galleries, and museums. Within two years of its 1934 victory on the LCC, for example, Labour had rehoused 20,000 people in the capital (Weinbren, 1998, pp. 45–6). Labour was also at the forefront of green and park town planning and spent millions in the years after 1945 on improving its green spaces for Londoners (Hannikainen, 2017). For its part, the UK postwar state sought to give 'direction' to such ventures. The New Towns Act 1946 in the UK empowered government to control urban development, while the Town and Planning Act 1947 forced local authorities to gain agreement from central government to their respective redevelopment plans (Ortolano, 2011, p. 485; see also Gössling, 2016).

Place promotion was a valuable commodity for city planners in marketing civicness, which was tied partly to investments in the transport and communication systems, urban and suburban renewal (Harvey, 1989, p. 132). Lefebvre notes that road construction is one way for politicians, policy officials, planners and architects to draw up unique plans and designs for postwar abstract space. 'Motoring needs and traffic problems' are constructed to model urban spaces through 'self-technical rationality' that enable people and objects 'to mix without exchange, each element remaining enclosed in its own compartment … ' (Lefebvre, 1971, pp. 100–101). Highways codes and other visual signs mark out the spatial content and 'plan' of a road system. Abstract space of a road thus becomes a simulated concrete encounter that further encompasses walking, strolling, chatting, encounters, shops, hotels, greenery as well as cars, buses, motorbikes, subways, and so forth (Lefebvre, 1997, p. 313). Mass production of cars can likewise signify and symbolise adventure and human contact across urban places (Lefebvre, 1971, p. 101; see also Lefebvre, 2002, p. 212).

For the LCC, the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme was, in effect, a détournement moment to use materials within these spaces and recombine them into distinctively LCC 'civic publics' and civic sociable encounters (on sociability in city encounters, see Wise & Noble, 2016). For instance, the LCC Town Planning (Redevelopment and Road Improvements) Sub-Committee report from 17 May 1957 noted of the Scheme:

> The whole project will need to be considered from the standpoint of civic design. Some the problems that arise are the maintenance of the Ceremonial Route as an integral part of the scheme; the severance of land from the Park and the creation and treatment of new islands of open space; the effect of the proposals on "Speakers' Corner" and the "deckchair area" of Marble Arch; the position of existing memorials and statues and the re-siting of some of them; … the treatment of existing buildings on either side of the new road between Hyde Park Corner and Hamilton Gardens; the effect upon trees, etc. A great deal of work has to be done on all these matters. Having regard to the curtail of the Park, which many may deplore, it is essential to produce a scheme which will positively enhance amenities (LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/109).

As the quote indicates, civic design for the LCC was concerned not only with promoting central London, but was also related to designing 'open spaces', analysing the impact of the road scheme on surrounding

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[2] Similarly, Marx says that it is the very abstract and commodified form of labour under capitalism which brings concrete workers together to assert unique rights in and against capital (Marx, 1988; see also Holloway, 1992).

trees, ensuring there were positive civic outcomes on leisure spaces around important monuments such as Marble Arch, and thinking through how the road scheme would affect the most famous place in the UK to exercise free speech, namely Speakers' Corner. As the LCC noted at another meeting, civic design and the road scheme had to encapsulate alluring 'attractive' and 'visual' features (TNA: HLG 79/1062). The LCC therefore employed the spatial plasticity surrounding the roadwork scheme and nearby material objects – monuments, free speech, trees, socialising, deckchairs, ceremonial routes for grand formal displays of state power – to create new plans, networks and spatial organisations in order to reconfigure these in the guise of LCC civic spaces.

Civic images were also to be constructed into newly built underground pedestrian subways. Flowing into overground walkways, it was envisaged these subways would connect the road scheme together across different spaces. Civic narratives about London's modern history were to be a vital ingredient to these spatial representations. In early June 1961, the Architect to the LCC invited George Mitchell, a modernist brutalist sculptor, who had also produced art for some of the LCC's housing schemes, to submit ideas for mosaic designs in the new subways. Among Mitchell's suggestions was a mosaic 'Coronation' mural that would be placed beneath the processional route at Marble Arch, while another mural would depict the history of Tyburn' – London's once notorious hanging tree (LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/112). The LCC therefore visualized the road scheme as a strategic opportunity to literally etch their civic public into the fabric of surrounding spaces.

Tensions were at the same time noticeable between the LCC and other publics. Richard Edmonds, Chairman of the LCC Roads Committee, reflected after the opening of the road improvement scheme that 'from some sections of the press there at once came prophecies of doom, not least at the thought that for a time the whole of Knightsbridge … would be closed to traffic to allow working space for the construction of the underpass'. Yet, continued Edmonds, ordinary people of London like 'busmen and taxi drivers' had 'praised' the new road system claiming they were now getting through central London in 'record time' (LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/112). There was good reason for Edmonds's somewhat barbed comments about the press. In trying to construct their own civic public, the LCC could not control the national mainstream media's public representation of the roadworks. As early as December 1957, *The Evening Standard* had noted that while the improvement scheme was 'admirable in conception', it was nevertheless 'marred by excess of caution in design'. For *The Evening Standard*, the newly built underpass section of the scheme would see traffic now being 'squeezed' into single lanes having previously enjoyed three lanes (The Evening Standard, 1957). Press carping about the road scheme continued after the official opening on 17 October 1962. Just a month later, *The New Statesman* felt that the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme was 'generally undistinguished by world metropolitan standards'. For example, 'the design of the pedestrian circulation is afterthoughtish, unimaginative in planning and excruciatingly detailed in places (the interior detailing of the tunnels is full of visual disasters throughout) (The New Statesman, 1962).

As importantly, the LCC was also challenged at various points by other public institutions. Early on in the design phase of the scheme, a letter dated 16th April 1955 from Geoffrey Samuels, Secretary of the Royal Fine Art Commission, declared:

> The Commission has from its inception attached greatest importance to the preservation of the Royal Parks and has on several occasions resisted several *encroachments* on their perimeter. The present proposals, based on traffic considerations, constitute the largest encroachment ever suggested. In the opinion of the Commission such traffic advantages as might result are heavily outweighed by the disadvantages to … (Hyde) Park. It hopes, therefore, that the whole scheme may be reconsidered; it is not one that the Commission could in any circumstances support (LCC CL/HIG/02/109; added emphasis).

But who were the Royal Fine Art Commission? What broader ideals did they espouse in terms of architectural design of public spaces? Why were they against the road scheme? Indeed, what public were they trying to assemble together in and around the Park Lane Improvement Scheme?

4. A local amenities public

The Royal Fine Art Commission was established by the government in 1924. Its remit was to enquire into the artistic importance of public amenities and to report back to government with its views. Local authorities and public bodies could therefore seek out the advice and views of Commission on their own respective development plans. In their history of the organisation, Carmona and Renninger (2018) note that the Commission generally favoured the coherence and preservation of local amenities over planning and designs that might threaten them, including plans that favoured motoring interests. After the Second World War, and following large-scale construction, expansion and investments in British cities, the Commission inevitably found it was entering ever more into public debates about specific architectural designs and proposals (Carmona & Renninger, 2018).

In early September 1957, the Royal Fine Art Commission met with representatives from the LCC, Ministry of Works, and the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation. A Mr. Jellicoe for the Commission asked those present if they had considered the possibility that the road scheme might not in fact provide the expected amount of traffic relief in the area. The Ministry of Transport said that while they could not give assurances on this point, an architect from the Ministry of Works had nevertheless noted the road scheme would certainly cause minimal disruption to Hyde Park (TNA: Work 16/1994). But by late September 1957, the Commission was still suitably apprehensive about the road scheme that they felt obliged to let the LCC know about their concerns:

> The Commission is particularly anxious that in any change that is made to the East Carriage Drive the amenities of Hyde Park shall be protected and indeed enhanced as far as possible …. With regard to Hyde Park Corner, the Commission attaches greatest importance to the continuity of Hyde Park and the Green Park as planted open spaces, and believes the suggested introduction of large paved areas and a pool on the new central island would be a mistake. It would prefer to see a large area of grass and trees … Although the Commission is not concerned with traffic circulation as such, it is interested in the reduction of traffic congestion inasmuch as it prejudices local amenities. It believes, however, that any relief of traffic congestion likely to ensue from this scheme will be small in comparison with the cost involved and the damage to other forms of amenity … In short, the Commission does not believe that a scheme on these lines is really in the public interest (LMA: LCC/CL/HIG/02/110).

Clearly, the Royal Fine Art Commission was drawing upon an alternative narrative about the impact of the road scheme on the surrounding spaces to that articulated by the LCC. Without doubt, both the Commission and LCC shared similar concerns about the consequences the scheme would have on open spaces, but whereas the LCC saw these issues in a generally positive light, the Commission drew on a 'local amenities' and 'traffic congestion' discourse to argue the scheme would be detrimental to the park spaces. Indeed, by mid-December 1957, the Commission warned the LCC: 'It seems clear … that the Commission's views on (the Park Lane Improvement Scheme) must be made public' (LMA: LCC: CL/HIG/02/110). The Commission then engaged in a national media blitz stating its opposition to the road scheme. In particular, it told a variety of newspapers that the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme represented, 'largest encroachment on the Royal Parks ever suggested'. The Commission continued:

The Royal Parks are a unique feature of London and one of the main attractions both for those who live there and for visitors from other parts of the country and from abroad. Their value has increased enormously as the built-up areas of the metropolis have extended beyond them, and hitherto no sacrifice of immediate practical convenience has been considered too great to preserve them intact. There is a grave risk that if an *encroachment* of this kind is permitted, further demands will follow from time to time, which, if accepted, would whittle away the splendid series of open spaces (LMA: LCC: CL/HIG/02/110; added emphasis).

The Commission informed the press that if the scheme did go ahead, then it hoped that 'every effort will be made to mitigate the damage done, and indeed to compensate, if possible, for the loss of amenities by the creation of new ones' (The Times, 1957). The Manchester Guardian thought the Commission 'had a point' to their criticisms (The Manchester Guardian, 1957).

In some respects, the Royal Fine Art Commission was drawing on the spatial uncertainties generated by the road scheme in order to compose their own utopic representation of the surrounding area. For Lefebvre, utopic space is represented always existing 'elsewhere', a 'non-place', which cannot be 'seen' as such but 'is there in all its glory'. Utopia is thus 'a vaguely determined place' that is often 'carefully conceived and imagined' in 'a place of consciousness' (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 129–130). A utopic discourse of the urban will sometimes construct representations of almost 'inaccessible' symbolic 'ornaments' that go on to build a 'dreamlike vision' in which human wealth is attainable for all (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 131–2). But this is dialectically entwined with an 'everywhere and nowhere' mentality, stipulating a 'presence never achieved' (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 131) exactly because utopias invariably denote a value beyond any empirically visible object (see also Coleman, 2013).

For its part, the Commission assembled its own utopic vision by mobilizing a material and non-material urban landscape – noise, smell, motor traffic, green open spaces, and trees – to suggest that the road-works would potentially damage the *local, national and global* symbolic value of this landscape. London's Royal Parks, in particular, were said to enjoy a value that was immeasurable. To make these utopian assertions, the Commission captured part of the already existing LCC civic public discourse, but then turned this against the LCC. The LCC civic public discourse stated that parks and green spaces of London were places of open-air leisure. Indeed, public green spaces were now increasingly used by Londoners not only for traditional activities like sport, but also for experiments in new outdoor entertainment, such as open-air cinemas, concerts, children's adventure playgrounds and sculpture exhibitions (Hannikainen, 2016, pp. 140–149). The Royal Fine Arts Commission re-configured this public narrative by arguing the road scheme might in fact pollute the commons of the Royal Parks and thereby diminish their value to the public. Traffic fumes and traffic noise would possibly constitute an 'encroachment' on the Royal Parks, especially Hyde Park, if the road scheme went ahead. As a result, 'encroachment' was now the *dystopia* that *might* arise from the LCC civic public and trample on the utopic greenery of London. So, the Royal Fine Art Commission represented a different publicness to the civicness of the LCC. Their public was attached to a local amenities public sphere, which also incorporated a utopic 'elsewhere'.

A number of government departments joined in dialogue with both the LCC and the Royal Fine Art Commission, but did so to assemble their own representation of space. The Ministry of Works managed government buildings, some public parks, some housing schemes, and a number of public memorials and monuments. The Ministry had expressed concerned with the impact of the road scheme on symbolic objects of national heritage. In assembling its own national heritage public sphere around the road scheme, however, the Ministry of Works was often led into intense debates with other government departments and government agencies about objects and material in the surrounding spaces. We now turn our attention to these issues.

5. National Heritage Public

Public heritage can naturally communicate values of the state, but it can likewise communicate a variety of emotions to the public embedded in past events, whether these are related to traumatic events associated with death and destruction or to popular cultural experiences. Objects of public heritage, such as monuments celebrating past military figures, therefore have a dialogical quality insofar their original meaning can be appropriated and given new themes by different communities in civil society (West, 2010a; b; see also Lefebvre, 1997, pp. 222–224). Monuments can be obvious totalizing sites of power – 'to glorify conquerors and the powerful' (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 21) – but their dialogical quality opens up potentials to bring together ordinary people into one space who might then articulate alternative their own socio-cultural heritage and people's history (Lefebvre, 1997, p. 223; see also Mace, 1976).

Governments of course employ elements of public heritage for specific socio-political projects and agendas. The postwar Conservative administration, which came to power in 1951, was aware of the need to use heritage to build an alternative socio-cultural narrative to that of the previous Labour government's welfare agenda. Heritage themes surrounding the 1953 coronation of Elizabeth II, for example, were managed, in part, by the Conservatives to show that a new national identity was coming into being, 'that reflected not only the continuity of the ruling establishment that the monarchy represented but also modernity in the form of a young queen' (Sables, 2017, p. 982). At the same time, the Ministry of Works sought to integrate other socio-cultural forms, such as working-class history, into its expanding public heritage and monument work (Thurley, 2013, p. 217). But by the 1950s, the Ministry was also sceptical of other organisations and government departments gaining the necessary expertise to care for local monuments (Thurley, 2013, p. 207). Its distrust was especially noticeable in relation to the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme.

In early September 1955, a report was published by the 'Technical Sub-Committee on Amenity Aspect of the Working Party on the Park Lane Improvement Scheme'. Comprised by members from the Ministry of Transport, Road Research Laboratory, the traffic branch of the Metropolitan Police, and the LCC, the remit of the sub-committee was to consider if and how the road scheme might be modified to minimize interference with surrounding amenities, 'without detriment to the traffic advantages of the scheme as now planned and without any material increase to the estimated cost' (TNA: HGL 79/961). For the Ministry of Works, the Technical Sub-Committee Report had failed to consider how the proposed road scheme would impact on the complexities involved in managing some of London's key monuments and memorials. Instead of giving fresh perspective on traffic issues contained in the scheme, argued the Ministry, those on the committee had in fact 'assumed that it is their duty to pronounce on amenity matters' even though they were not experts in heritage matters. Authors of the Report had therefore 'not seriously thought out the possibility of reducing the interference' that the roadworks might have on certain symbolic heritage sites, such as Hamilton Gardens Buckingham Palace and the Decimus Burton Screen, the latter of which was the grand architecturally

lavish entrance to Hyde Park Corner. According to the Ministry of Works, the authors had subsequently written a 'bad report' (TNA: Work 16/1857). But further disagreements also ensued *within* the state apparatuses themselves about which strategy would work best in adopting traditional British values with a postwar modernising zeal. The Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, for example, felt that it would be wrong to take an unduly pessimistic view of the LCC road scheme. Some spaces in Hyde Park Corner were in fact home to 'barren' areas that were 'hardly the most imaginative or aesthetically pleasing layout'. The road scheme might in fact provide the opportunity (a moment of détournement) to re-model these spaces to enhance local amenities. Trees lost to the scheme could for instance be planted elsewhere in surrounding spaces (TNA: HGL 79/961).[3]

Still, the Ministry of Works went on to use the road scheme to make a number of criticisms of other government agendas. At one meeting organised by the Ministry in November 1957 and attended by the Bailiff of the Royal Parks, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, and Chief Architect of the Ministry of Works, progress was discussed on how the road scheme might affect a number of specific statutes and monuments. The Ministry of Works in particular used the meeting to criticise LCC proposals to place the Artillery War Memorial (constructed in 1925 to commemorate the 49,000 soldiers from the Royal Artillery killed in the Frist World War) nearer to Wellington Arch because the War Memorial would then be overshadowed by the Arch. The Ministry of Works told those present that it would therefore 'resist' such proposals. The Ministry also used the meeting to berate the LCC by advising the LCC representatives they should as a matter of courtesy consult with Artillery Association about any changes the road scheme might have on the Artillery War Memorial (TNA: Work 16/1999). In some respects, then, the Ministry was in these instances mobilizing its own national heritage objects in a manner that put them in disagreement with other attempts to produce public narratives around the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme, including the LCC's civic public.

According to Lefebvre (1997), there is also a right to the city allied with the creation of representational spaces that seek to struggle in and against those who wish to represent space on behalf of the dominant. In terms of the Park Lane Improvement Scheme, these representational spaces emerged through struggles around the right to free speech in Hyde Park. After all, Hyde Park was (and is still) home to the most famous people's space for free speech in Britain, namely Speakers' Corner. Ordinary people had held social and political meetings at Hyde Park throughout the nineteenth century and actively campaigned for the right of free speech in the park. In 1872, the government finally allowed people the right to give a 'public address' at Hyde Park. Nevertheless, many regulars at the Hyde Park speaking area continued over the years to assert rights to 'free speech' over and above the state-sanctioned 'public address' (see Roberts, 2000).

How, then, did Speakers' Corner regulars use the road scheme to assemble their own public on free speech? How did they draw on conflicts and schisms within and between state departments, local government, and various allies and partners concerning the spatial uncertainties – the détournement – generated by the road scheme in order to appropriate their own representational free speech space; a space that then sought to maintain, and even further develop, the identity of Speakers' Corner as a monument for popular practices of free speech? We now turn to consider these issues.

6. Free speech publics

For Lefebvre, those seeking to build representational spaces in which to enhance and develop certain rights will aim to critique 'centres of decision-making, wealth, power, of information and knowledge' in favour of a multitude of concrete rights; for example, 'the right to meetings and gathering'. This is to ensure that 'places and objects must answer to certain "needs" generally … the "need" for social life and a centre, the need and the function of play, the symbolic function of space … The right to the city therefore signifies a gathering together instead of a fragmentation. It does not abolish confrontations and struggles' (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 195; see also Harvey, 2008; Mitchell, 2003).

Given the socio-cultural significance of Speakers' Corner, it is therefore unsurprising that the state and local government held conversations and meetings about the impact of the improvement scheme on this space for 'public address'. In late February 1955, the Ministry of Works noted: 'we shall want to keep a careful eye on the effect of the scheme on Speakers' Corner where … there are certain traditional characteristics which must be preserved' (TNA: Work 16/1856). And as already been noted above, in May 1957, the LCC announced that Speakers' Corner was part of their 'civic design' plans for the improvement scheme (LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/109). For the Police and Treasury Solicitor, there was disquiet about boundary alterations to Hyde Park, especially since such changes might cause legal headaches as to the enforcement of Park Regulations to those grey and in-between spaces created by new park borders (TNA: Work 16/1995).

The Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme pushed some of the regular users of Speakers' Corner, along with certain allies, to employ two interrelated strategies to create a new representational space about free speech in Hyde Park. The first strategy is noticeable in a letter written in late April 1957 by Speakers' Corner regulars, the National Secular Society, to the Ministry of Works. The National Secular Society was alarmed by news that the road works might 'interfere with the speaking pitches at Speakers' Corner'. If this was indeed the case, then the Society wanted to register 'a strong protest' against this potential obstruction to free speech. After all, continued the Society, Speakers' Corner is 'known all over the world' as well as being 'a genuine democratic feature of English life'. The Corner offered the opportunity for ordinary people to air both 'unpopular and popular opinions' (Work 16/2004).

Importantly, the National Secular Society appropriated a discourse already in the public domain, and one articulated forcibly by organisations like the Royal Fine Art Commission, which stated that the road works would lead to possible 'encroachments' on Hyde Park. The National Secular Society, however, subtlety altered the public constructed by the Royal Fine Art Commission principally by adding a utopic element to the meaning of 'encroachment'. This was a utopia attached to popular culture – a 'feature of English life', no less – mediated through a type of free speech that welcomed 'unpopular and popular opinions' in a 'genuine' democracy. In effect, the National Secular Society was trying to concretise their utopia within everyday life to the extent they were considering how free speech really operated as a mode of democratic inclusion at Hyde Park (cf. Lefebvre, 1996, p. 151; see also Lefebvre, 2009, p. 288). Only this time, the National Secular Society refracted the 'encroachment' discourse into a novel public narrative, which expressed anxiety that the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme might pollute an inclusive and 'genuine' free speech through the noise of a significant increase in cars.

The second strategy is noticeable with the involvement of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) in discussions they had with the state about the impact of the road scheme on Speakers' Corner. Formed as a national body in 1934 to monitor the policing of political

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[3] There was initially some uncertainty as to whether the Ministry had the right to transfer ownership of a strip of land in the Royal Parks across to the LCC so that the LCC could commence work on the road scheme. The Crown Land Act 1851 had placed the possessions and land revenues of the Crown, including the Parks, under the management of the Commissioners of H.M. Office of Works. As early as September 1947, however, a note from the Ministry of Works made it clear it was doubtful there was any legal power in the Crown to authorise the permanent appropriation of park land for the purpose of widening a highway (Work 16/1994). The Park Lane Improvement Act, 1958 was passed, in part, to transfer to the LCC the necessary ownership rights of the required land in Hyde Park and Green Park to carry out work on the road scheme (The Park Lane Improvement Act, 1958: 755–781).

demonstrations and to ensure civil liberties at these events were being upheld by the police (see Clark, 2009), the NCCL sought in this instance to exploit the uncertain impact of the Road scheme on Speakers' Corner. It did so initially by trying to disrupt and influence what it perceived to be dominant plans the authorities had fashioned from the road scheme for the speaking spaces in Hyde Park. So, in early May 1957, the NCCL wrote to the Ministry of Works to let the Ministry know they had read in the press about the Park Lane Scheme to relieve traffic congestion, yet it was not clear to them the consequences this would have upon Speakers' Corner. The National Council therefore wished to see a plan of the works. The NCCL eventually met the Ministry in early February 1958. At the meeting, the NCCL outlined four main principles that should be borne in mind by the Ministry when designing the new roadworks. First, facilities for public speaking should continue to be available in the area. Second, the area made available for public speaking should not be smaller than the previous area. Third, there should be no change in the privileges enjoyed by speakers and their audiences under existing Park Regulations. Fourth, every attempt should be made by the Ministry to keep Speakers' Corner open while the road works were underway (Work 16/2004).

The Ministry tried to reassure the NCCL that there was no intention of taking away the privileges enjoyed by speakers and that a line of grass would be moved back to permit an area similar to that used at present to be made available for speakers. However, the NCCL placed added pressure on Ministry of Works by mounting a national media campaign about the negative consequences the roadwork scheme would possibly have on Speakers' Corner (Work 16/2004). The NCCL was therefore building upon a public criticism that had already been created in and around the road scheme. And due to this mounting media campaign by free speech champions, the Ministry guaranteed that all Speakers' Corner regulars would be protected 'from the increased noise of traffic in the new carriageway'. Indeed, by mid-July 1958, the Ministry made a guarantee to the NCCL that two new connected speaking areas of an overall larger size than the existing speaking space, along with a line of trees to minimize traffic noise, would be built (TNA: Work 16/1836).

7. Conclusion

Reading some Lefebvrian analyses, one is sometimes led to believe that there is a dualism between a dominant and homogenous central representation of space seeking to impose its agenda onto distinctive representational spaces in civil society. For instance, Butler suggests that Lefebvre argues, '(t)hrough its roles as the provider of infrastructure and the manager of resources, alongside its subsidization policies and spatial planning regimes, the state is largely responsible for the template on which abstract space is built' (Butler, 2009, p. 324). Unquestionably, Lefebvre does explore in detail how the state helps to produce new forms of abstract space at specific points in time. But Lefebvre is also attuned to how the state is itself a contradictory entity comprised by an ensemble of institutions and state apparatuses which are often engaged in strategic disagreements among themselves about how they might implement particular spatial policies. Lefebvre therefore clearly insists that the state must take account of different class struggles and the activism of other forces in civil society when it seeks to impose spatial policies.

But my paper has also shown that two further theoretical points are important to remember when analysing the processes noted above. First, it needs to be borne in mind that the state is a strategic entity based in and around a battle for hegemony between different state 'parts' (cf. Cooper, 2019, p. 61) including state partners and local authorities. This leads to often intense debate and dialogue between these apparatuses, which can then be strategically exploited by progressive movements in civil society. Second, a moment of détournement can make the territorial claims of specific spaces and publics more malleable, softer and open to strategic opportunities for some forces to mould and shape them in new ways.

One main focus of this paper has thus been to highlight how the very

nature of postwar abstract space in London led to the formation of different publics, publicness, and spaces of détournement around the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme. The road scheme was not merely about building a new physical road, it was also about assembling competing social, cultural and historical materials and discourses (see also Clarke & Newman, 2009; Smith, 2022). Lefebvre's theoretical and empirical insights are thus extremely useful because he explores space as being not only a field of action – examining space through the projects and agendas of different groups, institutions, state apparatuses, for instance – but also as a 'basis of action' – examining how material objects in a field of action interact in predictable and novel ways to create 'energies' and 'potential' to reproduce existing and enact new spatial relations (Lefebvre, 1997, p. 191).

For Speakers' Corner regulars, it was exactly both the détournement and uncertainty created by the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme *and* the strategic terrain assembled by dialogical differences between state departments that the regulars then strategically employed to try to redraw the representations of the spaces in and around the road scheme to suit their own free speech representational space. Unlike the Royal Fine Art Commission, then, campaigners also held an inclusive set of ideals about the democratic use and potentials of Speakers' Corner as a place for the free speech of ordinary people. Free speech campaigners thus championed the right to meet in Hyde Park in and against the abstract space associated with the road scheme. In this instance, Speakers' Corner regulars and campaigners sought to extend their own democratic rights to the city.

Ethical statement

There has been no research involving human participants and/or animals.

There are no ethical issues associated with informed consent.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no potential conflicts of interest in the writing and submitting of this paper.

Data availability

The primary data that support the findings of this study are publicly available in UK archives. Specific references for historical documents used in the paper are given in the bibliography.

Acknowledgement

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