

**BOUNDARIES OF CONNECTION AND DISTINCTION: AN
OUTSIDER'S MANEUVERS, PRACTICES, AND TASTES IN
GUARE'S *SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION***

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Öz

***Bağlantı ve Ayrım Sınırları: Guare'ın Altı Derece Uzak'ında Bir Dışlanmışın
Manevraları, Pratikleri ve Beğenileri***

John Guare'ın Altı Derece Uzak adlı oyununda, ana karakter Paul sahte kimlikler kullanarak başka insanların hayatlarına dâhil olmaktadır. Sahtekâr Paul aslında sınıf, ırk ve cinsel yönelim gibi farklı etmenler tarafından şekillenen sınırları aşmayı istemektedir. Bu sınırlar bağlantı kurma ve sosyal ayırım belirleyicilerini aşma olasılığı üzerine yapılan değerlendirmenin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Bu makale, Guare'ın oyunundaki bağlantı ve ayırım karşılığı hakkındaki tartışmayı canlandırmak için, bu ikiliğin mekân, mekânsal manevralar, pratik ve beğeni sunumuna dayandığını savunmaktadır. Bu çalışma öncelikle de Certeau'nun mekân, taktik, strateji ve pratik incelemeleri ışığında sınırlar üzerinde mekân ve mekânsal manevraların önemine dikkat çeker; daha sonra Bourdieu'nun habitus, beğeni ve kapital üzerine çalışmaları ışığında üyeliği belirleyen etmenleri inceler.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *J. Guare, Altı Derece Uzak, Sınır, Mekân, Pratik, Beğeni, M. de Certeau, P. Bourdieu*

Abstract

In John Guare's Six Degrees of Separation, the protagonist Paul integrates himself in other people's lives, using fake identities. The imposter Paul indeed yearns to overcome the boundaries formed by distinct factors such as class, race, and sexual orientation. These boundaries provide a basis for a consideration of the possibility to connect and to transcend markers of social distinction. In order to revive the discussion about the dichotomy between connection and distinction in Guare's play, this article argues that this dichotomy is based on the depiction of space, spatial maneuvers, practices, and tastes. This study primarily draws attention to the outstanding role of space and spatial maneuvers in the commentary on boundaries through de Certeau's examination of space, tactics, strategies, and

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practices and then investigates the determiners of membership through Bourdieu's scrutiny on habitus, taste, and capital.

Keywords: *J. Guare, Six Degrees of Separation, Boundary, Space, Practice, Taste, M. de Certeau, P. Bourdieu*

John Guare's play *Six Degrees of Separation* is basically about an imposter named Paul and his transgressive attempts to become a part of other people's lives. In Guare's plot, Paul who creates and uses false identities is hosted in the houses of several wealthy New Yorkers and a relatively poor couple. The play questions the determiners of connection and distinction in a society through a close investigation of the relationships between Paul and the people he visits. One of the forces that provides the inspiration for Guare is the sociologist Stanley Milgram's small world experiment which is commonly linked with the phrase "six degrees of separation." Milgram's study on social networks concludes that six was the average number of acquaintances separating any two people in the entire world (Newman, 2000: 820). Guare's inspiration by Milgram's experiment is combined with the news story of a real event in which "an African-American teenaged hustler named David Hampton . . . inveigled his way into four different homes of prosperous Manhattan couples by pretending to be the son of Sidney Poitier" (Plunka, 2002: 39-40). Hampton's story, as well as the small world phenomenon, is the key to Guare's questioning of a possibility of connection despite the prominence of separative social barriers among people.

In an interview with Bryer, Guare explains the reason why he was fascinated by Hampton's story as "it's about what white people want black people to be, what black people think white people want them to be, what our self-image is" (Bryer, 1995: 83). Despite the prominence of the role of race, Guare's interpretation of both Hampton's story and Milgram's experiment is not limited to the issue of race and is more complex. The commentary on social barriers is maintained mainly by the characterization of the black protagonist who is revealed to be poor and homosexual, as the plot unravels. Through the interaction between Paul and the people he conned, the play illuminates several significant oppositions such as white versus black, rich versus poor, homosexual versus heterosexual, real versus phony, and legitimate versus illegitimate. There is an amount of critical attention on Guare's play, along with Schepisi's film adaptation under the same title, in the context of these oppositions based on class (Zimmerman, 1999), race (Evans, 2002; Gillian, 2001, 2002; Román, 1993; Zimmerman,

1999: 108-9), sexual orientation (Clum, 1992; Gillian, 2001, 2002; Román, 1993; Zimmerman 1999: 124-5), authenticity (Cheever, 2010), and legitimacy (Deans, 1998: 209-21; Gillian, 2002). All of these oppositions are evidently major denominators of the complex dynamics of connection and distinction in the play. Keeping in mind the factors such as class, race, and sexual orientation, this article aims to provide a fresh look at the dynamics of connection and distinction and argues that Guare's play discusses these dynamics through its presentation of space, spatial maneuvers, practices, and tastes as distinctive emblems of inclusion/exclusion. De Certeau's notions of space, tactics, strategies, and practices and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, taste, and capital provide the theoretical framework to examine the role of spatial dynamics, taste, and practices in the interpretation of the boundaries of connection and distinction.

The social message that dominates the content of *Six Degrees of Separation*, which is based on the constant tension between a possibility of connection and a reality of distinction, is most explicit in the use and presentation of space. The dialectical association of the social and the spatial has been evaluated and reiterated for a long time, mostly defined as the spatial "turn," "rebirth," or "renaissance" in the social sciences. Following the confrontation of historicism as the dominant theoretical perspective, space was reasserted in social and cultural theory especially after the 1960s (Smith and Katz, 1993: 66; Soja, 1989: 4; Warf and Arias, 2009: 2). Henri Lefebvre, who attempts to reach a unitary theory of space between physical, mental, and social fields (Lefebvre, 1991: 11), and Michel Foucault, who declares the twentieth century as "the epoch of space" (Foucault, 1986: 22), are among the significant contributors of this interest in space. Since then, space has served as an important theoretical background in different disciplines such as literary studies, cultural studies, sociology, political science, history, art, anthropology, feminism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism (Smith and Katz, 1993: 66; Warf and Arias, 2009: 1). For instance, the distinguished geographer and urban theorist Edward W. Soja points out that "there is no unspatialized social reality" and "we are intrinsically spatial beings and active participants in the construction of our embracing spatialities" (Soja, 1996: 1). "Geography matters," as Warf and Arias explicate, "not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen" (Warf and Arias, 2009: 1). Likewise, in order to understand why and how people are separated from or connected with each other, a spatial reading of *Six Degrees of Separation* is crucial. The protagonist's spatial practice or his movements in the physical space

designates certain codes and images in society consequently forming a bridge between the spatial and the social.

For this reason, an attempt to comprehend the dichotomy between connection and distinction necessitates a careful scrutiny on the protagonist's spatial maneuvers. The play is based on an outsider's, i.e., Paul's, steps into other people's private spaces. Paul visits three wealthy families telling the same lie that he is a school friend of their children from Harvard College and he is Sidney Poitier's son. The play begins with an act of panic in the house of the Kittredges. Then the Kittredges begin to narrate their first encounter with Paul which would explain the terror and panic in their house. Flan Kittredge, an art dealer who used to be a painter in the past and his wife Ouisa are entertaining their guest Geoffrey with the hope of taking two million dollars to buy a Cezanne. The door bell rings and the doorman carries Paul who is mugged and stabbed in the Central Park. The presence of a character as a doorman is indicative of a border that separates in and out, a border that needs to be watched since the wealthy Kittredges own a privileged place. The doorman "literally polices the border between what is admissible into the cultured universe of Ouisa and Flan, and what is not" (Zimmerman, 1999: 121). Learning that Paul is their children's friend, he is taken in. Inside as a guest, Paul refers to Kandinsky, Salinger, Beckett, and Chekhov and is good at imitating an intellectual Harvard boy. Paul tells the Kittredges that his father is Sidney Poitier who is nowadays working on the adaptation of *Cats* into a movie. The Kittredges are more interested after Paul promises them to give a role in the film. Impressed by Paul's intellectuality and his kinship with a celebrity, the Kittredges ask Paul to stay with them for that night. In the morning, when Ouisa goes to Paul's room to wake him up and check his health condition after being stabbed, she finds Paul in a sexual intercourse with a male hustler which is the reason of terror in the house. Seeing him with a naked hustler, the Kittredges banish Paul from their house. In short, Paul "gains entry into the Kittredge's rarefied world" (Schultz, 2004: 109) as their children's friend, earns the privilege to spend a night inside as the intellectual son of Poitier, and is taken out as a gay who would not bother to have sex with a hustler in a guest room.

Though much of the play takes place in the Kittredge's house, which is a signal of the emphasis on Paul's relationship especially with Ouisa and Flan Kittredge, Paul flows into and out of other spaces as well. In a dialogue with their friends, the Kittredges find out that Paul also steps into their friends' house telling the same lies. When their friends, Kitty and Larkin, learn that Paul is caught during a homosexual intercourse, the two families decide to call the police. After calling, they become aware of another victim of Paul's game. Paul visits this victim named Dr. Fine firstly in his office

and after Dr. Fine gives him the keys, Paul becomes a guest in his house. Upon finding out that his son does not have such a friend, Dr. Fine goes to his house with a police. Although Dr. Fine wants the police to arrest Paul, he cannot press any charges because he himself has given the keys to Paul. Even though Paul is not arrested, Dr. Fine casts Paul out of his house just as the Kittredges have done. Thus, the play is ornamented with the protagonist's to-and-fro movements. Evidently, subsequent to inward maneuvers, Paul has to step out.

Although Paul's inclusion is followed by exclusion, the poor, black, gay protagonist can be considered as a boundary breaker who can leak into spaces which would be forbidden to him. There are some good indicators of Paul's characterization as a boundary breaker in the play. For instance, in Guare's plot, as a fake identity, Paul chooses being the son of Sidney Poitier who is "the first black movie star—the first to win an Oscar in a lead role and the first to see his name featured above the title in movie advertisements" (Dargis and Scott, 2009: 1). Considering Poitier's rags to riches story and his talent for and success at acting, Poitier is a perfect role model choice for Paul. Moreover, Flan Kittredge's description of Poitier as the "barrier breaker of the fifties and sixties" (Guare, 1992: 25) reinforces Paul's inspiration for becoming a "barrier breaker" like Poitier. Another indicator of Paul's identification with a boundary breaker image is evident in Ouisa's narration of how Paul finds them. Using the phone book of one of their children's former school friend, "Paul looked at those names and said I am Columbus. I am Magellan. I will sail into this new world" (Guare, 1992: 81). Just as Magellan or Columbus, Paul is an explorer of new spaces. However, he explores not to exploit but to communicate. His desire to know new people and to connect leads him to search for and step into new worlds. Besides, Paul's stimulating speech on the paralysis in *The Catcher in the Rye* draws attention once again to movement in space:

The book is primarily about paralysis. The boy can't function...

Now, there's nothing wrong in writing about emotional and intellectual paralysis. It may indeed, thanks to Chekhov and Samuel Beckett, be the great modern theme.

The extraordinary last lines of *Waiting for Godot*—"Let's go." "Yes, let's go." Stage directions: They do not move.

But the aura around this book of Salinger's...is this: it mirrors like a fun house mirror and amplifies like a

distorted speaker one of the greatest tragedy of our times—the death of imagination....

The imagination has moved out of the realm of being our link, or most personal link, with our inner lives and the world outside that world—this world we share. (Guare, 1992: 33-4).

Paul liberates and enlivens the imagination which is “the passport we create to take us into the real world” (Guare, 1992: 34) and assumes a new imagined identity to “link” with both his inner life and outside world; he imagines, moves, and tries to connect. Therefore, Paul’s spatial movements are indeed attempts for both invigorating imagination and challenging paralysis. For Paul, the protagonists in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Waiting for Godot* are paralyzed and in contrast to them Paul moves and struggles to overcome the boundaries.

In Guare’s questioning of the constituents of social boundaries, Paul’s spatial practice is obviously not limited to the experiences inside and outside of wealthy people’s spaces. Paul’s *planned* visits as a poseur are all into the spaces of upper-class society. Although not a planned action, his incidental encounter with the relatively poor Rick and Elizabeth and the time he spends in their house are also the means through which Guare comments on the dual pattern between connection and distinction. To Rick and Elizabeth, Paul introduces himself not as Sidney Poitier’s son but as Flan Kittredge’s son. In this version of his story, Paul is “the child of Flan’s hippie days” (Guare, 1992: 84) and Flan rejects any form of communication. Paul says that Flan “lives up there” (Guare, 1992: 84) which is a prominent signifier of Flan’s social elevation and that the Kittredges “won’t even let him in the elevator” (Guare, 1992: 85) which is an indicator of the barrier against social mobility. When Paul tells that he does not have a place to live, the couple allows him into their house. One night Paul tells the couple that Flan wants to see him and is ready to accept him as his son and that he can give the couple some money when he sees his father. In order to celebrate it, Rick and Paul go out and spend all the money the couple has saved for years because Paul assures to give the money back when he sees Flan. Also, Paul and Rick have a homosexual affair that night. After Paul leaves, Rick, unable to find an explanation to his girlfriend, commits suicide. When Elizabeth informs the police about the death of her boyfriend, the police start to search for Paul who becomes a person of interest in the investigation.

At that point, Paul calls Ouisa asking her to help him, telling her that he is innocent. That dialogue evinces that Ouisa wants to protect Paul, because she feels pity for him. Given that Paul has not stolen anything from the

families, Ouisa is aware that Paul is not a thief and all he wants is to be just like them. As Plunka emphasizes, "Paul gains access to houses in order to find the family that he lacks; he is searching for an identity and yearns to be loved, wanted, and appreciated" (Plunka, 2002: 197). When Ouisa asks Paul his real name, he replies as "Paul Poitier Kittredge" (Guare, 1992: 109). This name shows that Paul wants to be a member of the family and their class, so his trespasses upon these spaces and his mimicry are the attempts to overcome his exclusion.

Ouisa tells Paul that he should go to the police and promises to help him since Paul believes that the police can even kill him for he is a black man. When Ouisa goes to the place where Paul is, she realizes that he has already been arrested. Afterwards Ouisa cannot find out anything about Paul because she does not know his real name and is not a family kin to whom the police can give information. Paul's imprisonment reveals that he is not free anymore to flow into any space and that he is limited by the force of law. Furthermore, at the end of the play Paul loses any possibility of movement considering that the play ends with an implication of Paul's suicide in the prison or his final act of movement from this world to another.

A close analysis of Paul's movements in space covers nearly all noteworthy details of the plot. Using the motif of Paul's spatial experiences as a symbolic mark, Guare plays with the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion which further demonstrates and criticizes the constituents of membership either combining or dividing people in society. These dynamics are produced by different facts which become obvious in the differences between Paul and the people he calls on. One of these dynamics is class since the lower-class protagonist's planned visits are all directed into the private spaces of upper-class characters. Another fact through which Guare interrogates the boundaries is based on race which is evident in the contrast between the black protagonist and other white characters. Moreover, the educational background is another inquired issue because Paul is indisputably deprived of a proper education despite all other educated characters. Also, sexual orientation, which is among the ascertainable dynamics Guare explores, is illuminated in the difference between the homosexual Paul and other heterosexual characters¹ and generally elicits Paul's exclusion. All of these contrasting factors are the instruments Guare uses to interpret the im/passable boundaries among people through the

¹ The upper-class, white, and educated people Paul visits as a poseur are all straight; however, Paul is not the only gay character of the play. In addition to him, there are three gay characters such as Trent, the hustler, and Rick who has his first and last homosexual intercourse with Paul.

protagonist's movements. Paul's visits implicate Paul's desire to connect and to be included while his banishment, as well as his imprisonment and death, indicates his exclusion or the cultural distinction.

Although Paul is only temporarily included, his spatial practices have the power to transform places into spaces. In order to understand the essence of this transformation, the specification of the contrasting definitions of the terms "place" and "space" is necessary. The French thinker and theorist Michel de Certeau, who contributes to several disciplines with his readings of space and everyday life, describes the distinctive qualities between the terms "space" and "place" in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

A place (lieu) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.

A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. . . . In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a "proper." (De Certeau, 1984: 117).

In other words, place is characterized by stable elements with their own distinct locations while space is shaped by the movement or mobility of the elements. Following these comparisons between the two terms, de Certeau develops his famous motto: "In short, *space is a practiced place*" (De Certeau, 1984: 117).

From this point of view, when Paul steps in, the Kittredge's house is not anymore only a place in which they live, but it is a space, a "practiced place." The Kittredges' house is a projection of their social status and if the Kittredges knew that Paul is a poor, black, gay prostitute, they would never have invited him in. According to Deans, "By adopting the identity of Paul 'Poitier,' the protagonist is able to gain access to a world otherwise denied to

him: high (white) society” (Deans, 1998: 213). In this vein, from the moment Paul, the stabbed black man, is allowed into the Kittredge’s house and begins to move in it, the house—the ordered place in which “the law of the proper rules”—becomes a space practiced especially by Paul and defined by the instability of “proper” rules. Definitely, all other houses, as well as Dr. Fine’s office, go through the same process.

Moreover, Paul’s transgressions of the lives and spaces of other people are, in the de Certeauan terminology, “tactical” in character. According to de Certeau, “The space of a tactic,” which is “a space of the other” and “a maneuver ‘within the enemy’s field of vision,’ . . . and within enemy territory,”². “takes advantages of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids” (De Certeau, 1984: 37). Paul—a poor, black gay—is clearly a representative of an outsider and in order to step into and practice these places, he “takes advantages of opportunities.” The most influential “opportunity” is provided by Trent, a Harvard student who makes love with Paul in exchange for giving Paul the information about the rich people in his address book. Trent is Paul’s chance to “plan raids” and enter places that he would not be accepted under normal circumstances. For this reason, Paul’s movements resemble operations “within enemy territory.” Attention to the word “enemy” is necessary at this point because certainly Paul does not see these people literally as his enemies and the tension among them is not an actual battle. In fact, rather than a suggestion of an actual battle, there is an implication of a power struggle that the opposition between rich and poor, black and white, and homosexual and heterosexual can be generalized as the opposition between the powerful and the powerless. Paul’s movement, or, in Ouisa’s words, Paul’s “bulldozing his way into [the Kittredges’] lives,” (Guare, 1992: 68) is what de Certeau describes as a “tactic” to overrule the domain of the socially elevated class since even a poor, black homosexual can pretend to be a member of the dominating powerful class. Therefore, despite Paul’s invasion of these territories is driven by a desire to belong to or to connect rather than a rage to destroy or to occupy, the relationship between the owners of the three houses and Paul is shaped by the struggle between the weak and the strong to a certain extent. De Certeau claims that tactic is “an art of the weak” (De Certeau, 1984: 37) and Paul’s spatial practices of these three houses are tactical in this respect.

De Certeau also makes a comparative explanation between “tactics” and “strategies” of making do. “Lacking its own place . . . a tactic is determined

² The phrase “within the enemy’s field of vision,” is de Certeau’s reference to von Billow.

by the *absence of power* just as strategy is organized by the postulation of power” (De Certeau, 1984: 38). For de Certeau, “Every ‘strategic’ rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its ‘own’ place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an ‘environment’ . . .” (De Certeau, 1984: 36). In this sense, the Kittredges’ banishment of Paul from their house upon finding out his relationship with a male hustler, along with Dr. Fine’s expulsion of Paul after discovering that he is a con man, can be evaluated as a strategy. The Kittredges and Dr. Fine, learning that Paul is not proper for their place, are actually trying to distinguish their own place, implying that he does not belong there. Even Ouisa Kittredge, who tries to understand Paul and to whom Paul connects most, uses such strategies. This fact is evident in the following dialogue in which Ouisa’s offer for work after Paul is let out of prison is followed by Paul’s request to live with them.

PAUL. And live with you.

OUISA. No.

PAUL. Your kids are away.

OUISA. You should have your own place.

PAUL. You’ll help me find a place?

OUISA. We’ll help you find a place. (Guare, 1992: 111-2)

Hence, even though Ouisa desires to help Paul and save him, this dialogue brings out that Ouisa is a member of the powerful class who uses strategies to dominate their own social place and to exclude the powerless from their places and all she can do is to help him find a place.

Together with de Certeau’s analysis of “tactics and “strategies,” his contemplation on the role of “storytelling” is a powerful medium to understand Paul’s spatial practice and the power struggle it conveys. Preceding the polemological examination of “battles or games between the strong and the weak,” (De Certeau, 1984: 34) de Certeau analyzes stories, tales, and the act of storytelling using a linguistic frame of reference. Paul’s creation and adoption of a new identity can also be regarded as a narration through which he rewrites his own story. Correspondingly, the householders Paul visits listen to Paul’s story: on the one hand, the wealthy families listen to this entire narration of a Harvard education and being a member of the Poitiers and on the other hand, the relatively poor couple hears the struggles of a poor man rejected by a rich father. Noticeably, Paul tells his life story, sometimes making changes in the spaces he visits. As de Certeau defines, “Stories. . . traverse and organize places: they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial

trajectories” (De Certeau, 1984: 115). Likewise, Paul’s narration of his own imagined story enables him to organize and traverse the spaces of power, rendering the houses spaces that he can step into. “Stories,” for de Certeau, “thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.” (De Certeau, 1984: 118). As formerly stated, Paul’s spatial practice has this transforming capacity and Paul’s transformation of the Kittredges’ place into a space of contradictions where Paul’s limits are transcendent and his delimitation is overthrown is pertinent to the information and details about him in the story he tells.

De Certeau also comments on the spatiality of a story emphasizing its function of delimitation or making the spaces distinct. The story plays a decisive role in the organization of spatiality by the determination of frontiers (De Certeau, 1984: 123). This operation of delimitation is composed of two steps. In the former step, the establishment, displacement, or transcendence of limits is authorized and in the latter step, two intersecting movements which are setting and transgressing limits are set in opposition (De Certeau, 1984: 123). Thereby, a story operates as “a sort of ‘crossword’ decoding stencil . . . whose essential narrative figures seem to be the frontier and the bridge” (De Certeau, 1984: 123). For this reason, the delimitation role of a story combines the determination of both frontiers and bridges. “Stories are actuated by a contradiction that is represented in them by the relationship between the frontier and the bridge, that is, between a (legitimate) space and its (alien) exteriority” (De Certeau, 1984: 126). This delimitation through the foundation of frontiers and bridges is remarkably evident in *Six Degrees of Separation*. Paul’s narration of his assumed identity is reconstructive in that it establishes bridges in frontiers and following his movement from an exteriority, each detail he provides in his story makes these houses legitimate spaces for Paul. “A narrative activity,” for de Certeau, “. . . is continually concerned with marking out boundaries” (De Certeau, 1984: 125). Similarly, one of the tools that helps Paul to mark out the boundaries between the powerful and the powerless and to compensate for his displacement and exteriority is a narrative activity—Paul’s reconstructing a life story for himself. How he transcends the boundaries and becomes a part of the new worlds are related to the stories he tells. Paul’s ability to trespass certain boundaries, which is indicated in his metaphoric identification with famous characters such as Sidney Poitier, Columbus, and Magellan and his contradiction to Holden Caulfield and the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, is enabled by the story he narrates. In this respect, Paul’s story, just as his spatial movements, is tactical.

In addition to Paul, there is another character who redefines the boundaries by means of storytelling. After expelling Paul from their house, Flan starts to narrate their story with an imposter to everyone around him and even gets this story published in *Times*. “The tale of Paul Poitier is a story on which the Kittredges dine out and which increases their value at the social functions integral to Flan’s business as an art dealer” (Evans, 2002: 285). Through the end of the play, Ouisa becomes upset due to their constant narration of their encounter with Paul, reminding Flan that “[Paul] wanted to be us. Everything we are in the world, this paltry thing— our life —he wanted it. He stabbed himself to get in here” (Guare, 1992: 117). Clearly, Ouisa “desperately wants to avoid reducing Paul into an anecdote exchanged—retold and retailed—for laughs and social distinction among the urbane friends” (Zimmerman, 1999: 115). Her discomfort is explicitly indicated in her statement: “we turn him into an anecdote to dine out on. Or dine in on. But it was an experience . . . we become these human juke boxes spilling out these anecdotes” (Guare, 1992: 117-8). In contrast to Ouisa, Flan does not feel uncomfortable about narrating and almost fictionalizing the reality because “[Paul’s] story becomes Flan’s personal trademark. It becomes Flan’s story, Flan’s signature in the market for social distinction” (Zimmerman, 1999: 120). The role of delimitation is strikingly discernible in Flan’s story in which he reestablishes the boundaries and demolishes the bridges between them and Paul despite its difference from Paul’s story by which the bridges are established. Just as Flan’s banishment of Paul from their house, his transformation of that experience into an anecdote is a “strategy” in de Certeauan literature which specifies the boundaries separating Paul’s place from theirs.

Thus, space which is associated with tactics, strategies, and storytelling gives meaningful clues about the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in *Six Degrees of Separation*. In addition to the role of space in eliciting a more clear vision of the dichotomy between connection and distinction, there is another essential point that needs to be carefully examined: A spatial inquiry on the play elucidates that there are boundaries separating people, but how about the mechanism that enables Paul to overcome these boundaries temporarily? Or how can Paul leak into the spaces of people who would not let him in if they knew his real identity or figured out that he is telling lies? What information in his story enables him to flow into those spaces?

To give proper answers to these questions, it is crucial to underline the relationship between Trent and Paul since Trent is the person who informs Paul about the proper behaviors and speaking manners of the wealthy and elite people. This fact is obvious in Trent’s speech as “This is the way you

must speak. Hear my accent. Hear my voice. Never say you're going horse-back riding. You say you're going riding. And don't say couch. Say sofa. And you say *bodd-ill*. It's bottle. Say bottle of beer" (Guare, 1992: 76). Moreover, Trent recommends that "Rich people do something for you, you give them a pot of jam" (Guare, 1992: 77). In a way, Trent, who gives advices to Paul in order to fit into the lives of this powerful class, eases Paul's transgression to these spaces. Trent's role in the emergence of Paul's ability to dissolve the boundaries is evident in his statement as "You'll never not fit in again. We'll give you a new identity. I'll make you the most eagerly sought-after young man in the East" (Guare, 1992: 79). Trent gives information about not only the proper life styles of the rich people but also the families' children and houses recorded in his address book. Trent is Paul's creator, helping him to deceive the upscale New Yorkers by enabling a good mimicry of the way they speak or behave. In this context, what Trent teaches Paul is the imitation of everyday lives of these people. De Certeau, who gives prominence to everyday practices, states that "dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong'" (De Certeau, 1984: 40). Likewise, Paul's mimicry of the everyday practices of the white, wealthy New Yorkers—Paul's speaking, cooking (he cooks for the Kittredges), shopping (buying pot of jam for the Kittredges)—is a tactical attempt to fit in. Everyday practices are similar to tactical ruses considering that they can form patterns that can be opposed to the norms of consumption. Through strategies, schemas concerning how people should walk, talk, shop, or eat are provided. However, an individual or a consumer can develop tactical practices that are different from these schemas. What Paul does is a little bit different for he does not develop alternative tactical everyday practices. On the contrary, in order to transcend the boundaries, he imitates the schema of everyday practices of the group he yearns to belong in order to be accepted easily.

Along with de Certeau's examination of everyday practices, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of "habitus" and "taste" would be appropriate to understand the medium of Paul's transgression and the elaborate criticism of social distinction inherent in the play. Examining the link between agent and structure, Bourdieu uses "habitus" as "both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of these practices" (Bourdieu, 1986: 170). For him,

The habitus is not only structuring structure, which organizes practices and perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principal of division into

logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences and differential positions, i.e., by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference. This means that inevitably inscribed within the dispositions of the habitus is the whole structure of the system of conditions, as it presents itself in the experience of a life-condition occupying a particular position within that structure. The most fundamental oppositions in the structure (high/low, rich/poor etc.) tend to establish themselves as the fundamental structuring principles of practices and the perception of practices. (Bourdieu, 1986: 170-2).

Differences between classes, therefore, are visible in the different practices and life styles or, in Bourdieu's words, in the habitus. Trent's mastery of the upper-class life style is an outcome of his chance and ability to observe their habitus. The essence of Trent's clues to Paul actually includes the condensed forms of the habitus—the structures pertinent to the practices and life styles of a specific class of people. Habitus which “are these generative and unifying principles which retranslate the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary life-style, that is, a unitary set of persons, goods, practices” (Bourdieu, 1996: 15) are not only “structured” and “structuring” but also “differentiated” and “differentiating”. As Bourdieu puts it, “Like the positions of which they are the product, habitus are differentiated, but they are also differentiating. “Being distinct and distinguished, they are also distinction operators, implementing different principles of differentiation or using differently, the common principles of differentiation” (Bourdieu, 1996: 15). The role of Trent is to make Paul aware of these “distinction operators” which are the elements making the upper-class society different from the other classes. Then Paul's ability to construct bridges on frontiers is enabled by his proficiency in understanding the habitus and imitating the practices in the light of Trent's instructions.

In addition to certain elements such as dispositions, practices, values, and lifestyles, one of the determinants of habitus is taste which, according to

Bourdieu, not only “classifies” but also “classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu, 1986: 6). For Bourdieu, “Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (Bourdieu, 1986: 6). In his examination of social stratification, Bourdieu accentuates the role of myriad of taste such as the taste in food, clothing, home decoration/furniture, language, body hexis, books, papers, entertainments, sports, and music as marks of class indicating one’s position in social space. This role of taste is also noticeable in *Six Degrees of Separation* in which not only taste operates as the emblem of rich family’s social positions but also the mimicry of their tastes is the key to Paul’s easy access to the spaces of that social class.

For instance, the decoration in the Kittredges’ house projects their taste and their social status. In the opening panic scene of the play, the Kittredges are worried about both themselves and the valuable items such as the silver Victorian inkwell and the watercolor in their house. After Flan checks these properties respectively, an actor appears for a moment holding the mentioned stage property (Guare, 1992: 4, 5). The presence of these actors is clearly an alienation effect Guare uses throughout the play; however, it also emphasizes the importance of these stage properties. Instead of being narrated or placed in a proper location, these stage properties which are the cultural artifacts manifesting the family’s wealthy life style and economic condition are directly shown to the audience. Besides, these stage directions indicate that class membership has a quality to be staged in which the members can fit in as long as they possess certain properties. In addition to the silver Victorian inkwell and the watercolor, the Kittredges own a Kandinsky painted on either side; one side is geometric and somber while the other side is wild and vivid (Guare, 1992: 3). The significance of this double-sided painting illuminating the two opposites in a single unit has been elucidated as an object illustrating the juxtaposition either between Paul’s virtue of vitality and the somber Kittredges (Bigsby, 2004: 42-3) or between order and chaos (Evans, 2002: 286; Slethaug, 2000: 10). Certainly the presence of such a painting in an art dealer’s house is not surprising, but, other than its symbolic value, the Kandinsky with a probable high market value further illustrates the class the Kittredges belong to. Moreover, through the end of the play, in a dialogue with Paul, Ouisa mentions that they have two Philadelphia Chippendale chairs which she associates with “quality” (Guare, 1992: 112). Hence, all of these mentioned items used in decoration serve the same purpose representing the tie between the Kittredges’ taste in home decoration and the social class they belong to.

Paul learns and copies the classificatory and distinctive upper-class tastes via Trent's assistance. "The social sense," according to Bourdieu, "is guided by the system of mutually reinforcing and infinitely redundant signs of which each body is the bearer—clothing, pronunciation, bearing, posture, manners" (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). Likewise, Paul's appearance is the bearer and the means to understand his ability to trespass. Paul's clothing plays a prominent role in illustrating his capacity to reflect the upper-class taste. Preceding Paul's first step on the stage space, this "handsome," "preppy" man's clothing is described as "[b]lood seeps through his white Brooks Brothers shirt" (Guare, 1992: 14). Definitely, Guare's choice of a white shirt for his black protagonist's body is an elaborate image for a reading based on the issue of race. In addition to the color, the brand of the shirt is clearly stated which draws attention especially to a reading in the perspective of class and reflects the upper-class taste in certain exclusive brands of clothing. Paul's Brooks Brothers shirt, according to Clum, is "not a genuine sign of class, but a borrowed, perhaps stolen, prop" (Clum, 1992: 19). Whether stolen or not, Paul's Brooks Brothers shirt "makes him look preppy" (Plunka, 2002: 191). The fact that the brand of the shirt is notified in the text indicates indeed that such a brand is a sign of class and prestige and in order to trespass into these territories, Paul has to take into account such signs based on the upper-class taste in clothing.

In addition to clothing, Paul's use of language, which he practices prior to his role as an imposter, is another sign of the link between taste and class. Paul is familiar with the importance of the language use owing to Trent's advices on the proper rules of pronunciation and word choice. "Groups invest themselves totally," according to Bourdieu, "with everything that opposes them to other groups, in the common words which express their social identity, i.e., their difference" (Bourdieu, 1986: 194). Therefore, the use of language is a mirror of social identity indicating one's both membership in a group and difference from the people in other groups. For Bourdieu, even the common words are "divided against themselves . . . because the different classes either give them different meanings, or give them the same meaning but attribute opposite values to the things named" (Bourdieu, 1986: 194). For instance, Bourdieu compares the word *drôle* which means "amusing, funny, droll" to its popular equivalents such as *bidonnant*, *marrant* or *rigolo* and comments that *drôle* which is distinct by its socially marked pronunciation "clash with the values expressed, putting off those who would certainly respond to a popular equivalent of *drôle*" (Bourdieu, 1986: 194). Then he provides the example of the word *sobre*, "which applied to a garment or interior, can mean radically different things when expressing the prudent, defensive strategies of a small craftsman, the

aesthetic asceticism of a teacher or the austerity-in-luxury of the old-world *grand bourgeois*" (Bourdieu, 1986: 194). Language is an indicator of social identity because either people from different classes tend to choose different words out of the pool of synonyms or the same word can mean different things when used by people from different social classes. For this reason, arriving at "an ethical organon" prevalent in all classes is impossible for Bourdieu:

It can be seen that every attempt to produce an ethical organon common to all classes is condemned from the start, unless, like every 'universal' morality or religion, it plays systematically on the fact that language is both common to the different classes and capable of receiving different, even opposite, meanings in the particular, and sometimes antagonistic, uses that are made of it. (Bourdieu, 1986: 194).

Bourdieu's above scrutiny on language undoubtedly coincides with the formerly mentioned short dialogue on language use between Trent and Paul. Language is not only a system of signification but also a cultural consumption in which this signification is attached to a symbolic system positioning the users in specific classes. The words one chooses and the way one pronounces these words can also be considered as symbolic signs reflecting the social class one belongs to. For this reason, Paul's newly acquired knowledge regarding both the proper pronunciation of the word "bottle" and the right word choice between "couch" and sofa" is definitely a projection of the upper-class practice of speaking and one of the means to prepare his body to become the proper "bearer" of signs.

Bourdieu's musings on the system of this classification include the term "capital" as well as "habitus" and "taste." "The primary differences, those which distinguish the major classes of conditions of existence," for Bourdieu, "derive from the overall volume of capital, understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers—economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital" (Bourdieu, 1986: 114). Paul lacking all forms of capital—money, education, connection, and membership—can act as a member of the dominant class and manages to develop and carry out tactics for proceeding through their spaces at least for a while. Nevertheless, his tactics are confronted by strategies. Following the revelation of Paul's con game, Flan and Paul talk on the phone and when Paul asks Flan to work with him in the art dealing business, Flan replies "You have to have art history. You have to have language. You have to have economics" (Guare, 1992: 105). Clearly, Flan is again working on his strategies as a response to Paul's

tactics reminding him that once one is devoid of capital, one cannot acquire the power to belong to a specific class. Despite the plot develops successively into the images of Paul's exclusion, imprisonment, and death or the display of the success of Flan's strategies, Paul's con game elucidates that the lives of the elite, upper-class people are based on a similar game in which the participants pursue basic rules concerning the proper practices, tastes, and life styles. Zimmerman articulates that "Paul can pass as a member of the Kittredges' class because class membership is ultimately something that is acted, auditioned for. All of his signs of money and pedigree are not backed—they were never backed—by any of the capital or investments they normally signify" (Zimmerman, 1999: 110). "The struggle for distinction is the symbolic struggle over the signs," as Zimmerman argues (Zimmerman, 1999: 122). Given that Paul acquires to belong and connect—even if it is temporary—by using this symbolic sign system, the play negotiates whether the lack of capital is a barrier against social mobility.

Even if Paul's attempts for inclusion and connection are followed by mechanisms for exclusion and distinction, there is an apparent form of connection between Paul and Ouisa. Paul enables Ouisa to question their empty lifestyles which becomes obvious in her statement that "there is color in my life, but I'm not aware of any structure" (Guare, 1992: 118). The color and structure of their lifestyles are questioned in view of the white upper-class mentality which is also a con game in which the members use and imitate certain cultural codes. In the context of Ouisa's transformation, which is an outcome of the connection between Paul and her, the title of the play should be stressed. Ouisa's explanation of the six degree theory is as follows:

I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. Between us and everybody else on this planet. The president of the United States. A gondolier in Venice. Fill in the names. . . . you have to find the right six people to make the connection. It's not just big names. It's *anyone*. A native in rain forest. A Tierra del Fuegan. An Eskimo. I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people. It's a profound thought. . . . How every person is a new door, opening up into other worlds. Six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet. But to find the right six people. (Guare, 1992: 81).

As Ouisa narrates, the six degree theory is about the possibility of connection or communication between any two individuals on the planet. Despite the ironic presence of the word "separation," six degree theory outlines that the separating boundaries can be dissolved if one maintains the right chain of acquaintances. Nevertheless, "as the play demonstrates, the more remarkable thing is how separate people are from one another, not how close" (Bigsby, 2004: 52). In other words, how people are separated from each other on account of the differences in race, class, and sexual orientation is pinpointed. Even though the play seems to emphasize distinction instead of connection which is apparent in the unfortunate ending awaiting Paul, Ouisa's transformation exposes a glimpse of connection because it is a result of her interaction with Paul. Consequently, the Kittredges may not be Paul's right sixth acquaintance that he yearns to reach, but Paul seems to be the right person for Ouisa to reevaluate her lifestyle.

To sum up, *Six Degrees of Separation* generally criticizes the mechanisms which include different factors such as race, class, and sexual orientation and which classify and set people apart in both social and spatial terms. The protagonist's inward and outward movements which occupy a central role in the plot convey certain elements in accordance with the conflict between connection and distinction. Paul is a boundary breaker who can transform places into spaces and go beyond the spaces of even white, elite, rich circles or build bridges on the frontiers separating him from these people by the story he tells regarding his identity. Paul's connection with the people he intrigues is signified by a step into their spaces and the distinction between them and Paul is manifested by his step out from their spaces. For this reason, the play is rumination upon the nexus of social and spatial in which Paul's maneuvers to be included and others' effort to exclude can be interpreted in view of "tactics" and "strategies." The powerless Paul uses his "tactics" to be included while the powerful class exercises their "strategies" to exclude once they learn that Paul is an imposter who does not belong to their places.

The scrutiny on how a poor, black homosexual manages to flow into the places of even white, rich, elite people articulates that membership or connection among certain people is based on a symbolic sign system in which the members perform similar practices, tastes, and lifestyles. Even though Paul lacks all forms of capital such as money, education, connection, and membership, he prepares himself to become the bearer of such signs and becomes an expert in imitating and reflecting the upper-class taste in clothing or language use with Trent's guidance. Once Paul is able to master this symbolic system or the habitus, he can gain access and connect with

them. Whenever he fails to use this system, he is eliminated. Through the presentation of this symbolic system, Guare extends his investigation of social mobility and ridicules the artificial qualities that constitute a boundary. Thus, this “small” world is distinctly shaped by boundaries which can be temporarily dissolved through the use of this symbolic system of practices and taste. In this context, *Six Degrees of Separation* deals with the dynamics of both connection/inclusion and distinction/exclusion with a clear emphasis on the latter.

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