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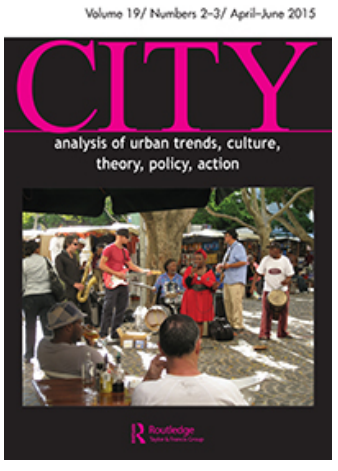

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Afterword: Come on out, you're surrounded: The betweens of infrastructure

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Afterword
Come on out, you're surrounded
The betweens of infrastructure

AbdouMaliq Simone

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An infrastructure of infrastructures?

In these closing remarks on a series of papers covering a range of locations and time periods, I try to find a place *between* them all, not in order to pose connections among them, but rather to point to the various doors they seem to collectively open. What new terrain of infrastructure do they seem to point to, now that they so effectively have considered the intricate ways in which social and material bodies impact upon each other in highly singular ways at different places, scales and times?

Infrastructure exerts, channels and constrains force. Take a neighborhood. Imagine all of the actions, events, gestures, exertions, speech and operations that take place simultaneously at any given time. No one situated in this neighborhood or outside of it can possibly be aware of all of these occurrences. What they can be aware of, as well as the kind of impacts they can register among them—the impact each has upon the other—is largely a matter of the infrastructure available to them. For this infrastructure provides specific ways of witnessing or sensing what the intersecting trajectories of force bring about. Infrastructure establishes specific channels of interaction among these occurrences, specific trajectories of impact. As a result, what we come to know, feel and be is largely a matter of infrastructure. However, force also can exceed the bounds placed on it. It leaks, radiates and affects in ways that cannot always be anticipated and controlled (Simondon 2009a, 2009b). Thus, any of these occurrences can ramify across each other, affecting and being affected in ways that exceed whatever infrastructure is available. Volatility is a default position, and in this sense, infrastructure is always built upon turbulence. This turbulence may be largely constrained but it does not go away, it is always there.

As these papers demonstrate, when people inhabit a city, they situate themselves and are situated through the intersections of infrastructure and technical systems, and the particular domains and modalities of occupation—settlement and work—that are configured by them. At the same time, people are also inhabited *by* the city, as a kind of possession, endowment, capacitation and series of conundrums. People figure themselves out through figuring arrangements of materials, of designing what is available to them in formats and positions that enable them particular vantage points and ways of doing things. What it is possible for people to do with each other is largely a question of what it is that exists *between* them, and how this *between* can be shaped as active points of reference, connection and anchorage. Infrastructure exerts a force—not simply in the materials and energies it avails, but also the way it attracts people, draws them in, coalesces and expends their capacities. Thus, the distinction between infrastructure and sociality is fluid and

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pragmatic rather than definitive. People work on things to work on each other, as these things work on them.

How to get the infrastructure right is a refrain increasingly heard across urban forums of all kinds. Rationalizing material flow systems, reducing carbon footprints, enhancing the productive capacities of residents, generating virtuous recursive loops for interoperable systems, providing adequate volumes of housing for anticipated demographic explosions, or accelerating urbanization as a matter of economic or environmental policy—all are aspects of the heightened concern about urban infrastructure. Whether infrastructure is a right or can be made right are questions that tend to disappear in the exigencies of how to raise the money to do what is needed or to showcase the latest of designs. The papers in this special feature attempt to return to the 'right of way' of infrastructure—a sense of give and take in the relationships between sociotechnical systems and human operators. How material, built, social and human environments use each other, 'sense' each other as a constantly mutating process of affecting and being affected generates singular conditions within and between discrete urban domains. However, these processes of mutual shaping also constitute multiple lines that cross them, and sometimes cross them out. All of these pieces point to the tenuous accomplishments of stabilizing patterns of association and interpretation, which also prepare us to consider the outlines of the turbulence ahead.

Emerging urban struggles will be less about land, physical infrastructure and services, and more about who controls knowledge-producing capacities and the ways these capacities can be altered or remade. Much of the engagement with digital urban computation partly reiterates preoccupations with visualizing and analyzing populations as a whole through recording everyday transactions, which predominated in the late 19th and early 20th century as a function of the registration work of various officials. As Ruppert, Law, and Savage (2013) point out, the current emphasis on the granularity of analysis thus attempts to bypass existing categories of people and things, to delve deep and directly into singular patterns of behavior, and in which individuals become aspects of multiple emerging groups that are always changing, unmediated by the interpretive inclinations of supposedly stable interest groups or identities.

Increasingly there is an infrastructure of infrastructure whose materiality is more than that of programming codes and mathematical sets, albeit requiring enormous volumes of energy and space. This infrastructure of infrastructure attempts to register the intensities, oscillations and prospective variability of how specific built environments actually operate, establishing specific parameters for constituting and measuring data, registering the force that particular conditions and materials exert upon each other. Regardless of how connected or disconnected things might be or how they are experienced, these calculations engender or impose connections. Local government finance, transportation systems, water reticulation, energy flows, population densities, climate and so forth are calculated as having specific impacts upon each other through a network of inter-calibrated parameters.

The result of orienting the stuff of the city in a calculus of probabilistic values, thought to enhance prediction, planning and control, is also the opening up of connections to a wide range of incomputable dispositions—there are resultant scenarios, as Parisi (2012) observes, that simply cannot be specified, that the surrounds produced through interrelating the operations of apparently discrete things and domains take on an existence that is not determinable. There is the proliferation of uncertain *betweens*. The sequential running of algorithms generates incomputable quantities of patternless data that have no application to existent realities, and rather introduce new forms of contingency within computational design that then give rise to events outside of any conceivable

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control. What this means is that urban life increasingly signals the inability of an 'economy' to enclose a territory on the basis of some fundamental shared value or underlying material or cultural commonality.

As infrastructure systems attempt to become 'user friendly', and provisioning systems identify different scales of users and user costs, who the 'user' is also becomes something more ambiguous. As Bratton (2014) points out, algorithmic determinations may attempt to amplify the singularity of particular media users, but these users confront the overproduction of their identity by the sheer volume of different data streams, factors and variables. He points to the ascendance of 'composite users' that, even as proxies, become the 'real' subjects in multiple sites, bots, sensors and nanometric robots. 'In the construction of the user as an aggregate profile that both is and is not specific to any one entity, there is no identity to deduce other than the pattern of interaction between partial actors.' Where people are at any given time then becomes harder to figure out, and as such, the structuring capacities of the 'old school' of urban infrastructure do not so much become obsolete—we all have to drink and turn on the lights after all—but also open to new uses and forms of governance.

Underground railroads and parallel cities

There are antecedents to this condition in the fact that urban residents have long been ensconced in surrounds of force and sensation. Cities are matters of vibration, resonance and affect that enjoin, distinguish, lure, pass through and constitute discernible objects. Normative understandings of infrastructure usually are organized around the ways in which materiality is a platform upon which social differences are created, recognized and sustained. Infrastructure conjoins and divides; it connects and circumvents. While these are matters of common sense, the sense of the city is far from common, because the affirmation of a common depends on the participation of things that can be identified. Increasingly, the proliferation of digital measures and calculations, of ramifying texts and image-making, of incessant feedback and probabilities amplifies this sense of urban infrastructure as something that cuts through and confounds the stabilities infrastructure was thought to ensure. Rather something more uncertain, more dangerous and yet even more potentiating is at work if one considers the urban environment as a world existing simultaneously with and without us, where our presence exists as something other than what we either have words or images for.

This is not something that simply appears now in the predominance of algorithmic urban governance or in media-saturated environments that seemingly mediate little. Particularly in ostensibly under-regulated cities, where infrastructures have been overly partial or fragmented and thus limit the implantation of ordering devices, kinesthetic and affective enactments provide critical measures for how people and things arrange themselves, make use of and circle each other (Clough 2012). From overcrowded public transport, rambunctious markets, chaotic streets, residents seemingly knew what to do. They knew both how to defer being overwhelmed and to use the overwhelming strategically in order to propel different configurations of bodies, sense and livelihood. Matters could be literally overwhelming, debilitating and joyous, and it was often hard to tell exactly what could hurt or help you, even as collective immune systems took hold (Esposito 2012). Sometimes orientation depended on reading 'the writing on the wall', as walls seemingly were constituted for inscriptions of all kinds, as they themselves inscribed their way into marking off a sense of here vs. there, of yours vs. mine. But sometimes walls existed simply to be 'walked through', an occasion for the display of seemingly impossible occurrences, or to outline new trajectories of circulation rather than

keeping movement confined to designated spaces (Pløger 2010; Ingold 2011). Parkour, that 'pastime' of usually youths gracefully running and scaling their way across seemingly prohibitive landscapes, in making both mockery and celebration of the frequently brutal ways in which urban populations were to be proportioned, reiterates the inabilities of infrastructure to be anything 'for sure'.

I have long been one of those subjects Stefan Höhne discusses in his history of the way the New York subway cultivated the subject positions of the passenger. Having taken the subway in New York for over half a century, the experience is at one and the same time completely predictable and uncanny, full of uncomfortable drudgery depending on the time of day and replete with passengers giving something away that they would not exhibit elsewhere, that they cannot completely control, in a choreography of performances overladen with sensations bouncing off the confined space as the train either hurtles or plods its way across the city. The subway offers proof of the relative safety of the overall urban environment, as well as staging dramas that cross the thresholds of race and sex.

One of the great New York subway dramas, Baraka's (1971) *Dutchman*, has black Clay and white Lula rip each other apart, psychologically and physically, on the train. Here, whiteness needs to make itself visible in order to exert power, as Lula claims to know everything there is to know about Clay, while blackness submerges itself in opacity just to get by, as Clay refuses every attempt to be called out, and thus misses the opportunity to be what he wants. Both positions are saturated with rage prompted by these obligations. This culminates in a dance of death that mixes desire, sex and violence that is America's 'public ride' to nowhere. The substrate of the city could display intensities that tended to dissipate or filter out above ground, in an intensification of both the impediments and the potentials of public life. Keeping track of the track work, and reading all the signs that indicate today's sites of what lines are or are not running in a continuous renovation of the system, is a constant reminder of both the exigencies involved in ensuring the survival of the system as well as the enormous amount of money the Metropolitan Transit Authority flitted away on bad derivative investments. Therefore, the story is always what could have been.

Infrastructure always seems to promise something, and so often it seems as if it is a promise intended to be broken. Whether this is a matter of intended deceit or an ingenuous miscalculation as to how infrastructure will actually be used and the costs entailed to keep it going, those responsible for its care often run to keep up or simply disappear from view. Public housing, for example, has long seemed to promise that even the poor could have access to a livable environment, and no matter how much residents may take pride in their surroundings and learn to manage seemingly unworkable densities of occupation, housing authorities ended up being the actors that underestimated the work involved, or more maliciously sought to constrain the potentials of their own creations.

As Trovalla and Trovalla illustrate, Jos may be a particularly devastating example of infrastructural breakage, and the ways that connections have to be read and experienced 'between the lines'. But Brownsville in New York City, at the end of the line—for many black lives blocked from the start, as well as a line that gentrification probably won't cross—is also a minefield of suspicion and confinement.

In Englewood, South Side of Chicago, most young residents have never been downtown, and hold on solidly to specific blocks and intersections while speculating wildly about the world 'out there'. The decimation of public housing in Chicago became a means of 'rounding up' black life into neighborhoods themselves increasingly depleted by scam mortgages. Funerals become the primary modality of the remnants of what

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was once a dynamic collective life. The larger city life exists primarily as hundreds of tweets marking infractions and revenge, narrowing operational spaces to a minimum. Yet on websites like 'Fake Shore Drive', new shores are seemingly divined out of nowhere, as kids send out hundreds upon hundreds of videos and mixtapes that issue their own version of the promise to leave no one left behind, to posit a 'whole-nother' world beyond the empty rail yards, the closed factories, the vacant houses and abandoned schools.

The broken promises of decent housing and services in some way are less foreboding than those composed by states or coalitions of brokers acting as states in order to manage logistics—interchanges, ports, trade zones, which promise the organization of stocks and flows in ways seemingly drained of political interest. Here the ostensible consideration is the seamless circulation of effort and goods accomplished by technical efficacies in spaces completely turned over, neutralized for such observations (Toscano 2014). In the meantime, the complex negotiations of accords, monitoring procedures, fragmented and multiple sovereignties, security apparatuses and labor regimes which go into creating this promise are obscured, impenetrable to negotiation. Knowledge about the heterogeneous circulations, destinations, diversions, costs and assemblages is distributed across various organizations and scales (Cowen 2014). It would seem as if the state itself moved to assume the role of diviner, for divination might come closest to the kinds of epistemologies entailed.

As Vormann makes clear, the New York waterfront has come a long way since 1741, when a revolt of slaves, indentured workers, freemen and stevedores came within hours of changing the course of American history (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000). At the time the waterfront was what it would remain for many years, a gritty place of uncivil encounters, hard work and dirty business. Even when the veneer of logistics and interports appear seamless and cleanly efficient, there are still heaps of waste and pollution that are simply transferred somewhere else, particularly to areas whose residents themselves are largely invisible. The relationship between New York and Elizabeth is an important example of the ways in which parallel cities are developing across the world. However, these are parallels whose relationship goes beyond any zero-sum game. It is not simply that one city absorbs what the other leaves behind.

Rather, Vormann uses the notion of 'twinning', to point to a process of mutual disturbance, of conjunction without clear evidence, but with strong interdependencies. Across Africa, for example, with its deep ambivalences around twinning, new satellite cities are being built seemingly everywhere. While it is possible to identify the money behind them, they are usually replete with substantial opacity as to actually how they come into existence. These satellites are not outgrowths of the original city, with all of its seemingly manageable complexities, but rather virtual possibilities of what now seemed to be existent in the original city all along—the fact that trying to adhere to plans and coherent development trajectories was never going to be the process that was going to get residents anywhere. It is what Nielsen (2014) calls a collapsed future wedged into the present—a time without prediction or clear destination, of singularities seeming to have nothing to do with each other but whose presence provokes unanticipated dispositions from each other. Here, failure exists both as the impossibility of the original city ever being able to plan its way out of its mess but also as an opening of virtual possibilities, where new scenarios can emerge out of seemingly nothing. Nevertheless, that 'nothing' still needs the original city as a symbiotic point of reference, a twin.

Curated social waste dumps and increases in involuntary infrastructural inequality run rampant, as demonstrated in Chelcea and Pulay's depiction on Bucharest. Still, there are instances where promises of connection are circumvented, if not refused. Sometimes

urban residents don't want to be connected, or don't want to buy into the package of compensations on offer or behaviors expected in order to be more substantially articulated to whatever development dreams are being pursued at the moment. For example, from my own work in the urban core of Jakarta, there are many areas of seemingly depreciated, dilapidated commercial activities, a jumbled mix of built environments and residential status. Here, the dominant actors forego making money in order to retain a sense of power. This sense of power is built upon 'choreographing' oscillating relationships among religious associations, district defense committees, commercial networks, formal and informal local authorities, youth gangs—to cite a few—whose members usually circulate among these, on the surface, discrete organizations, wearing different hats.

Over time, however, the act of making claims becomes an instrument for discovering spaces of maneuver for discrete associational actors, a way of people separating themselves out collectively from others—even when they continue to participate in the groups from which they are separating. These are not claims for citizenship. Rather, claiming becomes a means of configuring different vantage points on what is going on, different kinds of access to resources and opportunities, and a way to open up new kinds of networks. And so the particular district operates as a series of parallel formations, where residents and operators do not feel they have to know everything about what everyone else is doing, where there is a limited sense of exclusion, where people can pursue highly particular agendas through provisionally connecting with all of these different kinds of collective formations, but without a sense of owing anything or aligning agendas. It doesn't mean there is not conflict. However, what usually happens is that particular 'projects'—economic activities, uses of facilities, streets, labor—spin off in different directions. This is made possible by the past history of the district and replenishes that history at the same time, maintaining lots of different things going on. Multiple uses of land and the built environment thus ensue—because the game really requires an ambiguous status of land. It requires an area where things are not consolidated, pinned down—and certain areas forego the possibility of making a great deal of money to keep the game going.

On the other hand, detachment also poses toxic futures. Long histories of suburbanization, partly driven, as Prestel's piece on Berlin and Cairo demonstrates, to escape the dangerous circulations of the city, its moral pollution and risky encounters, have eaten up large volumes of space and money aided by rails and automobiles. The footprints informed by normative conceptions of health and propriety have sometimes broken the weave of heterogeneous ways of life whose proximity, while never unequivocally virtuous, eked out unanticipated resourcefulness and invention. Urban cores could be hollowed out, leaving little of that from which escape was originally motivated. Increasing numbers of residents spend hours of their days caught in the netherworlds of slow-moving traffic. Because trips to the healthy suburbs are so arduous, and the suburbs themselves increasingly characterized by distorted personalities and numbing boredom, urban cores are intentionally resought as places of refuge, installed with fake decadence and the constant search for excitement. While Cairo so far proves an important exception, inversions in settlement patterns are well underway across most of the urban world, pushing the poor and other 'dangerous' populations to the periphery. The urban core is then reclaimed for a salubriousness based on the synergistic effects of work, leisure, administration, culture and education being in close proximity to each other. No need to traverse distance in order to experience an enriched life, a life constantly in need of new capacities and experiences, and where the dangerous circulations that were to be avoided through suburbanization are instead tamed through

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their simulation as lifestyles and obligatory risk-taking.

Care as infrastructure

Maringanti and Jonnalagadda discuss how certain infrastructure just comes and goes. Particularly in poor districts, insecurity of tenure, institutional indifference, threats of internecine conflict and limited resources combine to institutionalize provisional built environments. States are renowned for providing a basic facility, such as a community toilet, water well or community center. However, their maintenance and repairs become the responsibility of the local neighborhood. Such self-management often works well, but it is also contingent upon the costs and complexities of spare parts and repairs, as well as the underlying economic cohesion of the neighborhood—in terms of its ability to hold on to specific values and uses of land and the demographic stability of its inhabitants. The poor must be prepared to do many things in the same place, and in the process distance themselves from being fully embedded within given locations so as either to ward off the shame of performing acts that do not belong together in the same place or to not foreclose opportunities that might arise by imposing rigid association between place and use.

A wide range of intimacies and privacy is just not possible given the physical conditions in which many urban dwellers live. However, the task is then how to maintain these intimacies as conceivable—how to perform them regardless, and the kinds of claims, requests and opacities required. The politics of these seemingly simple everyday maneuvers can become quite complex. In crowded settlements, residents are acutely aware of the extent to which they are being watched and scrutinized all of the time. However, the labor-intensive demands of putting bread on the table also means that people do not have the time or energy to pay a great deal of attention to all of those who surround them. Enactments of aloneness stand out but at the same time if residents are to make creative and often parasitical use of each other, it is also important to learn how to leave fellow residents alone.

Maringanti and Jonnalagadda indicate that as the mechanics of everyday residence become more individuated and privatized, thus making local political mobilizations more difficult, the intermeshing of practices and perspectives, which relies both on solidarity and difference, is disentangled. The complex balance then of watching and leaving alone, of acknowledging being witnessed but also ignored is disrupted and then vulnerable to intensifying feelings that certain people are expendable, and that the enactments of daily intimacies, of the process of being a person, depend on getting rid of others, expelling them from proximity, further complicating the process of demonstrating mutual care.

As the Black Power movement in the USA during the 1950s and 1960s so ably illustrated, the politics of rights and the self-valorization of a 'people' is effectively conducted through concrete demonstrations of care. The most depleted of infrastructures and dire social conditions are not simply compensated for through a stitching together of mutual concern and assistance, but are also lived through with deeply embedded practices of paying attention and tending to fellow inhabitants, of constantly reiterating concrete demonstrations of the actual or potential complementarities that residents pose for each other (Williams 2005; Joseph 2009).

What the Black Power movement focused on was the process of putting mothers, teachers, barbers, preachers, municipal workers, public housing managers and service providers—all living and working in specific areas, all overwhelmed and over their heads in their own specific ways about dealing with bad conditions, and all anxious about what the future held—in multiple, even exponentially increasing, connections with each other. They used the relative lack of institutionalized spaces as a means of

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instituting different forms of public demonstrations of these actors being together. This often took place through provocations, invented performances of building something on the spot, alerting different local actors that something crucial was about to happen in a particular location as a way of drawing different kinds of actors together and then coming up with concrete demonstrations of what each could concretely offer each other, right then. When amassed across the country's cities and rural areas, Black Power was a fight against expendability. Temporariness and incompleteness did not necessarily point to the inevitable getting rid of a particular population, but the very conditions of which to stitch together a wide range of initiatives. Specific spatial products, such as in Hyderabad's case, community toilets, may not come right away, or at all. Yet, the fight to get them may have to go around different circuitous routes that might find dignified places to shit along the way.

Provisional conditions also generate certain questions: Why should households invest substantial resources in solidifying claims and structures when they do not have the suite of rights and powers to hold on to them? At the same time, in provisional conditions, where arrangements cannot be defined in a stable manner, why not take advantage of the provisional itself? Why not gear actions toward rolling with various strands of activities and alliances; why commit to certain arrangements, livelihoods and settlement patterns when they are almost sure to be altered anyway? Why not use the temporariness strategically? Therefore, infrastructures are then built not to last and simply provide a particular vantage point from which to move on, or at least have the possibility of continuous readjustments in place. These vantage points are important because they help inform resident opinions about what is possible to expect or not.

If infrastructures are deemed to be incomplete, as Maringanti and Jonnalagadda indicate, what is popularly viewed to be permanent can also vary. Sometimes districts remain infrastructurally incomplete because everyone knows that too many 'facts on the ground' make it more difficult to convert particular areas into new uses, values and built environments. Here, residents are constantly reminded that the place they inhabit was never intended for them in the first place, or that they are better off elsewhere or that the costs of their continuous occupation are too high for one reason or another, whether it is framed as matters of health, taxation or public good. However, increasingly residents also take note of the temporariness of the replacements. In Jakarta, for example, large chunks of the urban core were cleared of its poorer residents, replaced with new commercial and residential buildings that now, after a decade or so, are being deemed obsolete or structurally deficient even when they were implanted as an instrument of completion or permanence. Perhaps ironically, thousands of middle-class households hold on to public housing apartments—never intended for them, but for the poor—in complexes that are almost 30 years old because even though they lack adequate size and amenities they are seen as more secure, more permanent than the scores of new specifically middle-class housing developments that have sprung up across the city.

Urban residents are surrounded by discrepant infrastructural capacities. In some cases they intensify the particularity of urban existence, enabling hyper-individuated performances that need not be integrated or tempered by any form of acting in concert. At other times they tend to round up various undesirables or actually bring them into being as a justification for narrowing the actual range of maneuverability for those otherwise promised the world—instilled with the imagination that they have access to almost anything. For the majority of urban residents these various techniques and material supports of being surrounded appear designed to foster the fullness of inhabitation wherever residents are located. However, there also seems to be a gnawing

dissatisfaction and disorientation with any specific place in particular. In the midst of such rampant contradictions, individuals are left little choice but to 'come on out', as if they are going to be 'outed' anyway. Simply to show up, to appear, to be visible is the purported solution to these dilemmas. To appear as something specific, as something consonant with the truth of a situation, of one's being or background, is not important. For 'coming on out', far from engendering particular modes of subject-making, becomes a dispersal of sense and action across all kinds of composite, temporary identities. Being surrounded from all sides, and with such thick textures of surveillance and calculation, promises both the possibility of being really 'pinned down' and disappearing altogether.

Disclosure statement

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