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City of Potentialities: An Introduction

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Abstract

This introduces a series of articles in a themed section entitled *City of Potentialities: Race, Violence and Invention*. The section concerns how we might think more specifically about how to act in domains where complexity is both a resource for the imagination and an impediment to action. What kinds of dilemmas do residents face and what kinds of practices do they engage in in order to continuously gather up the tools and possibilities to endure in volatile urban conditions, where volatility seems a critical force in the simultaneous undoing and remaking of life, as well as in providing assets and opportunities to inhabitants? How does violence obscure the various manoeuvres and practices that keep things together or apart?

Keywords

potentiality, violence, volatility, urbanism

This special themed section, *City of Potentialities: Race, Violence and Invention*, engages an intensified unsettling of things. It asks just how cities might be considered places of settlement and the extent to which relations of any kind can be considered settled. Here, cities, with all of their distinctive histories, are cauldrons of passions often neither clearly virtuous nor vicious. It is often not clear what things are, their functions or dispositions, even though it may still be possible to attribute specific identities to them.

Urban lives and materials are increasingly hedged in convoluted financial infrastructures, purportedly in order to generate the money needed simply to keep cities afloat in their present state, let alone introduce the massive interventions necessary to provide sufficient work, services and built environments for the future (Kirkpatrick and Smith, 2011). It is often unclear who or what actually runs things, as complicities of all kinds between supposed antagonists are often necessary in order to maintain any semblance of order (Willis, 2015). The particular ways bodies,

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things and spaces – and the relations among them – mutually compose themselves, engender dynamic, uneven, inventive and intensely problematic experiences and expressions for those who inhabit them. These generative processes often produce specific and diffuse traumas, drives and arrangements from which diverse forms of violence may ensue. Cities are particularly replete with violence of the imagination (Hengehold, 2013), where hopes, fears, aspirations and dreams are shaped by the inability of past knowledge and affiliations *and* future promises and trajectories of livelihood formation to provide adequate maps for how individuals can lead viable lives.

The contributions here attempt to insert themselves into the middle of contradictory trajectories of urbanization, replete with both feverish dynamism, where new capacities for connections, knowledge and repositioning are being introduced to all kinds of residents, as well as inertia, a feeling that residents are stuck in outmoded places, occupations and relationships.

Too often contemporary urban studies mobilize a range of theoretical manoeuvres simply to make the case that cities and urban regions are ineluctably complex, multidimensional, differentiated, unique, unpredictable, emergent and relationally dense. How might we think more specifically about how to act in domains where such complexity is both a resource for the imagination and an impediment to action? What kinds of dilemmas do residents face and what kinds of practices do they engage in in order to continuously gather up the tools and possibilities to endure in volatile urban conditions, where volatility seems a critical force in the simultaneous undoing and remaking of life, as well as in providing assets and opportunities to inhabitants? What kinds of histories and experiments can be drawn upon to live the city differently?

Across the urban world there are many potentialities being worked with. The design and use of public spaces, distribution of goods, transport of materials and waste, reticulations of resources among local networks of residents and commerce, the design of public service facilities, recycling systems and public information systems are potentially areas of social mobilization, as well as materializing new collaborations among fabricators, artisans, municipal officials, mechanics, artists and craftsman. These efforts might, in turn, bring other formats of sociality into existence through the very infrastructures that are produced (Brand and Dávila, 2011; Corsín Jiménez, 2014; Corsín Jiménez and Estalella, 2014; Moulaert et al., 2013).

While these efforts to elaborate new places of inhabitation can be considered forms of urban experimentation, experimentation itself is becoming a critical mode of urban governance (Broto and Bulkeley, 2013). Faced with substantial resource and environmental constraints, most cities are engaged in long-term experimentation with providing housing and infrastructure that are affordable and mitigate the carbon footprint of urban operations. These experiments entail a wide range

of actors and interests. Experimentation not only operates to affect innovations in socio-technical systems but also creates instruments of contestation among different strategic interests.

The Limits of Experimentation

Yet there are many constraints on such processes of experimentation, particularly when experimentation itself becomes a predominant form of disassembling solidarities and public space (Krätke, 2011; Peck, 2013; Rofel, 2007). The articles in this section, then, try to come to grips with how residents in different urban contexts try to create spaces of operation with the means they have available and how they, too, are shaped and constrained by forces outside their immediate control. Potentials are both opened up and closed down through various means – waiting, fighting, advocating, dealing, manipulating and giving. These articles emphasize that it is not clear what practices achieve or what objectives residents have in mind. For they do not know exactly where they are operating, what the rules are or what the likely implications of their actions might be. Sometimes residents are truly at loose ends.

In this section, Diran Valayden re-invokes notions of the feral in order to talk about urban populations turned into such loose ends – loose ends that need to be wrapped up, pinned down. But by virtue of the categories they are assigned, they find it difficult to secure a place in the city. In this double manoeuvre, people engaged in dangerous and abnormal circulations need to be corrected, but a life of constant correction produces circulation across various marginal positions that always require intensive scrutiny.

The feral doesn't belong anywhere, and even though the circuits of movement of the feral populations open up new trajectories of intersection among supposedly disparate places and people, these circuits do not belong to them, are not places in which to reside. Even populations long present in the city who have worked hard to build assets and histories can find themselves unmoored as their contributions are actively devalued. Feralization, as Valayden calls it, cuts across race, class and gender, loosening the grip these categorizations have on specific bodies so that they can always be transplanted elsewhere, but whose constant mobility is propelled by those very same categories.

There are times where the inability of residents to know precisely what they are dealing with produces protracted periods of waiting. This is particularly ironic and disarming in cities where residents had assembled *en masse* to define the conditions of a better life. An entire population marking their time is at the core of Mona Abaza's reflections on contemporary Egypt. Having written widely on the struggles for Cairo's central city and their relationship to recent mass politics (Abaza, 2012,

2013), she tries to find the ongoing traces of a 'failed' revolution. In contrast to the enthusiasm of the Arab spring, most of the Egyptian population has now been condemned to waiting it out, marking time. Abaza attempts to find room to move in the gaps between the now unrealistic expectations of revolutionary street politics and the reasserted dominance of the military in even more aspects of everyday life. In moments when the counter-revolution's revenge for the humiliation of the Arab spring seems to obliterate anything contrary in sight, the gaps are the only places from which to write, to create. Regimes often overreach, parade their overconfidence, and cultivate blind spots in the process.

The Egyptian population was left in the lurch in a revolutionary process whose vacuum was filled by the most organized vehicle of political opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood – itself largely subject to a collective paranoia cultivated through decades of persecution – unleashing paramilitary style violence. There were few options but to return to the former 'order of things' in order to restore order, for to upscale decades of dissent and local community and labour organizations into a viable political alternative required more time.

But in the interim, the Muslim Brotherhood-led government descended into incessant threats and violent confrontations. Despite the restoration of order by the Abdel Fattah el-Sisi-led military regime, violence continues – protesters are shot even at silent memorials, torture continues in police stations – as a surreal landscape unfolds where, on the one hand, the state proclaims its omnipresence while, on the other, it explains away every aberration by blaming it on infiltration on the part of an increasing list of enemies.

As Tahrir Square is largely fortified and emptied, along with the surrounding administrative buildings, in Cairo's nearby downtown various arts and theatres are flourishing. Somehow the regime, perhaps rightly, believes that such flourishing will speed along the process of gentrification, and pave the way for the complete remaking of the centre. And so through this modality artists feverishly attempt to generate work while they can, in order to keep at least the memory and mindset of the Arab spring alive.

In-between Spaces and Their Encounters

The contributions to this section deal with a variety of *in-between* spaces. For if, as Brenner and Schmid (2015) argue, urbanization extends itself not so much through the imposition of the axioms of capital but through complex processes of instantiation, where the singularities of place and history are experimentally refigured into unsettled articulations with larger surrounds, what are urban processes in such interstices? What is *between* the peculiar, idiosyncratic features of cities and urban regions and urbanization at a planetary scale? For the constant rescaling

of accumulation and dispossession, as well as the constant rearranging of levers, conduits and mechanisms for affecting how resources and wealth are accessed, circulated and leveraged, and how value is produced, do not definitively specify or control just how everyday action in cities is composed (Altamirano, 2014; Amin, 2013; McFarlane, 2011; Perera, 2015; Robinson, 2006).

Of course these *in-between* spaces are largely just figures of discussion here, not clearly demarcated strata or levels. The relationships between the forces of global capital and the locally expressed forces of inter-meshed and messy encounters are not assignable to clearly distinct scales (Allen and Cochrane, 2010; Brenner, 2004; Tsing, 2012). It is not that global capital sits above a world of cities, orchestrating its circuits below, apportioning things here and there in some kind of top-down system of command and control. Neither are the intermixtures of inclin-ations, styles and practices that make up a local vernacular simply con-fined within the administrative or cultural boundaries of a specific urban region (Coward, 2007; Secor, 2012).

What a city can do as a systemic entity in the end is largely contingent upon structures of global capital. But again, the question is how we come to grips with the relational spaces of the predominant structuring forces – of resource access, distribution and economic value – and the intermixing of different locally shaped forces, capabilities, inclinations, styles and opportunities. For this intermixing also stretches and constrains what it is possible to do for residents of any given background or status. No matter what formal structures, stories, powers or institutions come to bear on what takes place, no matter how they leave their mark, there remains a constant process of encountering, pushing and pulling, wheel-ing and dealing, caring for and undermining that potentially keeps almost everyone 'in play', that is, able to manoeuvre and pursue, how-ever limited this might be.

This intermixing is not clearly virtuous or destructive. In fact, it is such pushing and pulling that shapes the architectures of articulation that enable capital to shape-shift its way across new spatial parameters. It is also the means through which provisional, uncertain opportunities not under any particularly hegemonic thumb might be elaborated (Merrifield, 2014). And it also shifts attention away from the predomin-ance of human inhabitation as the centring node of urban development or sustainability towards ways of valuing the multiplicity of encounters among entities of all kinds possible in urban contexts (Colebrook, 2014a, 2014b; Lorimer, 2012; Matts and Tynan, 2012).

Hunter et al., in this section, explore various sites of such encounters in the way in which African Americans endeavour to create places where they can be together to derive a sense of everyday pleasure and joy. These endeavours are ever mindful of the violence that preys on black life and distorts the collective knowledge honed from the endurance of, and

labour exerted by, black bodies. Particularly in the Americas, black life brought something singular to urban life, that is, a way of 'honoring the city differently', as Katherine McKittrick (2013) puts it, that had to be quelled. As such, persisting with these efforts through violence becomes a critical building block of such place-making.

Shady contracts, redlining and larcenous mortgages have concentrated black residents in underserviced, abandoned and segregated pockets of many US cities. In what often appears to be the 'pruning' of black populations from economically troubled cities, black people may not be targeted so much as a collective racial group, but as households that are left behind, that are dysfunctional or no longer viable in terms of the new economic underpinnings of metropolitan change. In contrast, black place-making recuperates the experience of blackness as a deliberately collective means of engendering new spaces of everyday living – from pleasure to politics – as an urban commons.

Each of the article's four contributors marks different dimensions of such place-making activity. In the first case, black Twitter counters and reshapes predominant media and acts as a medium to continue long traditions of radical black critique and struggles for equality and justice. Particularly as forms of abuse and oppression are 'silently' internalized, Twitter and other forms of social media lend new instruments of visibility to events and behaviours that contribute to the tearing of black social fabrics.

The second case bears witness to the ways in which long-term residents of public housing have been displaced in an ongoing tradition of vilifying such projects as incubators of dysfunction, or simply in the way of various urban renewal schemes. Yet in the 'ashes' of destroyed public housing, former residents gather to share memories, socialize and renew bonds. For much of the land on which public housing stood remains fallow, not yet integrated into gentrification or maximized ground rent. Even in areas that have been substantially remade, former residents meet in nearby parks, many of which they had used back in the day.

Occupying parts of the city at the margins, black gay and lesbian nightlife venues have flourished in Chicago. The flourishing does not just entail the demarcation of safe, insulated spaces of leisure but also the mobilization of the night and of clubbing as a domain where all kinds of connections can be made and networks of support forged. Information about jobs, babysitting, apartments, health and social services are circulated. Blacks from across the territorial expanse and class lines of Chicago are gathered, and thus impressions of the metropolitan scale are figured and exchanged.

In the final story, an all-black baseball Little League team has anchored a revitalized sense of community spirit in the most depleted neighbourhoods of Chicago's Southside. In areas of the city where hundreds of public schools have been closed, as well as scores of public institutions and agencies, the self-organized league, encompassing over

300 young players, provides concrete evidence of local organizational capacity that has been developed over several decades. The Little League is an ongoing residue of a substantial institutional presence of black baseball in Chicago that thrived prior to the integration of black players into the major leagues. When a team emerged from these leagues to win the national Little League World Series in 2014, the city of Chicago was compelled to invest millions in rebuilding parks and other public facilities in the Southside.

As the authors insist, these instances of black place-making are not 'feel-good' stories. Rather, they are a testament to the skill of collective black life to continue to reiterate itself under conditions that would no longer seem to provide any platform for it, and in all of the efforts to undermine and deny the salience of such black life, an important resource for city-making in general remains unavailable.

The Mutant, Wasted and Opaque

As forces from 'above' and 'below' intersect, varied forms of differentiation ensue, as individual, infrastructural and collective bodies are remade. The apparent integrity of things – the way they appear – may be retained over long periods of time. But the interiors of those things and metabolisms may move away from each other (Bear, 2014; Tsing, 2013). The devices and operations required to sustain that apparent integrity become more complex, sometimes fragile. In other words, the work required to maintain the city as a domain of individuals, households, sectors and networks – discernible and stable – may vary in its intensities and content. When this work fails, the question becomes: what constitutes harm, as the 'real entities' or the 'real inhabitants' may no longer be what they appear to be, but rather a plurality of shifting interfaces, mutant assemblages or mere waste?

This is particularly the case with new forms of labouring. Far from being ancillary to the production of value, affective and cognitive spheres of life are constantly appropriated as factors and objects of production (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2009). Distinctions between work and leisure are erased. Capital intervenes in the entirety of a person's life-span as a means of maximizing the capacity not only to perform according to normative standards of optimality but also to continuously live with a sense of dissatisfaction compensated only through self-improvement and niche consumption (Marazzi, 2010). The seeming dissociation of finance capital from the production of 'real' things for 'real' lives in actuality becomes the critical operating mode for the capacity of life to become increasingly singular and resilient, constantly re-associated and redistributed in shifting networks of affiliations and experiences (Martin, 2013).

Here, Neferti X.M. Tadiar builds upon previous work (Tadiar, 2012, 2013) that examines the ways in which 'wasted' urban populations are

both folded in and remain exterior to new formations of capitalist value, and focuses her piece around roads and traffic. She begins with the particular rhythms she once assumed in order to make good time along routes full of varying types of vehicles and densities. Now, the journey from her hometown to Manila no longer has to navigate the small towns that prompted these rhythms, as new freeways have been developed to constitute a faster and more direct route. Speed promises the possibility of elongation, of extending the dominance of the metropole across broader physical terrain. It spaces out its heterogeneities and inequities in such a way that the highways, the conduits become themselves the content of the city.

In a not dissimilar way, the economic elite in the Philippines steer their acquisitions towards a total conflation of content and connection. The infrastructures of articulation will be turned over solely to the content generated by the same corporations that manage them. Such are the fantasies of total access – anytime, anywhere – in a mobility that does not have to worry about interruption; where inter-operable datasets, calculations and infrastructures permit unimpeded journeys suited for self-aggrandizement and predictable sociality.

Whatever refuse has been generated through the accumulation strategies of the past and their refusals by the poor, new formats of archipelago urbanism configured by freeways and other media transmission belts aim to convert shanties, slums, peripheries and depleted urban cores into fluidities underpinning new value platforms of metropolitan life. As the dispersion of urban fractals takes place across an extended landscape, of what Tadiar calls 'emulants', cheap labour is needed. So screening takes place less through hard-wired spatial segregation than through the sorting effects of regulatory pathways that are physical, cultural, emotional and symbolic.

What emulants offer in this urban archipelago is not just the typical suite of condominiums, research and hi-tech parks, shopping malls and leisure zones, but access to a life worth living. This is a life that is heading somewhere, even if it is only provisionally anchored in the object of investment, which is meant to facilitate a viable transience, one step in the capacity to reach other scales and opportunities. This is accomplished with the availability of the disposable lifetimes of a growing pool of reserve labour biding and marking time.

The density of the city, then, is not just that of human bodies. The logics that have informed urbanization were predicated on density as a mode of efficacy through variation, as the intermixing of devices. These devices included measures, angles, calculations, impulses, hinges, screens, surfaces, soundscapes, exposures, folds, circuitries, layers, tears and inversions. All are instruments for associating things, bringing things into association, where things get their 'bearings' by having a 'bearing' on each other. City life was propelled by this possibility of creating sets

of 'bearings'. The bearing down of things as an impression, as the impact of force, could walk a thin line between the incitement of adaptation, and thus new capacities, and a wearing away of desire and ability.

But the difference between inhabitants 'getting their bearings' and being rendered 'bare' is not always clear, and this reflects a persistent conundrum in urbanization. Trying to navigate this uncertain space may require large measures of opacity and indifference. AbdouMaliq Simone uses the notion of 'generic blackness' to explore this conundrum, where the blackness of specific lives and histories offers a way into thinking about all of the imperceptible practices at work in urban life, but is not limited to these histories. All of those forces making the urban that cannot be grounded into a clear project of self-furthering – all of the errant and unbounded forces that have nothing to do with the survival of residents within the city (Colebrook, 2014a) – are 'black-boxed' within blackness. So generic blackness is both the 'black box' of unfathomable operations and the space of the Middle Passage. It is the way that the erasure of black people's subjectivity could be converted into unexpected, unplanned capacities in what McKittrick (2013) called the interweaving of body with multiple species of the plantation 'surrounds'.

Referring to those aspects of the black power movement that emphasized the importance of a collective caretaking, Simone argues that even though the massive re-formatting of urban space, labour and livelihoods substantially narrows the possibilities for community organizing exemplified by the Black Power movement, processes of taking care may still endure. They do so in ways that are sometimes seemingly indifferent to the severity of this re-formatting and elaborated with large measures of opacity. He points to a range of black acts in a market in Jakarta, black both in their imperceptibility and in their pointing to aspects of the urban that remain outside apprehension. These acts are not subsumed by market valuation. Nor are they computable in inter-operable assessments of how different urban sectors and materials impact upon each other. They are not turned into probabilistic assumptions about what different spaces and persons are about to look like.

Speed and Circulation

So, urbanization is a process that has been caught in the crossfire since its inception. On the one hand it makes possible a circulation of things across any border that would delimit them, such as habitats, niches, territories or scales (Adams, 2014). Bodies, things, machines and institutions, brought together in dense interactions, not only operate as a gravitational force, drawing materials inward, but also constitute platforms for making materials move, whether in the shape of resources, commodities or information (Batty, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013). For the widespread interaction of things not only creates different kinds of space, and thus

multiple fields of attraction, but also changes the potential and values of those things that are put in motion (Lash, 2013).

As such, urbanization entails not just circulation but stability and security as well, securing populations into territories that operate as domains proper to the particular characteristics of their inhabitants. For too much circulation poses a danger to the ability to know who people are, what they are capable of doing and what can be demanded of them. So urbanization points to continuously revisable structures of working out relationships between circulation and security. Who and what should move under what circumstances, then, is always an issue that entails relations of force, constraint and contestation.

Throughout urban worlds today, these relationships are changing at unprecedented speeds and in ways that are difficult to track. Clearly, almost everything circulates more extensively and rapidly, while, at the same time, the available platforms on which to make use of that circulation – to plan, to settle, to cultivate over time, to trace an ongoing story of a coherent life – diminish, or become formatted in narrower terms (Lacy, 2014).

In Laurent Gayer's reflections on Karachi here, 'full speed ahead' becomes a modus operandi of urban inhabitants whose emplacement, no matter how provisional, increasingly depends on their ability to vacate familiar assumptions and locales. The need for speed becomes the terrain where conflicting needs and aspirations for the city collide. For some urban workers, speeding up becomes the essential criterion for the ability to keep one's head above water, to eke out minimal profit in sectors inundated with competition and seemingly infinite layers of subcontracting. But speeding up also entails the means of processing troubling events, such as the rigours of everyday commuting, replete as it is with intrusive physical proximities, bad equipment, shakedowns and risky driving. To make any and all discomfort pass quickly implicitly encourages the speeds at which commuting practices travel.

Reflecting on the large-scale riots that ensued from a pedestrian being run over by an errant minibus in 1985, Gayer analyses how the infrastructures of circulation are both a precipitant of and hedge against violence, but, more importantly, the invention of an ongoing political game. As public anger was directed against minibuses and their ethnically marked drivers, who subsequently staged a strike that shut down the city, circulation as a critical feature of urban life was amplified, as well as the possibilities of consolidating particular bastions of urban political power around just how circulation could or could not take place. Subsequent political contestation largely revolved around who could shut the city down, or at least parts of it. So, Karachi residents had to accustom themselves to an endless process of 'stop-go', not just in terms of excessive traffic but in the excessive trafficking of contestation.

Standard operating procedure for navigating the city entailed a range of devices and tactics for anticipating and circumventing blockages. In order to appear normal, Karachi residents assume a plurality of guises, since strategic navigation entails reading the urban milieu at a micro-level, thus infusing small details with a power otherwise unavailable to them. Even with large-scale infrastructural investment in highways and flyovers to speed up circulation and circumvent the ways in which roads could be mobilized as political devices, the new infrastructure, far from avoiding political violence, afforded it new perspectives and opportunities, as flyovers offered opportunities for snipers, gun battles, and even the use of heavy artillery, as well as the possibility of easier escape routes.

This is part and parcel of the city itself as weapon. As Derek Gregory (2011) and Stephen Graham (2011) have pointed out, the capacity to dissect, encode, survey and predict what takes place in cities at almost any level is unparalleled. There are few places to hide, to avoid scrutiny, and indeed the spatial planning applied to cities is geared increasingly towards instantaneous detection and remote targeting as a crucial manoeuvre in the simultaneous efforts to make other 'critical infrastructure', material, symbolic and political, impermeable and immune from the effects of its proximities to populations, actions and places construed as or purposely turned into threats (Crandall, 2010; Kitchin, 2014; Miorandi et al., 2014; Parisi, 2012).

Algorithmic urban governance is accompanied by the intensity of the anxieties its own operations largely bring about. Things cannot simply be what they are without being potentially indicative of open-ended complicities, into which they are wittingly or unwittingly drawn. While cities have always been viewed as places of danger and volatility, there has long been little appreciation of the fact that, by virtue of all of the ways in which everything inhabiting the city could interact, they could be much more unsettling than they actually are.

So residents must increasingly dwell within such unsettling. And they themselves may feel increasingly compelled to unsettle as much as settle. Any effort to consider new and residual potentialities of cities, then, must come to grips with the violence inherent in the potentiality of cities. The articles in this section mostly grapple, in one way or another, with what has been expelled, displaced, wasted and circumvented in the relationship between urbanization as a planetary process and the specific configuration of individual cities. They thus deal inevitably, if not always directly, with violence. As such I want to say a few more words about how violence has been dealt with conceptually in a range of literature.

Violence and Urban Dissection

The very discourse on urban violence seems to be impermeable to any specific ordering that might enable it to be 'pinned down'

(Penglase, 2011). Social analysis of violence itself increasingly relies upon aesthetic forms that attempt to bypass existent categories of people and things, to delve deep and directly into even more particularized divisions and singular patterns of behaviour. Here, individuals become aspects of multiple emerging groups that are always changing, unmediated by the interpretive inclinations of supposedly stable interest groups or identities. Here social life is purged of anything that is uncertain or ambiguous, that can't be made visible (Hoofd, 2014; Ruppert et al., 2013).

Obsessions with violence also embody and excuse the absence of imagination of alternative urban futures (Arantes, 2007). While incidents of violence in their various forms of manifestation may often provide residents with a map that is critical to how and where they attempt to interpret and organize their daily lives (Vargas and Amparo Alves, 2010), the ways in which violence is conceptualized can either produce what Penglase (2009) calls an 'active unknowing' about the disparate ways in which violence is distributed across the city or act as a grammar of conjunction, reminding other residents of the long histories of continuous subjugation beyond their control.

As such, it is important to consider how the selective deployment of violence as an instrument shaping urban governance has long been at work. As Galvin (2012) reminds us, organized crime as a critical facet of the neoliberal state, for example, continues a long history of tolerance for criminality as the very means to buttress state control in times of government vulnerability. Criminality also operated as a vehicle to mediate between the ideals of normative legal governance and the need not only to generate locally engendered standards of social influence and legitimacy but also to accumulate the economic clout sufficient to entrench them as 'real working' norms.

While such mediations also provided a means through which particular kinds of political elite could be constituted and transition into purveyors of the law and the idealized norms of good governance, those laws and norms, which they now purportedly upheld, were instruments that could also be turned against them under new regimes of political contestation. This opened up the possibilities of renewed violence through the very enforcement of the law (Arlacchi, 1983, 1986; Gambetta, 1993; Handelman, 1994; Herzfeld, 2009; Kang, 2002; Sanchez, 2010; Varese, 2005; Volkov, 2002; Yurchak, 2002).

At times, extrajudicial forces put to work the very kinds of discourses that would seem to rule them out. Holston (2009), for example, talks about the proliferation of discourses about rights to the city across a wide spectrum of actors, including gangs claiming their right to democratic inclusion, which upend clear distinctions between the legitimate and illegitimate. Claims to democratic citizenship become a common language of justification, what he describes as the moral centre of both the legal and illegal. So even though the law may not, in its present

state, actually work in the interests of the poor, the claim to such a new common measure becomes a form of commensurability. No matter who you are or what you do, there is something that enjoins you, which renders you part of a larger public. To deny such a claim, to deny the right of anyone, regardless of their current status or background, is then to inversely constitute the grounds on which a person must operate outside of the law.

But it is difficult for cities to concretize the affordance of such democratic inclusion. Particularly in cities of the so-called Global South, the shift of competencies to municipalities and other subnational levels, largely without the requisite resources to effectively govern, have diminished mechanisms of concrete attachment to larger territorial scales. Under the rubric of various forms of subsidiarity, this shift reinforces the particularities of localities in a more intensely differentiated landscape of service provision, policing, public amenities, land valuation and investment.

Districts of relative privilege and impoverishment become sites of contestation among various armed actors, ranging from private security guards and citizen militias to mafias. Increasing differentiation in the composition of the metropolitan landscape and the relocation of responsibilities for governance to various strata of authority, as well as the development and management of region-wide infrastructure to various formats of public–private partnership, make it increasingly difficult for inhabitants, regardless of their location, to engender a sense of belonging to a larger city. This, in turn, reinforces their sense of vulnerability and the need for specific protections. These protections may be provided by different state and non-state actors, and in various composites of complicity and competition (Arias, 2006; Davis, 2007; Koonings and Kruijt, 2007; Moser, 2004; Sparke, 2005).

In his review of the literatures of urban violence in the Global South, Moncada (2013) discerns a wide variety of relationships among residents, extrajudicial forces, criminal organizations and different tiers of the state. In some cities and sub-territories, ongoing conflicts among different parties largely shape the daily atmospheres, dispositions and social relationships residents live through. Sometimes long-term collaborations exist which enforce stabilities that come with highly circumscribed spaces of everyday individual manoeuvring. In other situations, conflict and collaboration may oscillate, as part and parcel of a district's need to innovate, grow or make necessary adjustments to new political formations or economic dynamics in larger surrounds.

When political control of local populations is decentralized away from the state, the development of districts is largely contingent upon the accumulation strategies of those who enforce control for the state, a process characterized through extraction and rent. Situations of ongoing conflict between the state and various consolidations of extrajudicial power, whether the latter are armed or not, may produce substrates of

economic domination, where gangs and mafias control particular sectors of an economy but largely leave other facets of local life alone. In addition, varying forces are able to deploy different repertoires of power, such as the state's ability to use eviction as a tool of force or the ways in which organized criminal groups can turn illicit liquidity into high-rise housing developments (Hansen, 2005).

New Geographies

In most of the big metropolitan areas of the South, many residents are on the move, but largely away from the urban core, pluralizing but perhaps dissipating gravitational lines of attraction that put different ways of life in touch with each other. This mobility is sometimes characterized by substantial disjuncture. In the exodus of many of the self-designated nascent middle class from labour-intensive, increasingly unaffordable and volatile urban cores – which have placed inordinate strains on both the accumulation strategies and social fabrics long depended upon – to the cheaper, more secure but isolated peripheries, residents have to make big adjustments to practices of sociability and practices of affordances (Keil, 2013).

Urban cores once provided intensely heterogeneous compositions of built and social environments that enabled the constant re-piecing together of supply and support systems. Too often, now, the periphery throws people together with little shared history, significant debt, long commutes to work, the imaginaries of individuated middle-class status, and the prospects of temporariness given the shoddy construction of the built environment.

The elaboration of important social ties and support systems is not impossible here. After all, many residents are indeed convinced that life will be better, that they want more space, more anonymity. Yet, many of these new areas are characterized by a pervasive sense of wariness. They are characterized by a mixture of the anxieties about whether or not households can sustain their newfound economic positions, concern over the vulnerability that these peripheral areas exude in terms of their location and relative lack of strong social ties, and the absence of occasions and infrastructure to facilitate the cultivation of local support networks. Where the excess of events occasioned the need for security in the urban core, in the peripheries, concerns about security largely stem from too little going on (Davis, 2014; Drummond, 2012; Harris, 2010; Mabin et al., 2013; Thibert and Osorio, 2014; Ward, 2012).

Regardless of whether cities are more or less violent than they were before, references to violence generate their own geographies, as well as senses of what is possible or not. While the repression dished out by both state and non-state actors has long been predicated on their guaranteeing protection from violence, repression can keep going whether or not it

offers such protection. So residents are often caught in the middle, trying to avoid getting killed and also trying to avoid all of the managerial mechanisms that limit their manoeuvrability, and which end up repeatedly putting them in the line of fire that state repression, cloaked as governance, was supposed to protect them from (Telles and Hirata, 2007).

Additionally, many residents of popular districts have been 'hailed' so many times, mobilized for so many different campaigns, political ideologies and feigned emergencies, that they are no longer anchored as any clear or stable political subject. As such, what they need to know are the highly idiosyncratic trajectories, opportunities and dangers posed by the immediate surrounds and the generalized abstractions of a more global view. Whatever is between these positions tends to shrink from view, such as a sense of collective belonging or a set of shared understandings (Gaonkar, 2013). Neither mode of visibility, the idiosyncratic or the abstract, may have much traction in the other. Cut off from the mediations and portals of a viable 'middle', residents figure out ways of both immunizing themselves from the uncertainties of such disjuncture as well as ways of operating under the radar in order to extend themselves beyond the confines of the immediate surrounds (Beckert, 2013; Dewey, 2012).

Ironically, even though cities begin to look more and more alike, urban governance and life has been intensely localized. The ways the urban landscape is actively fractured and particularized, the ways in which new proximities of disparity are engineered so that the different elements and conditions can be seen but not accessed or engaged, and the subsequent privileging of circulation as a repertoire of individual performance and routine – all are critical factors in the proliferation of everyday violence, most often exhibited *within* households and neighbourhoods (Bourgois, 2004a, 2004b, 2009; Scheper-Hughes, 1992, 1997).

Here violence becomes a normal everyday vernacular in the face of structural conditions that impinge, constrain, marginalize and unravel. Residents are subject to an entire gamut of quotidian abuses, which are often managed by attributing them to their own unworthiness or incapacity. Residents internalize the lack of value accorded to them in their own regard of themselves and others. In other instances, they turn themselves into the very thing that is feared or devalued as a means of recouping their own agency, of staying in the 'game' by virtue of creating self-confidence through believing that they are indeed to be feared.

The Temporalities of Urban Violence

Much of everyday violence has been analysed in terms of a moral economy, of what inhabitants consider to be the bounds and resources of violence, its efficacies and damages, the conditions of its production and

what constitutes its proper forms of engagement and attenuation (Auyero, 2007; Auyero et al., 2014, 2015). In communities at the margin, violence may be an important but fragile device that is deployed as an obligation to protect family, kin and neighbours. Such obligations may, in turn, be appropriated by gangs, mafias and other extrajudicial forces as a means of self-aggrandizement and for the enforcement of loyalty and labour discipline. Karandinos et al. (2014) argue that such appropriation represents a form of primitive accumulation in the way in which it depletes the non-renewable resource of organic life and health. Under the guise of acting as the common sense of what it means to maintain important intimate and social relationships, violence introduces substantial fault lines in the very communities struggling to maintain solidarity – fault lines that are then often illusorily bridged through displays of violence (Goffman, 2014). Violence protects the common as it wears down the common that then needs protecting.

But far from promoting solidarity and cohesiveness, communities at the margin become battlefields among various actors. There are predators who attempt to lay claim to whatever resources circulate within the community and local residents who organize various associational efforts to maintain a semblance of 'normal life'. There are various and increasingly hybrid forms of social welfare and regulatory agencies that attempt to contain disorder within particular territorial configurations. There are the various forms of speculation that wager on the eventual dispositions of such territories, both actively leveraging against stability and investing in the potentialities of new value and new populations (Wacquant, 2007).

But there is also an institutional moral economy that conceptualizes the conflicts of everyday urban living in terms of notions of trauma and victimization. The struggles of the marginal and increasingly precarious working and lower middle classes to fight their way towards remaining viable in the city can be easily transformed into discourses about mental health and vulnerability. As Fassin (2012) points out, the image of the vulnerable teenager is more palatable than that of the violent fighter.

Regardless of whether the perpetrators of violence consciously deploy overt political vernaculars or not, there are few real options for many to avoid fighting (Abdullah, 2005). The fighting could be more effective, judicious and less parasitical if conducted in ways other than the formats it assumes, but this does not obviate the reality of the fight. As Fassin argues, contrary to the daily evidence of the realities we encounter:

> humanitarian reason, by instituting the equivalence of lives and the equivalence of suffering allows us to continue believing in this concept of humanity which presupposes that all human beings are of equal value because they belong to one moral community. (Fassin, 2012: 252)

In such equivalence, the violence that forms an essential part of political practice does not have to be considered in relation to the constitution of what Protevi (2009) calls specific *bodies politic*. By bodies politic he means the unfolding of a history of bodily experience, of *specific* modulations on ongoing processes of people and things encountering each other. Here, varying distributions of capacities to affect and be affected, to bring things into relationship, or to navigate actual or potential relations are political matters. These are matters about who gets to acquire particular emotional patterns, thresholds and triggers, and who are thus connected to a complex field of differential practice.

Derrida (2002) also reminds us of a violence undertaken on mystical foundations that eludes all forms of legitimation. While foundational in constituting the rule of law, such violence remains excessive in relation to what it brings about. In Sanchez's (2008) discussion of Pentecostal squatters in Caracas, buildings are seized in the name of the Holy Ghost, as part of a divine obligation to take property away from demons. This, Sanchez argues, is part and parcel of the obliteration of the temporal gap between events and their live presentation, a gap that was necessary in order for residents to plan, to develop proposals, to persuade and test the waters incrementally over time.

Now urban life is increasingly a challenge to seize or be seized, to act in the immediacy of the moment where distinctions between public and private, 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then' are increasingly provisional. The body becomes:

> [a] tremulous site where, in all of its passionate immediacy, the intimations of a ghostly elsewhere are immediately registered and sensed. No longer protected by a series of representative instances that are either gone or currently undergoing severe crisis, such a sentient, haunted body is, in other words, returned to the center of sociality. (Sanchez, 2008: 302)

Such refiguring of the social might even be extended to the obliteration of human form itself. For, as James (2013) argues, it is time to put an end to all of the violent squabbles about who is human. And all of the blood spilt over who gets to define the construct of human has been a waste of time, an endless progression of constant skirmishes. As bodies count for little in these skirmishes, since body counts are not the determinant factor in who wins and who doesn't, thinking the body as something different from the human, not more or less, may be the only means out of such repetitive violence.

The Remainders of the City

How this potentiality of putting an end to skirmishes about the human intersects with engaging the potentialities of city life remains

another story. Still, the contributions to this special section all attempt to reach for ways to reiterate the city's capacity to put things in touch with each other in heterogeneous ways, to invent new circulations in the gaps between divisions and trajectories. They explore the ambiguities of invention, the violence invention engenders and impedes, and the ways through which the apparent disappearance of the city is struggled with at different steps of the way, raising the question of whether its prospects of survival are worth the costs or whether it should be fought for at all costs.

This is particularly evident in Dennis Rodgers' contribution to this section. He engages Walter Benjamin's three-fold concept of violence – law-making, law preserving and law-destroying – to consider the trajectories of a single individual life in Managua, Nicaragua that he has followed for some time. Rodgers met Bismarck when the latter was a young kid, and in the process witnessed how the strains placed on poor and working-class urban households propelled youth into economies of gang solidarity that initially outweigh individuated accumulation. This solidarity as something excessive in terms of the available vernaculars of social organization was reiterated in exuberant displays of fighting and hold-ups. These, in turn, generated stories and reputations, whose recounting became an important pastime and provided *barrios* with a specific character.

When Rodgers reconnects with Bismarck years later, he has grown from a skinny, rambunctious youth into a physically imposing, relatively successful entrepreneur living in a *barrio* that had witnessed obvious improvements over the past decades. One thing that had set Bismarck apart was a close relationship with an Italian priest, who had intervened when he was child and was expelled from his stepfather's house, and whose support could be mobilized later on to get him out of trouble. Despite this affiliation, the sheer need to turn to the priest during times of unfounded accusations on the part of others lent visibility not to a clean and licit life but rather to its inverse – that is, to the economic prospects entailed in working the boundaries between the licit and illicit. For Bismarck discovered just how complicit supposed legal and illegal actors and operations could be.

Bismarck entered into the cocaine business as a local distributor, putting to work solidarities honed as a youth gang member. Here, youth gang membership as an apprenticeship in the use of violence served to consolidate a tightly circumscribed narcotics sector that produced marked profits for those participating at various levels of the trade. This was a process which reinforced solidarity, but which was also predicated on the willingness to violently enforce these sectoral boundaries. In this way, instead of violent performances supporting more inclusive solidarities, their deployment in the drug business produced a more segmented *barrio*.

Bismarck got out of the drug business, prompted by an almost surreal story about an interruption of supply, and then circulated through a range of small businesses, from second-hand clothing, to a nightclub, a motorcycle repair shop, a small restaurant, to finally purchasing a line of houses in his *barrio*, all of which he acquired at a cheap price by marshalling his past reputation into a capacity to take advantage of the different legal vulnerabilities faced by these residents. Through focusing on the life trajectory of Bismarck, Rodgers demonstrates how violence is not simply something imposed on the urban from the outside, not simply a by-product of larger macro-structural conditions. Rather, as Benjamin indicates, violence can also be a way of seeing things through, and thus different modalities of violence are articulated in different ways, sometimes not clearly productive or destructive.

In all of the contributions here, no matter their diverse perspectives and locations, there is the sense of a city worth fighting for. The city may seem to disappear in new configurations of the urban, and its mode of disappearance may entail intensifications of violence that motivate residents to participate in more extensive and diffuse forms of dispersion, opting for more defensive designs of security and well-being. Cities are the locus of massive expulsions as well. These expulsions depend upon a kind of inventiveness. For, as Sassen (2014) points out, finance invents instruments that act as weapons to invade various aspects of life, converting them into abstract calculations that are bought and sold in an escalating valuation that exceeds the counting of things and money. This conflation of violence and invention certainly hollows the city out by disentangling the densities of perspectives and ways of life.

The demands of increasingly individuated life trajectories and living arrangements may turn the interactional densities of city life into burdens simply too large to bear, what with the exigencies of always having to acquire and demonstrate the capacities to make oneself marketable. But in all of these instances of violence, and those forms of inventiveness which attempt to penetrate deeply into the microphages of everyday sentiment and behaviour, reworking urban subjects into increasingly particularized and manipulated constellations of elements unable to enjoin as collective lives with collective agendas, the traces of *the city* remain, even under progressive erasure.

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