

Cities and the ethic of care for the stranger

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Introduction

Until recently, debate on the politics of integration in plural and diverse societies has made light of the imprint of lived and everyday material cultures on negotiations of difference. Attention has tended to focus on the rules and practices of human integration and recognition in the national or otherwise imagined community. For example, in the area of race and immigration, discussion has hovered around issues such as the rights and responsibilities of minorities, the obligations and duties of majorities, policies on immigration and asylum, opportunities for integration and participation, legacies of discrimination and prejudice and public discourse on national belonging and its constituents. The insight of research on habits formed in everyday practices of living and interacting with others – directly or indirectly – has had marginal influence. This research shows the habits to be constitutively relational, plural and hybrid, rarely remaining open and fluid but hardened by rhythms of situated experience (e.g. local legacies of negotiating difference). It shows that the habits of living with diversity vary from place to place, weaving in emotions and precognitive reflexes formed in bodily, material and virtual encounter.

Curiously, policy discourse on diversity seems to have evolved in directions that are more sensitive to the dynamics of bodily encounter and local specificity. How far this stems from an awareness of research on situated practice is a matter of conjecture, but it certainly seems to acknowledge, for example, that neighbourhoods can vary sharply in their cultures of negotiating difference, that the tone and content of local policy interventions can make a real difference, that local balances of segregation and mixture affect cultural practices, that vigilance in a post-9/11 world requires intensified ground-level surveillance of difference (Graham, 2010). Woven into this awareness of the specificity of the local cultural environment is a sense – and little more than this – of the potential significance of the urban infrastructure in regulating relations between strangers; a sense brought to the fore by certain celebrated examples of rupture or repair. These include the stark contrasts between London and New Orleans in their response to catastrophes with marked racial connotations (respectively the 7/7 bombings and Hurricane Katrina), or those between cities such as Vancouver or Toronto with their elaborate infrastructures of social and cultural inclusion and towns such as Bradford and Oldham which faced the 2001 riots with a history of division built into the urban infrastructure.

This awareness of the powers of place in regulating local negotiations of diversity and difference is yielding, above all, an interest in tackling the problems of social cohesion in a multicultural society by changing the patterns of contact between people from different backgrounds in everyday spaces such as workplaces, neighbourhoods and public spaces. On the one hand, states and communities convinced that the multicultural policies of the late 20th century that encouraged plurality and cosmopolitan engagement have increased, rather than diminished, the distance between majorities and minorities, are now calling on urban managers – in the face of heightened suspicion and anxiety after 9/11 – to get tough on crime, minorities, youths, asylum seekers and dissenting voices, to step up measures of surveillance, control and compliance, to erect barriers to contain or keep out those judged to pose a risk, to sharply define the boundaries of tolerance. The belief here is that the only way of managing the plural city is through order and discipline, compulsion and conformity; in short, the abandonment of multicultural policies.

The measures being rolled out are both controversial and far from convincing. Every attempt to impose order and discipline has sparked opposition, generated counter-effects or failed to penetrate the many hidden nooks and crannies of urban life. The war on terror and fundamentalism has only served to fan dissent and defiance among those under attack, along with escalating fear, insecurity and animosity among majorities. The rounding on vulnerable minorities and assimilated strangers has inflamed racism, intolerance and xenophobia and forced the injured into a feral and fearful existence. The indiscriminate use of sophisticated surveillance technologies has bred an urban culture of mistrust and punishment, pushed real criminality and harm into the shadows and automated the means by which different sections of society are classified and evaluated. The many attempts to segregate communities in the name of urban order (in gated developments or ghettos and through

restrictions on the mobility of those considered undesirable) regularly produce backlashes that breach the walls going up.

On the other hand, urban actors worried by such developments have begun to turn to more inclusive modes of social integration, looking to improve social interaction and cultural exchange. The interventions have included attempts to desegregate schools and neighbourhoods, open up public spaces to multiple use and diverse communities, encourage greater contact between people from different backgrounds or enrol them into common projects (e.g. communal gardens, sports ventures, neighbourhood regeneration schemes), build bridges between antagonists with the help of reconciliation schemes and promote an open civic culture (e.g. by emphasising global connections and hybrid legacies). Across real differences in expectation between cities (e.g. UK cities tending to expect more from minorities than from majorities, compared to cities such as Vancouver which even after 9/11 remain committed to cultural diversity) is to be found the shared assumption that living with diversity demands a regularity of encounter between strangers and with the unfamiliar (Wood and Landry, 2007); a sense that in the inclusive city, demarcations should function as permeable boundaries rather than borders that separate (Sennett, 2008).

In many ways, the case for living with diversity through social engagement seems beyond criticism, welcome recognition of how everyday practice shapes human behaviour. But it begs two fundamental questions. The first is whether urban sociality is reducible to interhuman relations, and if it is, whether it is open to strong affinities between strangers. Modern urban living is about people placed far apart from each other, rushing past each other, carrying multiple cares with them, inhabiting familiar and known spaces, displaying varied affects – positive and negative – towards others, bringing a host of pre-formed orientations into the encounter (e.g. ingrained attitudes on race that are played out in the encounter – see Saldanha,

2006; Swanton, 2010). People are made as social beings through many modes of dwelling and association that exceed the encounter (e.g. living in the urban environment, intimacies with non-human elements, resonances of work, educational or family experience). The affects of everyday urban encounter are a mixture of 'turbulent passions', including 'malice aforethought' among strangers (Thrift, 2005b), diverse feelings brought into the encounter (Wilson, 2009) and complicated personal biographies (Sardar, 2009). This is precisely why a politics of encounter requires active intermediation by third parties, managed interaction or common projects in order to undo settled behaviour, build interdependence or common purpose, catalyse positive feelings (Amin, 2002; Darling, 2009; Sandercock, 2003).

The second question begged is whether everyday urban experience – and its impact on relations between strangers – can be reduced to local transactions. There is a strong inclination in work in this area to interpret the daily as the rhythm of the spatially proximate, as noted by Valentine (2008). For example, the culture of transactions in schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, streets and squares tends to be traced to the dynamics of human co-presence in these spaces. A concentric logic seems to be at work, with routine engagements in other spaces such as national public opinion, virtual networks or international diasporas seen as somehow 'external', one removed from the immediacies of the spatially proximate. But if the situated is grasped as the locus of many intersecting geographies, a meeting point of relations of varying spatial stretch and intensity (Massey, 2005), then everyday encounter has to be understood as the space in which near and remote intimacies intersect with each other in shaping social practice, including social response to difference. Multiple geographies of association explain the everyday rhythms of encounter in the city.

This paper looks beyond the politics of interpersonal encounter by examining how the

play between humans and non-human elements in daily urban life, and how the urban environment, seen as a site of multiple connections, force reconsideration of the influences on social response to urban diversity and difference. It examines the cultural resonances of the urban infrastructure that gives cities their means of collective service and security, circulation and connectivity, symbolic and affective commonality, and proposes that this infrastructure be regarded as a 'collective unconscious' shaping human reflex and affect in the city. The paper suggests that interventions in the urban unconscious (public spaces, physical infrastructure, public services, technological and built environment, visual and symbolic culture) have an important role to play in regulating social response to difference. In turn, the paper makes the case for an urban politics of living with difference that is both aware of, and works through, the many relational geographies that shape local cultural practice. It sees the challenge less as one of making cosmopolitans out of urban inhabitants, than one of developing institutional awareness of how the world at large shapes local habits of social encounter, leading to policy effort capable of mobilising relational connections beyond the city.

Where/What is the 'urban social'?

The topological city

The contemporary city poses an interesting spatial paradox. With half the world's population living in urban settlements, some of which lie at the heart of shaping world economic, social and environmental change, it might seem fair to argue that the human and the urban condition have become one and the same. At the same time, the morphology of urban 'settlement' has become extraordinarily fluid and amorphous, with the whereabouts of the city no longer self-evident. The city no longer exists as a bounded space guided by its own internal dynamics. Instead, it is a relationally constituted entity, a space in which multiple geographies of composition intersect, bringing distant and dispersed worlds into the centre of urban being. The result is the transformation of the city from

a territorial form with distinctive insides and outsides to a topological form with blurred and shifting spatial contours, as places on the cartographic map become drawn into diverse organisational topologies.

One geographical feature of this topology is spatial radiation, traced, for example, by the extensive physical and virtual communication networks that now traverse cities, situating life in a given place into daily worlds with many geographical forms. Sometimes, this 'radiated' existence involves a loosening of connections between co-located people and sites (Graham, 2002; Sassen, 2002), sometimes simply the addition of new spaces of linkage, sometimes dwelling in virtual environments that are rich ecologies of community and connectivity in their own right (Dodge and Kitchen, 2004; Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, 2002). Another is a geography of global organisation, typified by the transnational corporate networks that bind together producers and consumers in far parts of the world into the same economic space (Dicken, 2003), or the international circuits of migration, tourism, escape and organised crime that structure the lives of an increasing proportion of the world's population, ceaselessly bringing new impulse to urban life, new remote connections, new connotations of power and control (Harris, 2002). A similar process of urban re-composition is occurring as a result of growing attachments formed in global diasporas – ethnic, religious, consumerist, ideological (Pieterse, 2003; Thrift, 2005a), and the rise of transnational social movements, intergovernmental bodies and international organisations pressing hard on urban and national institutions in ways that challenge a politics of communal returns at the local level (Sparke, 2005).

The result is that locations on the map – cities, regions, nations – are becoming sites of intersection between territorial force (e.g. embedded cultural and social ties or institutional arrangements) and relational force, involving complex patterns of spatial stretching and perforation, distant linkage and transterritorial

flow. The re-composition of place is no simple displacement of the local by the global, of place by space, of history by simultaneity and flow, of small scale by big scale, or of the proximate by the remote. Instead, it is a subtle folding together of the distant and the proximate, the virtual and the material, the present and the absent, the passing and the settled, onto a single ontological plan. The implication is that the dynamics of location – the happenings in a place on the map – have to be seen as the jostle between cartographic framings and other geographies of formation, a continual struggle between multiple spatial orders of being and becoming (Olsson, 2007). All cities, from the most cosmopolitan to the most remote places, need to be grasped as a meeting point of rhythms formed in diverse temporal and spatial envelopes, shaped by the dialectics of relational and cartographic power, by being-in-relation in the same geographic space (Massey, 2005). This includes the interpretation of social relations, for in the city diverse groups – from settled and segregated communities to mobile migrants and professionals – press to be understood in their multiple affiliations, relationships of co-presence, response to the many contingencies thrown up by urban complexity and resilience in a field of unevenly poised powers.

Such an urban ontology dispels the assumption that spatial contiguity implies relational proximity and, in so doing, poses the question of living with diversity less as a matter of building local community than of working with the constraints and possibilities related to the urban as a condition of 'thrown-togetherness' (Massey, 2005). This, on the one hand, means accepting that urban strangers are not of necessity tied to each other or inclined to recognise each other, dispersed as they are in the city, familiar with only particular spaces, locked into elective networks of belonging and intimacy, frequently compelled to stave off difference to cope with the multiple assaults of urban modernity (as originally suggested by Simmel, 1971). Clearly, the patterns of familiarity and indifference, local and external orientation or stasis and mobility,

are not uniform, but vary between individuals and social groups. However, even the most sedentary or least well-resourced people now participate in distributed communicative and affective spaces, linked to people and worlds elsewhere by telephone, internet, religion, ideology, consumption, media cultures and more. For them too, the city is the city of parts, divisions, unfamiliarity, connections elsewhere.

On the other hand, there can be no denying that individual cities possess distinctive institutional and public cultures which, through the signals of inclusion and exclusion they send out to different social groups, influence how strangers respond to each other. Typically, the combined actions of urban elites and practitioners affect how different social groups fare and are perceived in a given city, through the specifics of land use allocations, social and cultural policy, economic strategy, housing distribution, uses of public space, access to collective services and symbolic projections in the city. The perception and experience, for example, of a city as multicultural or assimilationist, exclusionary or inclusionary, is strongly shaped by the silent workings of such interventions. In turn, urban morphology itself – a city's density, sprawl, arterial structure, connectivity, built and natural environment, visual horizon and monumental structure – can be considered as a form of collective material resonance, affecting social moods and dispositions, senses of proximity and distance among strangers, intensities of recognition between humans partly defined by their experience of urban space.

My argument is that habits of urban living – including social response to diversity and difference – are largely precognitive, based on daily reflexes of urban negotiation that require little thought and deliberation. This is how the potentially bewildering experience of urban multiplicity and variety is tamed and domesticated, how humans adapt to being among strangers, in crowded or large spaces, with many non-human elements, how they adapt to the surprises of urban complexity, the unknown elsewhere in the city. These reflexes, I

have argued elsewhere (Amin, 2008), are the product of both habituated human practice and the orderings of urban material culture – how the assembly of humans, things, symbols, technologies, matter and nature in particular ways in different urban contexts guides individual and collective behaviour (see below). Urban habits of living with difference may not be reducible to the dynamics of interhuman encounter, if it is the case that feelings among strangers might be shaped by the atmospheres of place – the crowded or empty street, the neighbourhood open or closed to variety, the condition of urban transit systems, the aesthetic of the built environment, the visibility of the unknown city, the sensory feel of a suburb, the regulation of risk in public spaces.

The 'trans-human urban'

The non-human is deeply implicated in urban social practice because of intricate entanglements between humans, infrastructure and technology and the built and natural environment in cities. If, as Latour (2005) has argued, the 'social' must be imagined as the field of all associations, then every constituent element, human and non-human, must be considered to be on the inside. This means seeing social relations traditionally considered as only involving humans, such as ties among friends and family, feelings towards community or nation, dispositions towards migrants and strangers, as indivisibly hybrid and involving also objects, biology, nature, software, symbols and more. The entanglements of humans and non-human elements are increasingly being recognised in social theory, to account for human being, behaviour, sentiment and organisation (Bennett, 2010; Gregson, 2010; Ingold, 2006; Latour and Weibel, 2005; Miller, 2008; Rose, 2007).

Similarly, in urban studies, a new body of work has arisen showing how nature and the built or technological environment are threaded into urban social existence, as both life supports and components of human association (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Castree, 2005; Gandy, 2005; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Heynen, Kaika and

Swyngedouw, 2006; Hinchliffe and Whatmore, 2006; Latham and McCormack, 2004; McFarlane, 2010; Marvin and Medd, 2006; Pile, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2004). For example, new work on urban technologies is revealing how the everyday machinery of urban supply, mobility and regulation – assembled through timetables, software systems, communications infrastructures, data classification tools, architectural design and a multiplicity of objects and machines – ensures urban survival and recovery, selects between social groups and conditions human behaviour. Mathew Gandy (2005) has coined the phrase ‘cyborg urbanization’ to capture this melding of humans in the urban technological infrastructure, and while the phrase may miss the prosaic nature of such human being, it invites reflection on how material culture might be implicated in making and regulating relations between humans.

In our book *Cities*, Nigel Thrift and I have argued that the urban infrastructure made up of a city’s diverse systems of communication, maintenance and repair, order and security, welfare and basic provision, physical organisation and more, can be thought of as a machinic assemblage that not only manages urban complexity but also regulates human practice (Amin and Thrift, 2002). This is an assemblage of objects-in-relation replete with ‘interactional intelligence’ (Thrift, 2005a) built into code, thinking machines, software-led systems and object-mediated human thought, pulsating as an ‘urban unconscious’ (ibid.) at work on, above and below the ground to maintain life in the city. It acts as the ‘hidden hand’ of supply, organisation and control – allocating economic opportunity and reward, channelling circulation and orientation, designating the spaces, activities and people that count (e.g. by selecting zones for investment and groups deemed undeserving) and establishing the rules and tempos of urban participation. Usually working silently in the background, its centrality becomes all too clear during times of severe malfunction (e.g. when a city is brought to a halt by an energy blackout or environmental catastrophe).

The urban unconscious also regulates affects of living with difference. Daily experience of public services and utilities, neighbourhoods, streets and public spaces, transit systems and technologies of surveillance is an experience of judgement of the quality of these aspects of the collective urban infrastructure of commons (Latham and McCormack, 2004). The routines of negotiating the urban infrastructure and the resulting accommodation and frustrations shape collective expectation and individual assessment. Achille Mbembe (2008) has suggested that the urban unconscious, composed of a city’s material infrastructure as well as a city’s ‘aesthetics of surfaces and quantities’ (e.g. the symbolic projections of architecture or advertising or the routines of data gathering and classification), can be thought of as a field of affective excess that is able to ‘hypnotize, overexcite or paralyze the senses’. Working in the background, the urban unconscious nurtures public feelings, such as fantasies of desire projected through advertising or the built aesthetic, senses of security or insecurity aroused by the city’s systems of surveillance technologies, frustrations and irritations kindled by the quality of public service, angers stoked by the hidden discriminations of data-led classification. These accumulations give every city a distinctive affective register, one that, however, plays out differently among its inhabitants, as the rhythms of selection built into the urban unconscious sort out the deserving from the undeserving, the necessary from the superfluous, the promising from the threatening.

It is such sorting that converts general feelings into particular responses towards and between minorities and majorities, citizens and non-citizens, social classes and communities. In the gap between affects of togetherness and those of division regulated by the political economy of the urban unconscious, lie all-important differences in patterns of living with diversity among cities. It is in this space that a local sense of the commons and who has claim upon it is formed, where possibilities for change through the urban unconscious arise. For example, in cities with a functioning and

inclusive urban commons (providing, for example, universal access to welfare, strong minority rights, accessible public spaces and decent public services), sentiments towards immigrants, asylum seekers, dropouts or the unemployed will often hover around public attitudes on the right of claim of these subjects to a commons seen by those doing the judging as 'theirs'. Accordingly measures of the deservingness of these subjects (testing political status, economic and social worth or cultural affinities) become the zone of attention of critics and hopefuls, marking out, in the meantime, the border between inclusion and exclusion in the 'providing' city. The implication is that redress under such a framing of urban belonging requires actions – possibly through the urban unconscious – that challenge the assumption that the right to the commons can be apportioned in this way.

In cities which make no pretence of a shared or functioning urban commons (e.g. segregated cities or those with a rudimentary public infrastructure), the affects stirred by the urban unconscious are quite different. In the segregated city, a prime role of the urban unconscious is to erect impermeable barriers – high walls, tight surveillance systems, myths of cultural incompatibility and rigid hierarchies of social classification – and to naturalise separation as the culture of living with difference. Social and spatial demarcation becomes the rule of urban maintenance, the flashpoint of opposition, the spark to imagining another urban culture. In the 'threadbare' city, where the management of difference through the urban unconscious is weak as a result of regulatory or material failure, public feelings towards difference often gather around the improvisations of access to the basics of life. Here, with formal citizenship rights frequently bringing few privileges, and with low levels of care for the local commons among nationals and immigrants continuously on the move and loyal to people and places elsewhere (Landau, 2010), the negotiations of difference tend to crystallise around infrastructures regulating access to credit, medical care, energy, shelter,

water, safety, sanitation, food, transport and work. Improvisations in the interstices of market and state failure – how, for example, ethnic groups, criminal gangs, moneylenders, vigilantes, moneyed individuals, charities and other gatekeepers of organised scarcity regulate access – play a crucial role in the tug of war between different communities (Roy, 2009; Simone, 2008; Tulchin, 2010).

A rematerialised urban sociology, in summary, opens up new possibilities in understanding how urban patterns of living with diversity are shaped, by bringing into play relational proximities and separations structured around the urban unconscious. It suggests a politics of living with difference, focusing on the urban unconscious and the shared commons, to replace a politics of recognition that lacks solid foundation in the city of affiliations formed in multiple spaces and with many non-human elements (Amin, 2009).

Politics of togetherness

If urban composition today – with its multiple and material orderings – does not favour a politics of human recognition, does it lend itself in other ways to foster positive modes of living with difference? Is there a way of working this through the urban unconscious, so that solidarities arise out of the pragmatics of negotiating a particular kind of material and aesthetic environment, out of affects and solidarities forged through the urban commons? The rest of this paper explores possibilities that make virtue out of the urban condition of 'thrown-togetherness'. Cities no longer come together as self-formed territorial entities, so a politics of togetherness based on appeals to community cohesion, local cultural legacy or shared sense of place seems implausible. However, they do come together as juxtapositions of diversity, sites of relational connectivity and nexuses of overlapping worlds. Things and people with multiple and faraway connections become entangled in cities. Based on the proposition that the resonances and regulation of entanglement in a given location

shape social experience of the city as shared or contested, communal or selective, inclusive or exclusionary, it might be argued that interventions able to fashion a sense of togetherness out of thrown-togetherness have an important role to play in fostering positive ways of living with difference.

What form should a politics of togetherness take, and through what kinds of urban intervention should it operate? It is doubtful that a strategy to privilege particular sites of the urban commons is the best way forward. If anything, acting in this way, for example, by scaling back on urban surveillance, extending citizenship and welfare rights or widening access to public services, could backfire by attracting negative attention to the individual site or shifting practices of aversion elsewhere. There is a history of evidence showing just this (e.g. decisions to scale back surveillance fanning public demand for more discipline, or those extending welfare protections to asylum seekers leading to vigilante attacks). A better strategy would be to set in motion a machinery of inclusion across the urban commons so that a rhythm of inattention to difference, a habit of seeing the strange as familiar and the city as a space for the many, gradually works its way into the social unconscious. Pragmatically, this means acting on the diverse sites of the urban infrastructure around which affects of living with difference gather. The examples grouped below attending to the regulation of multiplicity and a sense of the urban commons are therefore by no means exhaustive, but serve as an indication of possibility; they are more or less appropriate in a given city, depending on its history of affects formed around the urban unconscious.

Multiplicity

Henri Lefebvre (1996) famously defended the right to the city as the right of all inhabitants to shape urban life and to benefit from it. He saw this very much as a participatory right extending beyond the conferral of entitlements of citizenship or residence. In many parts of the world, however, the denial of basic entitlements – for example the right of migrants, minorities

and the urban poor in general to have access to the minima of survival such as food, education, shelter and hygiene – remains a major obstacle to the right to participate. Those without basic entitlements can make no claim on the city, absorbed as they are by the task of surviving against the odds, often classified as unwanted subjects. Until their right of access to the means of life is recognised as a legal or civic right, there can be no possibility of their active participation in urban life. Such extremes of denial give majorities, elites, decision-makers and those who see themselves as deserving reason to assume that the suppression of the wretched and the foreign is entirely legitimate, even necessary in pursuit of civic harmony (Appadurai, 2006). The denial justifies intolerance as the basis of urban cohesion.

A rights-based approach to urban inclusion, however, is far from straightforward, as it raises important questions concerning the terms of recognition, whether entitlements can be delivered, and the balance between the needs of new arrivals and the expectations of settled majorities. Neglecting these questions can intensify social stress and division, along with blunting confidence in a city's systems of public provision as a source of collective well-being. Yet, the denial of rights to those without means and of means to those with rights makes little sense in a world of intense global connectivity and daily changing urban composition. In these circumstances, the assumption that some burghers possess a natural right to the city is increasingly untenable, in need of replacement by other principles of belonging and merit, perhaps the principle that all those who find themselves in the city – from long-term citizens and established elites to newly arrived migrants and the low-income residents – start out from the same position in their right to belong. This would open the possibility of linking rights to urban contribution, which, depending on the means and capabilities of individuals, could take a variety of forms, from fiscal and philanthropic donations to contributions in kind or community service, so that access to rights becomes a way of building social solidarity in the plural city.

But the conferral of rights – however the rights are defined – can only be a first step in forging a sense of equal access to the urban commons. Also crucial is the monitoring of the selections and resonances of the technological unconscious. For example, in the city of clockwork regulation, sophisticated software systems used by firms, public authorities or insurance and security agencies routinely track and influence the standing of different social subjects. Out of such automaticity – embedded in hidden cameras, customer evaluations, police records, postcode discriminations, insurance decisions, undisclosed circulation of personal data – stem evaluations of people as insiders or outsiders, dangerous or safe, worthy or unworthy. In the city of rudimentary technological systems, a different architecture of classification does the same kind of work, perhaps in a less hidden, less automatic fashion, relying on spatial segregation, direct forms of policing and elaborate practices of racial, class and gender tagging.

While one type of technological unconscious discriminates silently and the other more visibly, common to both is a subtle fusing of the ‘interactive intelligence’ that keeps cities maintained and repaired (Graham and Thrift, 2007) and that which organises the city as a social hierarchy. Without the intelligence nested, for example, in software systems that integrate the multiple spatial and temporal rhythms of the city, urban life would simply shut down. Yet the same systems that enable urban circulation, coordination, communication and well-being are implicated in the maintenance of urban social order and discipline through their patterns of human selection. It is precisely this blurring of function in the technological unconscious that naturalises the reproduction of embedded social discriminations and injuries, making their regulation appear as integral to the management of urban complexity, explaining why those sitting in judgement feel unperturbed in calling for more discipline when the subaltern make their presence felt.

No attempt to weave a commons out of the multiple urban environment can afford to ignore the ambiguous roles of the urban technological unconscious. This requires making every effort to ensure that the regime of maintenance and repair sees to the cares and needs of those without voice, power or means, and that the regime of order and discipline protects the gains made along with providing urban security without recourse to gratuitous targeting of strangers and subalterns. Given the entanglements of the two regimes, there can be no easy decoupling of aims. However, a good start would be to place both regimes under close public scrutiny, by exposing, for example, the selection and separation done by ‘values, opinions and rhetoric Ö frozen into code’ (Bowker and Leigh Star, 1999). This is a matter of exposing, ridiculing and neutralising the uses of technology as a weapon of discrimination and discipline, enforcing public audit of the machinery of human categorisation and selection in the city, experimenting with preventative and precautionary forms of order, bringing the machinery of urban order under democratic control. It is also a matter of building public momentum behind a machinery of urban maintenance and repair that minimises insecurity and disruption, that is non-discriminatory, that allows urban life in all its forms to flourish; an infrastructure of public utilities, services, institutions, technologies, spaces and transit systems widely recognised as a commons that keeps the city on the move, acts as a life support and opportunity field, ensures that basic needs are met.

Common ground

It is evident, however, from the many backlashes against the social state in the rights-based society that resentment and condescension hover close to the surface, with majorities often seeing themselves as the purveyors of rights allocated to minorities and subalterns seen to be different, inferiors, supplicants (Brown, 2006; Hage, 1998). For a rights-based culture to veer towards an ethic of human equivalence, it must embed itself in an understanding of the commons (nation, society,

community, the public sphere, urban infrastructure) as a gathering of equals, a meeting ground, a space of mutual or overlapping interests valued in its own right. Such a sense is undoubtedly nourished by practices of daily encounter between strangers, but is also sustained by experience of the commons as a plural and non-discriminatory space. My claim here has been that the many local separations, dispersed geographies of attachment and qualified proximities between strangers that characterise modern urban living make it difficult to build solidarity based on care for the other. But the prospect of a solidarity based on sensing the urban as a public good still remains open, if we are able to build public recognition of common resources and spaces, work on shared concerns and intimacies in the public sphere and cultivate stewardship of the urban commons.

A politics of common ground must feed off affects of togetherness, which in the city of multiple formations, require active cultivation, starting with public affirmation of the value of the plural city, backed by effective action against xenophobia, intolerance, inequality, injustice and erosion of the public sphere. The city that commits to mixed or public housing under pressure to gentrify or segregate, to collective services under pressure to be more selective, to the vulnerable, disadvantaged and threatened under pressure to invest for the economically privileged and the rich, to open and inclusive public spaces under pressure to privatise or control entry, to multiculturalism and hospitality under pressure to eject and discipline the stranger, to a green and diverse urban landscape under pressure to exploit commercial opportunity, shows that it is willing to stand by a particular idea of urban living. It asks inhabitants, visitors and institutions to think of, and act in, the urban environment in a certain way; presenting thrown-togetherness as opportunity for collective well-being and new formative experiences. It warns those who expect the city to serve partial or privileged interests to reconsider or move on.

But declarations alone do not make behaviour, unless they build on habituated experience of the city as a plural and shared space. Sustaining an ethos of urban togetherness requires the continual play between explication and practice, between prosaic and unconscious uses of the urban commons and public articulation of what this adds to personal and collective life. Selecting the individual spaces in which this play may be open to policy intervention is an imprecise art, and perhaps also ill conceived, since what is required is a habit of living through multiple forms of connection into the urban communal; the presence of plural spaces of urban togetherness, their steady accumulation over time, their cross-fertilisation, their availability to bridge the gap when interpersonal negotiations fall short. The challenge here is to build a habit of collective identification formed through the urban unconscious and largely unnoticed, but also resilient because of its distribution across many operative spaces.

Some of these spaces can be named. They include the associations, clubs, meeting places, friendship networks, workplaces and spaces of learning that fill cities, where habits of being with others and in a common space and stances towards the city and the world at large take shape. They include the physical spaces – streets, retail spaces, libraries, parks, buildings – in which being with other humans and non-human elements shapes sensibilities towards the urban commons, unknown strangers and multiplicity and change. They include the city's public services, infrastructure and collective institutions, experience of which forms attitudes and expectations related to the city as a collective resource, provisioning system and source of welfare. They include the city's public sphere – symbolic, cultural, discursive and political – in which inclusive and open accounts of the city's legacies and aspirations, and of subjectivity and belonging, ventilate popular understanding.

Across these spaces, the task for a politics of togetherness is to make the connections and dependencies visible, to reveal the value of a shared and functioning commons, to show how life chances depend upon an urban infrastructure capable of accommodating new demands and new claimants, to argue the necessity of an open, agonistic and active urban public sphere, to show that to damage the commons is to damage the self and future possibility, to build public stewardship of the urban commons. The kinds of intervention necessary to sustain such a politics hold few surprises and include measures to secure a decent public infrastructure, welfare equity, conviviality and 'participative parity' (Fraser, 2005), vibrant public spaces, a democratic public culture, popular stewardship of the city's natural and built environment, safeguards against abuses of power and influence, extensive linkage into the world at large. The real challenge lies in finding ways of maintaining public momentum behind these measures, so that an ethic of care for the urban commons spreads across the social fabric, open to multiplicity and difference.

This is a matter of building public interest in the plural communal with the help of diverse urban technologies, from the compulsions of cinematic representation, public art and the aesthetics of the built environment, to the percolations in popular culture of local stories, institutional practices and political discourse – slowly embedding care for the commons in the social unconscious (with the risk of it numbing social awareness and reflexivity) and making explicit the plural communal and the role that it plays in bridging difference, an object of desire. The everyday reproduction of urban affect, which can allow all manner of injury to pass unnoticed, has to be harnessed to a politics of publicity and rupture capable of mustering public concern over divisive or neglectful uses of the commons (Stewart, 2007).

Conclusion: Beyond the city

In this paper, I have chosen to link the challenge of living with difference to an ethic of care for the urban commons sustained through the city's material culture, contra current policy emphasis on the tenor of relations between strangers. In arguing that urban contact networks are far too materially mediated and far too spatially dispersed to support a politics of recognition, my intention has not been to cast doubt on local attempts to build bridges between divided communities. It only makes sense to learn from conflict resolution techniques honed in fractured cities such as Sarajevo, Beirut or Belfast in order to tackle practices of ingrained fear and prejudice between communities (Bollens, 2007), to gather people from different backgrounds around common ventures to break down social distances (Amin, 2002), to build on mutual acts of kindness between neighbours who realise that they share a common space or common values (Wise, 2005). Instead, my ambivalence stems from the observation that such attempts tap into only some of the everyday influences shaping social habits towards diversity and difference.

These influences, it should have become clear from the urban ontology outlined in this paper, stem from a mixture of local and translocal engagements, suggesting that even a politics centred on the urban commons cannot suffice in tackling the frictions of difference in an open and plural society. Situated behaviour is the product of dwelling in many relational worlds, with intensities of kinship towards others affected profoundly, for example, by representations of diversity and difference in the public sphere. In the spaces of communication sustained by state discourse, media commentary, educational practice and popular culture are traced the contours of nation and community, the meanings of belonging, the duties and rights of the stranger, the stances towards the world, the purities and impurities of community. These spaces not only shape opinion, but are a sphere of intimacy in their

own right in which feelings towards the nation and its outside, the self and the other, are made and unmade (Berlant, 2008). It is here that sentiments of imagined community are formed, along with affects of friendship or aversion towards the other, with the arousals of political broadcasts, news reports, school texts, films, internet chat and cultural forums thoroughly worked into the habits of everyday encounter as a kind of precognitive coding instinct.

The powers of judgement based on intimacies of imagined community have become all too clear since 9/11, as a new public culture of aversion in the West towards the Muslim body works its way deep into everyday habits of negotiating difference (Amin, 2010). Through incessant and emotionally charged commentary in the public sphere linking national identity, security and belonging to particular kinds of bodies, new instincts of daily response to Muslims and strangers in general are being formed. The proximities of multiculturalism that briefly surfaced in the late 20th century, sustained by a public culture sympathetic to diversity, cultural dialogue and openness towards the world, are being swept aside by new sentiments of suspicion, intolerance and retrenchment in the face of unassimilated difference. The strongly felt public compulsion now is to repel, domesticate or discipline the stranger, return blood, soil and cultural legacy into meanings of imagined community, look upon the outside as inferior, destabilising, threatening.

New public feelings reading culture and compatibility from evaluations of the physique of the stranger in the emotional spaces of imagined community are emerging, watchful of anyone failing to pass tradition-laden tests of conformity. As a result, along with Muslims and Muslim lookalikes, other minorities, asylum seekers, immigrants, welfare dependents and dissidents are also being drawn into the firing line, sensed as dangerous subalterns on the basis of charged sensory evaluations. Legitimacy in the public sphere for inflammatory labelling based on superficial bodily judgements is allowing majorities to feel secure in venting all

manner of aversion, passing vicariously from one kind of subject to another when it pleases. Affects of aversion are acquiring central regulatory force (Brown, 2006). While the beliefs of multiculturalism cautioned against vilifying difference (but often fell short of seeing the stranger as equal) and those of universalism made light of it (often at the expense of strongly held values among different communities), the affects of xenophobic labelling have normalised everyday vigilantism. The asylum seeker, dropout, Muslim, immigrant, protester, cosmopolitan are now required to prove their innocence, their ordinariness, their right to belong, their good intentions. The burden of proof now lies in demonstrating the acceptability of difference, requiring the courage and effort to think and act against the grain, the extra work to show that the new aversions are unnecessary and damaging, both to the other and the self.

Without a shift in the primary sentiments formed in 'intimate publics' (Berlant, 2008) the urban proposals outlined in this paper can only find themselves swimming against the tide. To be effective, they have to nest within a public culture that desires the imagined community for its heterogeneity, its multiple affiliations and legacies, its commitment to deep democracy. This is a public culture at ease with both convivial and disjunctive outcomes of everyday multicultural encounter (Chambers, 2001; Gilroy, 2004), community defined as the constellation of the many global connections that make up a society (Sardar, 2009), and the principle that all members of a society, temporary or permanent and settled or recent, have the right to participate in the democratic process (Connolly, 2005). To press for this in a present dominated by a culture of fear and anxiety towards difference may seem counter-intuitive given the strength of the public machinery bent on tracing future risk to particular strangers and alien cultures and promising security through a return to the purer and more closed society. Yet, this is exactly the kind of counter-culture that must be mobilised, building hope in the idea of a future faced together through collective effort and mutual

understanding, demonstrating that there is no pure or idyllic community to return to.

A machinery that makes public the dynamism, creativity and resilience of the open, equal and plural society needs to be put into place piece by piece, gradually unsettling the culture of fear of strangers and minorities that has come to prevail (Connolly, 2005). This involves fomenting new ideas of community (e.g. emphasising sympathy, hospitality or mutuality), publicising the cruelties and absurdities of the vindictive present, closing down on practices of discrimination and prejudice, defending the social state and transnational membership, building intimate publics where the heterogeneous and the foreign merge, pressing for legislative change, linking up the many social movements and political forces that see sense in bridging difference. When the feelings of imagined community start resonating around such a machinery of public being, the city of the commons will be ready to play its full part.

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