Extending Sovereignty in the Light of Black Urbanity

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*Introduction: Times of Becoming and Elusive Realization: The Challenges for Sovereignty*

Theories of sovereignty often presume territory and human control of it. Current (non-)urban conditions, however, posit an urban *yet to arrive* that is also, at the same time, already reaching its limits in terms of geological, atmospheric and human life implications, which in turn, affects the concept and actualization of sovereignty. Under these conditions, sovereignty becomes as strained and constrained, modified and modifying, as the urban *yet to arrive.* Sharing some of the messianic dimensions of the temporal formulations found in Jacques Derrida’s “the democracy to come”, the urban *yet to arrive* also operates with a more sinister teleology, one leading to an ineluctable fatalism of foregone human organizational conclusions. But the manner in which these conclusions emerge leave some options for derailing specific elements of the urban inevitability and its relationship to an ever-unstable sense of sovereignty. These options appear in the (non-)human “horizon” of spatial, temporal and sovereign formations: the horizon as an opening and also a limit, a perpetual state of becoming and an elusive realization. The theoretical designations of (non-)urban humans and (non-)urban sovereignty allow us to address several interlocking conundrums and dimensions pertaining to space, control, subjects and contradictory temporalities, thus opening inquiry into the influence of sovereignty on urban processes and vice versa. In line with a seeming global homogenization of urbanization processes, which apparently converge diverse people and places toward a single vanishing point, there are parallel trajectories where the extensiveness of urbanization mutates “all over the place” in the “strange” intersections of divergent logics. Here the urban is something already vanished in its familiar terms, and specific and supposedly urban places are layered with countervailing networks, scales and forces that make it difficult to determine what or who is sovereign in any particular instance. What we know as urban is already finished even as urbanization processes would seem to be in the process of “finishing off” its residents. Thus several different terminal temporalities converge on various scales to undo the aspirational horizon and delimit possibilities.

From the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of globalization as we came to know it in the second half of the 20th century, state-driven mobility and the triumph of the eternal “now” constituted by tele-technologies integral to Cold War global surveillance merged with business, economics, architecture and spatial practices, making the divisions between military, economic and political domains remarkably fluid (if discernible at all), and thus allowing one to fold into the other as the need arises. The deterritorialization of economic regimes through military technicity thrived during the Cold War and accelerated in the post-Cold War constructions of mobile sovereignty. The demand for global surveillance that characterized the Cold War and the Truman Doctrine--which stated that any action anywhere in the world could be considered as having direct impact on US interests and thus legitimated any and all actions on behalf of the nation-state–revealed the extent to which sovereignty no longer demanded attachment to territory and was extendable to other spatial regimes; that it had become in some manner of application as well as within the political imaginary “frictionless.”

Indeed, sovereignty and its attention or priorities could be shifted as interests dictated: present when desired, absent when not; mobile, strategic, selective. Mobile sovereignty during the Cold War/post-colonial moment, however, merely reiterated and updated the mobile sovereignty of colonialism, which maintained sovereignty over non-contiguous lands. Fungible frontiers constitute mobile, frictionless sovereignty, gliding over barriers intended to constrain it and keep one form at the border’s edge of another. This deterritorialization of economic, state and military apparatuses, therefore, has significantly altered understandings of built and “un-built” urban space and has done so by combining the vertical order of discipline and accumulation with the horizontal structures of dispersed control to arrive at forms of sovereignty still reliant upon violence (now including the violence of information and calculation as power and leverage) as the prerogative of the state but with extensions of this prerogative to spaces and territories not necessarily under that state’s explicit jurisdiction.

These conditions that supposedly make mobile sovereignty frictionless, materially realizable and immaterially imaginable, form an immediate context for an urban *yet to arrive* that manifests these sovereign dreams. At the same time, the urban also prevents, often without volition or intentionality, the realization of mobile sovereignty’s desires while presenting consistently new forms of resistance. The drives toward frictionless sovereignty have resulted in the implementation of tele-technologies, most especially multiple polyscalar autonomous remote sensing systems, that strike at the heart of formations of political subjectivity at individual and collective scales. The urban *yet to arrive* emerges in and through the never-ending extensivity of urban forms and operations made possible by the same financial, technological and noetic desires and apparatuses underpinning frictionless sovereignty. Each necessitates and realizes the other: inextricably intertwined and mutually dependent and influential. These rhythms and temporalities of consolidation and dispersal, intensive and extensive open up spaces of indetermination in their “back and forth” recalibrations.

*Accounting for Black Time*

For centuries predating the 19th century “Age of Civilization” colonialism, black bodies served as vehicles for extensive sovereignty both within the global slave trade and within national territorial control. The US deployed these bodies for economic gain while also furthering nation-state independence by distancing itself governmentally from European countries that had begun to implement and further abolitionist causes. The UK emancipated enslaved bodies in the Caribbean and Canada, as well as the UK itself, to articulate its own sovereign reach. In the current moment of frictionless sovereignty and its attendant strategic yet increased “borderizing” of the globe, black bodies as borders (pace Mbembe, 2018) especially in the Global South, serve as urban, economic, governmental and corporeal sites of limited mobility and geopolitical power. If polyscalar sensing systems can and do service surveillance capitalism and thus the phantasm of frictionless sovereignty, especially as the most advanced manifestations of planetary calculation and computation, then the bodies that are most surveilled, detained, deported and calculated for control within these systems also constitute sites of intractable friction and potential subversion of an accelerated geopolitical status quo. As the redistribution of bodies and resources within these global systems shore up specific sovereign claims, those targeted for enclosure, containment and the performance of power incarnate become ensnared by biometric borders that have discounted them as global citizens, much less as cogent agents. In so doing, the discounted become, ironically, the most counted of all because they do not count and thus must be accounted for at borders and other sites of imposed friction. Within regimes of frictionless sovereignty, the fusion of these multi-scaled tele-technological systems of calculation, measurement and control of environmental conditions and population surveillance with the mobile border that is the black body constitutes two sides of a contradictory geopolitical coin for sovereign claims and the enactment of them. On the one side, the Cold War technological inheritance of frictionless information gathering, calculation, surveillance and remote control; on the other, the embodied surplus of said inheritance and results, as always in inflated claims of absolute command and control, in unintended consequences–both negative and positive–for all cases.

An additional entry point to think about these conundrums around sovereignty centers on the purported sovereignty of urbanization as now an all-encompassing force. One of the most productive strands in contemporary urban research has been the focus on *extended* urbanization, which is but an element of the urban *yet to arrive*. Here, urbanization not only becomes more extensive as an ongoing, increasingly dominant process of spatial production and realignment, with a coherent set of constitutive dynamics, but also *extends* itself into a wider multiplicity of situations and histories (Brenner 2014). The extension of urbanization mirrors in logics, logistics, infrastructural capacity and general desires those operative in and through frictionless sovereignty. Both offer a particular working-out of dilemmas, tipping points, and conjunctures faced by settlements, and this working-out entails various equations of subsumption, adaptation, erasure, remaking, conciliation, and improvisation. Urbanization, as with frictionless sovereignty, is then something that not only spreads out as a function of its own internal operations, but is something contributed to through an intensely differentiated process of encounter, enabling it to change gears and operate through a wider range of appearances and instantiations (McGee and Greenberg 2002, Monte-Mór 2014, Keil 2018, Schmid 2018).

Notions of *extending* thus simultaneously complement and problematize our understandings of the workings of sovereignty. Far from a withdrawal from the volatilities of the world, sovereignty was to be a structured medium of *touching—*the ways in which political entities were to touch upon each other, through the mechanisms of bordering, of securing an internal coherence within borders. But this tethering to the tug and pull of communal organization formed through the structuring and ideological affordances of sovereignty become attenuated and ameliorated when converted to the apparent selectiveness of frictionless sovereignty as all strategically deterritorialized claims to sovereign control past also experienced.

Extensivity is far from being simply virtuous or destructive. It is a process that continually repositions what exists in a particular place, at times dissipating the sense of boundedness that permitted particular forms of self-recognition and, at other times, hardening boundaries as a defensive, immunological maneuver against the disturbances ushered in by virtue of being situated in a larger world of relevant connectivity (Esposito 2004). The sufficiency of any place, territory relies upon a metabolic functioning—i.e. inputs, flows, and regulations of materials and the generation of infrastructures of coordination and interoperability (Swilling et al 2013, Demaria and Schindler 2016). As these are situated within a larger “surrounds” to which they are variously articulated, the compositions and character of connectivity play a decisive role in terms of how a place maintains itself as a specific entity, a particular moment of “throwntogetherness” (Massey 2005).

The “surrounds” of urban space in the contemporary moment must now be extended to the sensing systems of planetary computation and control constitutive of the horizons for contemporary geopolitical and economic formulations, ones predicated on sustained and maintained inequities. Katherine McKittrick discusses the surrounds as the contexts that perpetuated plantation organization, geographies and life. As such the racial and spatial economy of the plantation contains within it, as extrapolated from theoretical frames expounded by Caribbean economist George Beckford, the outlines of contemporary urbanism, especially in, but by no means limited to, the Global South (McKittrick 8). She argues that the extended concept of the plantation serves as “the shadow” for her “tracing of the geographic workings of dispossession, which intends to contextualize the plantation as a location that might also open up a discussion of black life within the context of contemporary global cities and futures” (5). “The plantation” as site of self-contained economy, politics, law, built environment and surveillance “spatializes early conceptions of urban life within a racial economy,” (8) one that necessitated visual regimes of observation, tracking and control (as also explored by Achille Mbembe and Nick Mirzoeff among others). The routinized violence of the plantation that haunts contemporary urban formations and built environments demands visual regimes of oversight and episcopal control, like that offered by satellites and other massive complex systems of surveillance and futural prediction. Thus the surrounds, that which is non-urban, nonetheless falls under the watchful and gathering sovereign gaze when it suits the urban for it to do so and becomes no longer watched over but merely overlooked when not. The selective perception of and engagement with the surrounds necessary for sustaining urban existence and control of its extended space perfectly illustrates an important tenet of frictionless sovereignty: maximum benefit with minimum responsibility. The concomitant risk is that, particularly in contemporary modalities of calculation, maximum benefits from specific and limited inputs will often deliver unanticipated results. Such is evident in all the ways in which urban populations are released from or “let go” of specific forms of anchorage to circulate across increasingly disjointed urban landscapes, consolidating basins of attraction here and there without aspirations for long term institutional emplacement.

*Satellites of Time: Activating Urban Relations*

The etymology of satellite, from the Latin *satellit-,* relates to an attendant, the member of a bodyguard. There is an episcopal or overseeing function operative in the term, a protector but one that is (supposedly) under one’s own control not vice versa. The role of these systems in the operations of frictionless sovereignty becomes an essential element of the surrounds that further constitute contemporary urban space and populations in ways foreshadowed by plantation organization and existence. The “plantation futures” we experience in the present results in part through these teletechnological systems of Cold War origin and deployment turned to global divisions of economic distributions. McKittrick writes that “the city is the commercial expression of the plantation and its marginalized masses,” with the plantation as “a persistent but ugly blueprint of our contemporary spatial troubles” (2013:12)–a blueprint reinscribed and intensified by large-scale teletechnological systems of calculation and remote control articulate the desires of mobile, frictionless sovereignty such that the urban of the black body happens “elsewhere” and not in the site from whence control ensues and to where benefits of said control accrue. But as with the plantation and slave uprisings, the belief in total control then and now is ill-founded and haunted by the specter of failure and fatality. Planetary computation understands this well although its narrative of self-justification rarely indicates it.

Implicit in the relevance of sovereignty as a concept are considerations regarding for whom a particular set of circumstances matter, and to what degree? How far do particular events and outcomes exert a particular impact? How does the substantialization of such events and outcomes take place, from where do they draw force and efficacy? These are fundamental questions informing the particular manners in which urbanization becomes something more extensive as a form of extending, of offering particular mechanisms of problem-solving and anchorage, in addition to problem-creation and disconnection.

For the degrees of urbanization are not a matter of how particular instances of the urban conform or deviate from some kind of overarching normative functioning, but rather how the urban “shows up” in any specific instance of observation; that it is a mobile conceptualization, perhaps even a grammar of operationalization potentially present in any place (Halbert and Attuyer 2014). The conceptual challenge then is not to decide upon whether something is urban or not, but rather to dynamically account for its oscillating appearances over time and what forms it might take with various regimes of sovereign claims. The conceptual urban operates fully in prescriptive mode while the lived urban is intractably in need of the descriptive. In other words, any place is articulated to something that exceeds its normative frames of recognition—its boundedness, categorization, or sense of internal coherence. Even the most seemingly cut off places derive their relative isolation or detachment through an engineered history of relations that act to maintain that detachment (Scheer, 2016, Keil 2018). Thus what might be considered “rural” is partly a byproduct of densities elsewhere as well as their strategic relationships with, dependencies upon and support of those densities; a hinterland perhaps on the surface marginal to the operations of big city machines but nevertheless possible because of them. Ineluctably though the rural is wholly and fully constructed through the urban, not least in the sense that structuralism, for example, would cast the relationship. And the rural supports, maintains and supplies the urban. The divide is one of symbiotic relationality.

Relations are always materialized, even with invisible computational systems. They are not simply abstract mediating frameworks, but concrete objects. Relations are concretized, not as the interaction of definitive substances or forms of life. Rather, they are concretized via the specific media in which they take place, the destination of the transmitted information, the name in which any messaging is enunciated, and the content of that which is transmitted and its particular procedural codification (Hui 2015). In other words, the very process of *extending--*the very acts of touching, engaging, intersecting, inserting, and resonating—is the materialization of the relation, the articulation of one place, one operation, one functioning to another at the heart of urbanization processes.

Extending is not simply a matter of urbanization overspilling its familiar forms or reaching out into various hinterlands. Extending also entails the expansion of the value form, of the experience of residing and operating in urban contexts. It entails the extension of time from unilateral trajectories of past, present, and future, into temporal experiences that thoroughly entangle these designations into a complex weaving of cycles, ruptures, continuities, and inversions (Stavrides 2010, Bunnell and Goh 2012, Moreno 2018). Thus urbanization does not accumulate or posit a clear historical line. Whereas various administrative instruments, territory-making, and governance frameworks may attempt to impose developmental histories to urban space, their fluctuations and frequent revisions are always attempting to grasp the intersection of different “time lines” that bring various materials and populations within their ambit.

When too many variables are potentially relevant to the success or failure of an urban policy or intervention, and when computing speed and capacity simply generate additional uncertainty over what constitutes a fortuitous disposition, uncertainty, itself, becomes valorized as a critical urban resource (Cooper and Konings 2015). With this, then, is an instigation of a temporality set loose from calculation, something that encompasses and exceeds speculation. Such temporality not only operates within the rubrics of the financialization of risk as a means of hedging a multiplicity of probable futures for how a specific infrastructure will operate and the value it will have. This instigation also aims to posit infrastructure as *detached from reason,* within a scenario that cannot be fully calculated now, and which imbues it with an adaptability to futures where no matter what happens there is possibility of recouping something which itself cannot be specified.

Real estate development increasingly functions on the basis of a materialized hedge that positions any particular investment as an instrument to have something to “say” about what *eventually* might happen. The objective is to be in a position to shape *eventualities* without clear foresight or available empirical evidence as what the content of those eventualities might be. It is a process that renders past history largely irrelevant to the capacity to act within a future present. The prospect of utility or profitability in the present is devalued in favor of simply the affirmation of a fact on the ground, the decisiveness of a maneuver that is perceived as providing the opportunity to tend to and shape that which is coming—something not specifiable in terms of the present.

For if, as Luciana Parisi (2013) points out, programmatic calculation is not simply the executions of instructions but a machine ecology thoroughly infected with randomness, then digital infrastructures potentiate unapprehendable scenarios not easily subsumed to the dictates of technocapitalism yet almost always adaptable to them. As soon as actualities come together, as soon as supposedly discrete events and objects feel each other out, are placed in some kind of relationship with each other, are assessed in terms of their impact on each other or their respective genealogies of appearance, no matter how prescriptive or limiting their interactions might be, they always suggest a potential of what might have taken place, of non-denumerable dispositions. The compositions of gatherings, the particular ways they unfold, who can do what with whom, when, and how, are critical then for how a worldly sensibility embodied within larger deployments of environmental and other planetary sensing is rendered for a specifically human endurance and of making the world appear to us in ways that open up multiple spaces for its reshaping (Hansen 2015).

This notion of worldly sensibility can be contrasted to the standardization of time, supposedly an accomplishment of the urban. Much has been written about the homogeneous character of time in a globalized world where every space appears accessible to scrutiny, where trading floors somewhere are always open, and where spatial products seem to adopt similar forms and modes of operation (Augé 2009). There is the well-worn image of the businessperson constantly in motion whose life plays out in a series of cities where airports, hotels, restaurants, conference centers, upscale residential communities and leisure zones all look the same. Simply from the look of things, she would never know where she is located on any given occasion.

The disjointed circadian rhythms of the incessant traveler are the primary means through which she then recognizes the difference among her locations, if not evened out by the affective flatlines of pharmaceutical interventions. Within a universe of non-stop transactions, differentiations between night and day, work and play, friendship and commerce are frequently blurred, as are the objectives of social interchange. While instrumentality may prevail as the predominant *modus operandi* of action, it is often not clear to what purpose such instrumentality is deployed. Certainly, self-aggrandizement may be the aim of the instrumental, but the self to be aggrandized becomes an increasingly elusive and vague entity, partially reflected in the incapacity of persons to be alone, to be detached from the media of connectivity. We find, then, an urban resident that is always “activated”, always in need of new experiences and relationships.

*Cities and the Interweaving of Times*

On the other hand, the nearly decimated publicity of urban life gives rise to cities that are intensely divided and segregated. The “public city”—with its commitment to an equitable distribution of affordances, even when acknowledged as a near impossible goal—sought to imbue urban existence with a common orientation, a shared knowledge among different walks of life where each person participated in a relationship that superseded those differences, anchored them in a way of interacting that made each relevant and resourceful for the other (Ghertner 2014). In principle, this was the precept of postcolonial national sovereignty. Now, throughout most of the urban world, residents come to view themselves as residing in divergent zones that have little to do with each other even when structurally it is possible to chart out the multiple and complex interdependencies. Even as the rationales of urban administration fluctuate between establishing more spatially encompassing territories of coordination or decentralizing competencies and municipal power, the coherence of the city as a felt object, a locus of shared existence across a demarcated territory has largely dissipated. Commonality is increasingly dependent upon the trappings of large symbolic maneuvers, e.g. mega-events, sports teams, or nationalistic invocations.

Institutions of any kind find it increasingly difficult to suture together the different spaces and times of urban residents. In some cities shared religious identification might produce a strong sense of commonality, witness the mega-churches in Lagos or Singapore, even as they intensely compete with each other. Or, more typically generate thousands of small units. Micro-territories become sites of intense competition over loyalties and trading opportunities. The wealthy and middle class retreat to highly secured zones set apart from the unruly fabric of the “old city” as the poor find limited security in their own highly defended zones often impervious to any official policing. Ironically, the sustenance of a semblance of what we might recognize as community life is increasingly the byproduct of a situation where particular territories are “hemmed” in by insalubrious environmental conditions, poor transport infrastructure, or where they become the accidental pockets of continuity in a surrounds that has undergone substantial spatial transformation (Roberts 2017).

As more residents are pushed out or voluntarily locate themselves at the physical peripheries of cities, time is increasingly measured in terms of commuting and traffic. In Mexico City and Jakarta, four hours is the average daily commute time. For families, accomplishments of care, of maintaining a sense of household cohesion are measured in terms of small affective attainments (Lee 2015), e.g., the ability of a mother to return home in time to say bedtime prayers with her children. In many poor neighborhoods of Delhi, male breadwinners only are at home on weekends because available work is so far away, leaving not only domestic management to women but the maintenance of the district itself—work that is not recognized by the men, who when they return on the weekend tend to act as if they remain the ones in charge. There is simply not sufficient time to curate the once intensely textured social fabric that intertwined diverse lives with each other. So when it is claimed that “cities are running out of time”, the invocation not only refers to the exigencies of dealing with the urban footprint on climate change, but an exhaustion of time as a resource to develop a narrative of associativity and relationality, the cultivation of a sense of common belonging, mutual attentiveness and protection, which was to be offered by the cultivation of sovereign polities. These sovereign profferings, like the community they presume and invoke within negation, remain *yet to arrive.*

While the ever-mutating axioms of capital appear capable of continuous refiguring functional operational territories that articulate space and time in ways generative of value and thus livelihood, their translation into the local vernaculars of how things are done are not frictionless. Faced with the problematic disjunctions precipitated in the confrontation with capital, vernacular ways of doing things must find ways to individuate themselves within these axioms. If this is the case, the generalizability and singularity of urban formations can be narrated but not without causing a particular spatio-temporal collapse. For, the resultant relations are not just those of integration, subsumption, or fragmentation. Something else happens through a complex mirroring process, a series of parallax recursions and gazes that suffuse ambiguity into the differentiating inscription—i.e., is it local or global, here or there, them or us? It becomes difficult to determine *what time it is.* Is it the continuity of some “same old story”, the incessant reproduction of the endlessly “new”, or the non-contradictory simultaneity of contradiction itself? While we can be sure that relations both compose and are composed—depending on the scale of observation and the starting point of a specific narration (e.g. Luhmann 2013)—we can never be certain about which of these dimensions we are observing at any given moment.

Here, the matter of time becomes critical, especially the extensiveness of urban temporalities. If capital has colonized space and bodies, and the particularities of their operations and forms, it has also colonized time, not by subsuming it into a standardized format, but through enabling multiple temporalities to co-exist as instantiations of flexible rhythms and continuous adjustment. Here the time of capital innovation, the bazaar, the just-in-time logistical operation, the rhythms of religious obligations, and the empty time of endless waiting–for work, social status, services–all persist in seeming disconnection. Yet these are “times” that are available to each other, not according to templates or experiences in which they are recognized, but as extensions of each other. The bazaar, for example, has become, in many instances, not only the financial machine of a working class or a petit bourgeoisie, but a means of “working” out blockages or insufficiencies in otherwise intensely neoliberal forms of entrepreneurship.

Just as notions of the urban are being extended across multiple spatial and temporal formations, so too the modes of divergent inhabitation no longer are contained by or cohered within the once predominant form of the human as “*anthropos*”. Cities are no longer the embodiment of urbanization. To think “the city as urban” perhaps was the correlate to thinking inhabitation as human. The difficulty of thinking the urban beyond the apparent coherence of the urban is perhaps part and parcel of the same conundrum of trying to think the inhabitants of the city as exclusively or primarily human (Colebrook 2015; Wagner 2011).

The city existed as the locus through which certain of its inhabitants could reflect on their being as a singular prerogative untranslatable across other modalities of existence. It was the place that formed a “we” unrelated to anything but itself. Yet this “we” was inscribed as the node whose interests and aspirations were to be concretized through the expropriation and enclosure of critical metabolic relations (Cohen 2012, 2016). The city’s formation of the “human” also required the occlusion of a wide range of human activity before it became labor, activity that could not be easily translated or reduced to laboring bodies.

Here, the figure of the black body looms large as something that cannot be settled even as it clears the way for settlement. Here, the unsettled, dismembered, taken apart body, not immediately convertible into the figure of sheer labor, elaborates an almost phantasmagorical space of intersections—part human, part vegetative, monstrous, demonic, exotic, liminal, libidinal. Here is the interweaving of the body with bush, dirt, swamp, rain and cacophonies and rhythms. This is a space beyond inhabitation, but yet one that can be lived-with (Spillers 1987, 2003; King 2016).

This is a geography that is displaced from any certain utterance or exposition. It is a geography constituted from the lapses in a surveilling and punitive gaze that cannot maintain its sovereignty if it looks too long or too longingly. It is constituted by the illusions of self-assurance of domination’s efficacy, where the masters think that there is no need to look upon what is essentially nothing anyway. The job of subjugation is already done.

The conversion of blackness into forced labor *and* a monstrous form of human exceptionality in the long march of “moderns” to a bell jar existence in rarified enclosures of sense and domesticity has kept cities alive. In contrast to the white urban body with its sense of individual responsibility and free will, black bodies were to intertwine themselves into thick fabrics of complementarity and affordances, of dust becoming flesh and flesh neon; with everything packed into a density of contact, of the discrepant rubbing up against each other in multiple frictions, sparks that ignite chain reactions. Without these webs of many crammed causations looking out for any possible vehicle of release, there would have been no city. Blackness was not simply then a vehicle to space things out, to engender order, but also to connote the chaos of intermingling, the loss of boundaries and the dissipations of propriety. The black body was an urban body; forced to extend itself into various manifestations to preclude exhaustive extractions. It is a body renewed beyond the form of the contract, beyond discernible modalities of social reproduction. It is the “real inhabitant” of peripheries extending themselves across the world.

The “publicity” of the “public city” held out the possibility of equivalent access to the ability to make life in the city, but according measures of proportionality that could make urban citizens comparable. A “black city” refuses such measures and possibilities; they are forever postponed, something that will never be there as we might understand it, yet always present as an invention taking place—“out there” but yet immediately present as a promise whose fulfillment is “besides” the point of wherever residents might be located. The black body functions as *parousia* of the ever-extensive urban within frictionless sovereignty: a corporeal insertion resulting in temporal dislocation and disruption of the moment–friction in the operations of frictionless sovereignty.

*A Promising Dispossession: Sensing the Time of the “might be”*

The blackness of urban life is also found in the inexplicable instances of what might be seen as a form of rogue care. In the aftermaths of incessant eviction and evisceration of the attempts of black people to abide by the terms of normative urban existence, of being situated in the most toxic and uncertain environmental conditions, blackness also connotes an intertwining with ruined landscapes, of making abodes, gardens, ceremonies, and infrastructures of support and communication that operate under the radar, that are less visual artefacts than structures of feeling or forms of “remote sensing”. This is not to underestimate the casualities or precarity of livelihoods. It is not to turn attention away from the substantial accomplishments of alternative urbanisms that can be historically recorded—i.e the Black Metropolis of Chicago, the vital Afrofuturist urban landscapes of pre-World War II Detroit, and the black power movements of the 1960s and 1970s that generated a wide range of new local institutions (Hunter and Robinson 2016). Rather, it is to indicate that within the aftermaths of containment or erasure of these more visible accomplishments, that unincorporable remainders do exist.

At the same time, “addressing” the mobilities of black bodies, the very mechanics of extending themselves across space become the “venues” for the policing operations that are the concretizations of nostalgias for sovereignty. Whereas the objective of domesticating inhabitation—of situating urban residents in particular formats of everyday living, with their concomitant visibilities, responsibilities and attainments, may still prevail, acts of governing are no longer primarily predicated on the success or failure of these efforts. Rather, as Diren Valayden (2016) points out, a “society of targeting” emerges based on the tracking, monitoring and targeting of mobilities. This interception can take many forms, ranging from everyday harassment that forces a person to avoid certain areas at certain times, targeted assassinations of “suspected” terrorists, the use of urban designs such as anti-homelessness spikes and narrow benches (backed by laws against panhandling), the sudden demolition of “illegal structures” and temporary homes, use of private security guards, and extensive border patrols. It is designed simply to make particular kinds of movement and inhabitation impossible, and to *shift* problematic populations and practices elsewhere–the peripatetic solution to undesirable dwelling. But these strange geographies also suggest that targeting has its limits and cannot always penetrate the dissimilitude that these geographies engender, unless it reverts to random firing all over the place.

This dispossession of clarity may increasingly be a prerequisite for the deployment of collective effort that lives in conditions of what *might be taking place—*something that exceeds the available vernaculars of verification or affirmation—which is experienced as not all that far from *what is taking place*. The practical organization of everyday life—the melding of different personal dispositions and ways of doing things—does require a sense of internal consolidation and coherence that is composed and communicated. Yet, the capacity of residents to get by, cooperate, and sometimes act in concert requires them to live as if they were always, at the same time, living somewhere else. So, the interface between the concrete empirical status of their identifiable location, their modes and practices of dwelling *and* the ways their lives cut across territories and recognitions of all kinds—the *what might be taking place—*presents a particular conundrum. If there are facets of the urban then that extend themselves to a wide range of uses under the radar, the question is how to engage them, maximize their resourcefulness but at the same time being cognizant of the importance of their opacity, of not rendering them visible in ways that increase their vulnerability. Sovereignty lingers here as a kind of promise, an eventual means that the subjugated can emerge to truly govern their own emancipatory forms of subjecthood: yet another horizon yet to arrive.

Certain practices of an urban majority may be useful to think strategically about this conundrum. Residents of cities across the South have been recipients of many promises—for better livelihoods, democracy, and wellbeing. But they also avoided becoming preoccupied with whatever was promised. Through their own steady, incremental efforts to continuously work on their conditions, to turn them into resources, and to recalibrate relations of all kinds in face of the volatilities of the larger city, promises became something else besides lures, manipulations, or meaningless inheritances of citizenship. Rather, promises were induced as the by-products of the districts’ own efforts to prompt municipal governments to “show their cards”, to divulge their weaknesses in the face of the capacity of these districts to attain a certain self-sufficiency. This self-sufficiency was manifested in the capacity of these districts to ensure large levels of variation in ways of doing things while not devolving into incessant conflict and to attain a sense of progress without being overwhelmed by specific measures or fears of failure. Promises were important, then, less for what they offered than for their presence as a particular modality of disclosure, as something that kept matters open for deliberation rather than as the specification of a destination to which residents were committed.

This is evident in a practice that many residents in Rio de Janeiro refer to as “*ficou na promessa*”(“staying with the promise”). This is anorientation tothe future both staked out in clear terms of sufficiency and sustenance and an ability to not experience failure if those terms never were actualized. It was also a willingness to experience their realization in unfamiliar forms. Residents may have continuously pushed their particular agendas and aspirations, but were willing to be indifferent to them as well. For, endurance was an atmosphere of abiding, of a willingness to “stand-by” various trajectories of possible futures. Stand-by entailed both the sense of waiting to see how things unfolded and a commitment to see through various initiatives to improve livelihoods and environment. It is a willingness to operate “in reserve”, prepared to make something out of dispositions seemingly out of their control. So here, histories of strategic indifference, of detachment to aspirations being embodied by specific forms, address the conundrum of vulnerable opacities indicated before. Rather than investment in particular forms that singularly embody specific attainments or aspirations, it is more important to think about the capacity of actors to recognize possibilities in the most seemingly banal or obscure landscapes, over which dreams of sovereignty would never really be imagined.

These conditions are then antecedents for the urban human and for the prospects of a life that exceeds both the capacity of the urban to individuate life, to enhance its productivity, and to consider how human life itself might be remade to insulate it from the adverse conditions that urbanization itself largely generated. That which is to come, that which is to be invented either as new beginning or end, that which constrains any invention, and that which can be considered left out, removed from full participation in human life—all intersect in ways that upend clear distinctions between the inside and out, the urban and non-urban.

In any remaking of an urban human, it is important to reiterate the relationship of the urban human to calculation. The shift from the ideal of “universal computation” as a means of complex problem-solving as articulated in the 1960s by corporations such as IBM to the realities of planetary computation and algorithmic governance in the 21st century has resulted in new, emergent and as yet unarticulated geopolitical formations that have shifted the status of the political subject in relation to distributed and increasingly protean forms of sovereignty (Bishop 2018, Bratton 2016).

Instead of individuals belonging within nested scales of territories, from household to nations, formations of political subjects now can be deliberated across all kinds of “imaginary communities”—where individuals are viewed, ranked and compared according to categories of interest, consumption, behavioral tendencies, religious affiliation which cut across the conventional territories of belonging. Just as with cities, individuals can be targeted for all kinds of reasons, given what they have done in the past, their online activity, their consumption patterns, or circuits of travel. In these emergent, vague and often unformed situations in which the political subject finds its (collective and individuated) self constituted and taken apart, the foundational political concepts of the self in relation to others are being transformed in the very act of becoming a subject. And it occurs through a particular slice of the manifold planetary computational systems in which subjection occurs: polyscalar autonomous remote sensing systems. These systems are used for both utopian and totalitarian goals, but inevitably yield mixed and contradictory results (Bishop 2018). With the emergence of these polyscalar autonomous remote sensing systems, positions of agency no longer operate as the exclusive rights of humans or the political traditions of humans. Persons, as individuals, aggregates, traffic patterns or even “herds”, are tracked and targeted in relationship to movements of all kinds, whether it be weather, goods, cellphone conversations, and credit purchases, to name a few. Nonetheless positions of political agency and subjects still operate largely within imaginaries determined by long-term human traditions, while simultaneously being extended and multiplied through the multi-scaled non-human agential systems.

If the inhabitation of an *extending* urban life points to an emergent form of subjectivity for which there is yet a coherent language, it is still subject to being drawn into the normative vernaculars of urban life and control, particularly in terms of attempting to pre-empt, contain or limit the potentially wayward horizons of urbanization itself. As the reassertion of populist imaginaries, nationalistic revanchism and religious passions demonstrate, the assertion of sovereign selves becomes more erratic and errant, but nonetheless captivating of attention even as their very material conditions are being rearranged (Mazzarella 2019).

So, the old technics of sovereignty and political subjectivity have invariably and irrevocably shifted, but nonetheless they, too, make up an obdurate *refrain,* that which rules and holds sovereignty: monarch, state or algorithm. Mbembe (2017) asks, what forms of detachment from such technics are possible through different ways of speaking, writing, and sensing? What is in the very materiality of speaking, writing and sensing that offers different forms for the enactment of human life? The challenge is how to detach from a loop where narrowly drawn political and religious sentiment as a desire for old fashion sovereignty and definitive belonging are valorized as resistance to the calculation of every facet of life and the commodification of feeling. It means detaching from diffuse notions of interdependency and mutual responsibility as a way out of resurgent populisms.

What can be taken from the protocols and technologies of calculation and remote sensing that would highlight the sensorial capacities associated with the materialities of forests, deserts, and seas and that could stitch together alliances among urban residents across territories-- beyond self contained diasporas, or religious belongings. Instead of counting on urbanization to eventually standardize and equilibrate a consensually determined model of the “good human”, why not embrace urbanization’s capacities to take the human apart in the assemblage of new bodies of sense and feeling? Important work has been done here in queer and feminist studies (Barad 2011, Frost 2014, Chen 2012, Luciano and Chen 2011, Giraud 2019).

Urban life has perhaps always held out the promise of new bodies that could be made, even if the modalities of such production heretofore have relied upon the unmaking of others. But paying attention to what the unmade did and without a specific horizon of restitution is important in an abolitionist method of urban rescaling where inoperable relations might recompose what it means to be both urban and human—where each extends the other beyond the exhausted vernaculars of self-fulfillment.

*Coda*

“Extended urbanization” can be found in the hyperactive hinterlands of many megacities, where residents and operators increasingly talk about their inability to construct a coherent narrative about where things are going and *yet to arrive*. Too many on the surface seemingly contradictory trajectories of development, too many alternations between types of economies and built environments, too many strange contiguities of ways of life in order to tell a clear story, to put things in a coherent frame. And so at the household, kinship and associational level, people "spread out", distribute their investments, time, and attention in order to cover the different possible angles: attenuation in all areas as a means of differently scaled futures investing. But also at level of the sensorium, people talk about the need to pay attention to a diffuse background.

What this seems to do is combine a *willingness*to suspend the judgment that what you see is what things are, an *acknowledgement* that beyond the immediacy of a person’s context there is a field of vision that can be grasped*and* composed in excess of what is presented, and a *belief* that this willingness to see in a different way, a way that does not tie everything together into a coherent image, will enable the person to better navigate the ins and outs of everyday urban life. It is the horizon of possibilities and impediments. So it is a willingness to *extend*oneself into things, into a kind of non-sovereign position of sensing. And this is the correlate to the "lesson from blackness" about extending into and across the earth.

Extended urbanization, as a concept, is coextensive with extended sovereignty (or distributed sovereignty) of the state, as well as the subject. It can also be found in the remote sensing systems—as can the extended and frictionless sovereignty of the state. It therefore fuels a kind of extended sovereignty of the subject, at least in the imaginary. However, reinscriptions of the sovereign subject should be apprehended with scepticism, no matter how apparently desirable, liberatory or revolutionary. Even when that subjectivity is under assault in the kinds of complexly contradictory urban settings just delineated, recourse to the sovereign self/subject reinforces old stories of will, agency and control that are mere phantasms as the lack of coherent narratives indicate. The extension of self (urbanism and sovereignty) leads to lessons from blackness because it is an extension that is not predicated on a whole self in control of itself and its environment–as in transitive grammatical constructions--but a contingent, malleable way of being in the world.

This has some important lessons for thinking sovereignty as often constituted and assumed from specific Western perspectives, ones opposed to values held up by Western nation-states and their subjects/citizens often presented asymmetrical power relations as *a priori*. A non-sovereign position of sensing simultaneously embraces elements of the large-scale sensing systems while eschewing others. The role of a controlling self/entity that allows for extension of, or merely extends, subjecthood is in fact a connection back to the sovereign subject, but one that is changed through the process.

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