POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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The Urban Turn

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Content

Separation, Mobility and the Ordinary City:
On Migrants' Subjection and Subjectivity

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The paper centers on what was categorized as a paradigmatic city, an archetype; colonial and postcolonial notions of cityness; and the postcolonial city that was an exemplary to cities that were removed from the administrative centers of state and capitalist power, in other words, the ordinary city. It offers a critique of the existent paradigms of urbanism and what was perceived as constituting 'cityness' in the postcolonial context be it Latin American or the Indian context. Sinha contended that the 'paradigmatic city' was a myth, an artificial construct, a fabrication, or at the most a 'fleeting reality'. It served as a flawed model for deconstructing post-colonial cities. Its creation and continuance were the consequences of a connivance of social theory, comprising radical social theory and its postcolonial variations. The paradigmatic city was entrenched in 'separations', 'segregations', 'flows' and mobilities', which were consciously preserved by urban planning and was not an epitome of the attributes of universalism and modernity as advocated by social theory. On the contrary it encompassed aspects of exclusion and violence. The radical variations of social theory perceived the city as a 'generalized condition of sociality', a platform to insert a series of radical transformations suggesting that in its absence there would be "no civil society, no intellectuals and masses, no public spaces or spheres, no working class, no mass political party, no revolution". In reality, the paper contends that cities have always been sites of segregation or separation either by way of erected walls, gates and armed fortifications, in terms of racial and class segregations and even more pronounced in the form of settlements and in colonies. It was only since the 1960s with its pronounced racial eruptions that the fascination with the paradigmatic city began to wane.

The other focal point of the paper is the concept of ordinariness or the 'ordinary' city connoting 'the new outsides of old cities, and of other, and more remote centre of inhabitation'. The characteristic features of ordinariness (following Sanyal and Bhattacharya) being the dominance of the information sector, self-employment, partial integration of the informal sector with national and global capital though predominantly non-capital, inadequate international financing and banking facilities, a lack of basic utilities and the preponderance of adhocism or "jugaad", the informality perhaps accruing out of exclusion or adverse incorporation. Beset by contradictions, marked by natural calamities, violence and incessant civil war are prevalent both inside and outside the paradigmatic city wherein securitization is institutionalized. Separation in the ordinary city is discernible by way of 'lifestyle choices' and 'aesthetic demands'. It is marked by an absence of the politics of the street and quiet encroachment as well as the aspect of anonymity that is manifestly missing. It is distinguished by the virtual nonexistence of civil and political society. The ordinary city

is characterized by inequality of power and the concentration of power is in the hands of a strongman rather than the state. However ordinary cities can be transnational as well as translocal and the concepts of separation and restrictions within these cities demand consideration. The ordinary city is projected as the future of the postcolonial metropolis, the result of the migrations of the decades of 1990s and 2000s, the upshot of private accumulation and advance of capitalism, a situation ripe for the contestations and protests by the new entrants and the subalterns.

The paper concludes with the observation that the perfect/paradigmatic city, worthy of emulation is a misnomer. The fact of the matter is that in contemporary circumstances where mass migrations and the war on terror are the norm, the concept of a universal citizen is incongruous and it is the paradigmatic city that becomes a post-colonial one and not the other way round. Similarly the ordinary city will never really graduate into a post-colonial metropolis but it is the latter that will be converted into a larger version of the ordinary city. The starting point for any construction should be the ordinary city with an emphasis on commonism and heterogeneity.

Separations

By 2030, corporate projections inform us, 30-35 percent of India's population, and 70 percent of its employment, will be located in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, which together, at the moment, account for 65 cities in total. Is there urbanism outside of this list of 65 cities, what we might call 'cityness', and if so, what analytics do we have, and do we need, to understand their social and, crucially, their political possibilities at this time of tumult and chaos that attends every dream of accelerated development? The paper suggests that our understanding of Indian cities and their politics needs to stand on its head. We have been handed a sort of trickle-down theory of Indian cityness, even in the postcolonial variants of those theories. While attending to the issue of postcolonial difference and urbanity, the narratives of incompleteness and prematurity imply something that is indeed mature and complete in relation to which our cities are marked by a series of 'lacks'. We are told that Indian cities like Kolkata did not make the tradition to 'proper urban modernity', or that Indian cities are premature metropolises, from which we have made a transition, to the post-metropolis, without becoming the metropolis proper. These cities are out of time, and before time, because they became cities prior to the industrial revolution that is supposed to have begot the metropolis. But, it is pointed out, that pre-bourgeois modes of sociality persist in factories and slums.

These comments believe in unexplored and unelaborated conceptions of 'proper urban modernity' and the bourgeois city, implying a city based on ideas of a universal individual separated from that which makes them specific. To this we must ask, not if Indian cities are becoming properly modern and bourgeois, but if the paradigmatic city itself was 'properly modern' or 'bourgeois', and if, indeed, we can think of the modern bourgeois city without its exclusions and brutalities. The paper contends that these comparisons are inappropriate foundations for an understanding of the contemporary postcolonial city, partly because the paradigmatic city is more accurately seen as a fiction, or as a very fleeting reality bracketed by the dreams of the city on the one side and the shattering of that dream into shards of apocalyptic realities on the other. The paradigmatic city is a fiction, and social theory, including radical social theory and its postcolonial variants have been complicit in creating and maintaining this fiction. This is a debilitating fiction if we have to develop an analytics of ordinariness, the conditions of existence prevailing in those cities outside the 65 Tier 1 and 2 cities which are listed as the sites of contemporary capitalism in the Indian context.

Why is the paradigmatic city a fiction, and in what ways is social theory complicit in the perpetuation of this fiction? Note that there is a paradox in the history of cities, or, more accurately, in the historiography of the city as a social-spatial-cultural form. On the one hand, in the very history of civility, or the birth of the polity, of solidarity, there is a presumption that the city already exists. If one becomes more than one, by coming across those not like oneself, and an experience of unhomeliness that forces one to confront those not oneself, and to negotiate a relation, a modus vivendi, with a difference. This ideal, of the city in which one makes common cause with strangers, in one variation or another, lies at the base of much social theory.

The city is the gateway to 'the universal', or at least a way out of the particular, where the force of circumstance leaves no choice but to become one with others. This can be seen in the Kantian, liberal and traditional talk of civil society, in Ferdinand Tonnies' account of the passage from community to society, in Karl Marx's account of the emergence of the working class and indeed of 'revolution', in the Habermasian tradition of the public sphere, in the modernisation theory's account of the inevitable transition from rural to urban society, or in the more recent Italian writings, not only by Michael Hardt and Antonia Negri but more importantly in the writings of Paulo Virno on the multitude, and now, in the writings on the common, even the mobile commons, in the post-austerity city of postcolonial Europe.

In all these scenarios, the city, perhaps following in some oblique way from Plato's analogy of the cave, is a refuge from the storm (in this case we can use the storm as a metaphor for continuing primitive accumulation and the unfinished wars to settle the question of sovereign power), a place of an ultimate denouement, a place for the forging of new and liberating refuge, and of crafting collective projects of new futures. In the radical variants of such social theory, the city is the generalised condition of sociality on which to graft the programs of radical transformation: No city, no civil society, no intellectuals and masses, no public spaces or spheres, no working class, no mass political party, no revolution. But the rise of the paradigmatic city, the city so valorised by the social theory that accompanied and chronicled its rise, was not innocent. It was based on a series of separations and of flows and mobilities. We know that the great metropolises of Europe, and then the great centres of manufacturing that were points of concentration and maturity of capitalism, as well as the sectors of London or Manchester or Liverpool that came to house the offices of the factories and the banks along with the great trading companies were surrounded by squalor. This was the humanity made surplus by capital: the excluded, as Kalyan Sanyal has called them, were thus not just a feature of the postcolonial city of the contemporary times, but a constitutive presence of the paradigmatic city, whose authorities expended considerable force to maintain separations between the zones of capitalist modernity and the areas of housing its detritus, the bodies that it either could not absorb, or had absorbed, digested and excreted. No bourgeois citizen went there except for a taste of the illicit, or to perform acts of charity, or to spread the word of god. Or, indeed, to restore order. Segregation was the order of the day. One should recall that despite its pretension to universalism, civil society originated in this paradigmatic, segregated city, and also that it acquired its veneer of respectability, its properly bourgeois character, by adopting a pedagogical role with respect to the excluded detritus of capitalist modernity, the improvements of whose lives became its chief objectives, and the spread of bourgeois values to these zones of exclusion became its chief means of achieving this.

But this was not all: after all, the lowness of the low people, the new migrants forced into the city by primitive accumulation and war, too had to be acknowledged, and tamed. And this is when spectacles are put in place: the public executions and the drawing and quartering using ingenious methods and newly invented machines so evocatively described by Peter Linebaugh in *The London*

Hanged (2003). If some public squares became Habermasian zones of contact between members of the bourgeoisie, some others became scenes of public punishment too. One keeps in mind these practices whose object was to pacify the potential criminals and rebels inhabiting the zones of exclusion in the paradigmatic city, so reminiscent of the current methods used by the 'Islamic State' for similar purposes. Similarly, one needs to keep in mind the many examples of the commons, open to the use of many but not all the residents of the city, to compensate for that from which they were separated by the enclosures.

How were the separations maintained in these paradigmatic cities? Urban planning, as the Colombian writer Arturo Escobar suggest, was aimed both to pacify and to contain the always present below the surface fury of those made surplus in the countryside, but whose arrival as the universal individual in the city was permanently deferred. But as Michael Faber's great novel, *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) chronicles the relations between the zones inhabited by the detritus of capitalist modernity from those inhabited by its beneficiaries that were constantly breached, not so much by rebellion as the necessary traffic between the two, one that became ordinary with the arrival of mass public transport.

The point that requires reiteration is that the paradigmatic city is the stage for social theory's celebration of modernity, and the dream of universalism that is explicitly or implicitly made by social theory. But with few exceptions, and we know too well who they are, the practices of separation that made the city in the first place, both the separations of people from their means of sustaining life, that is, the original but still continuing moment of primitive accumulation and the separations of lives in the city from each other remained external to the writing on the city. It was only by externalising these separations that the transcendence and liberation associated with the city could be sustained. In the end, the dreams of revolution starting in the city and spreading in the countryside did not come to fruition. Fordism that followed the age of empire had great success in pacifying the exclusion of the paradigmatic city via reformism and social democracy. That too, came to an end in the upheavals of capital, and in the social rebellions that followed it in the metropolitan 1968.

Before the postcolonial city was the colonial city: it is that long moment that makes it 'natural' to compare the postcolonial city with the metropolitan city, to await the arrival of 'proper bourgeois urbanism', the failure to achieve it, and the consequent disappointments. The colonial centres in the age of empire came to embody a different cityness. There were part-replicas in the colonies: parts that were 'European' in form and name, which were separated from those parts that were not. Casbah and French quarter: Gillo Pontecorvo's Battle of Algiers. Separations here were more brutally enforced, as the excluded were more alien, more mysterious, less penetrated by the organs of capital, surveillance and service.

But colonial extraction also needed points in the hinterland, outside the replica cities of empire: as points in the opium trade, as locations for locomotive factories, as in-situ offices for mining companies, as railway hubs or change junctions, and for colonial administration beyond the presidency cities. The paradigmatic cities of Europe must have appeared as remote but familiar to inhabitants of the colonial replica cities, as perhaps the colonial replica cities must have to those inhabiting these strange hybrid formations that were part village, part city, part depot or logistical hub, part outposts closer to the sites of colonial extraction, far from the 'head offices' or 'regional' or 'zonal' offices, the state agencies involved in and coordinating these essential activities of the colonial relation. That distance between the site of the administration of primitive accumulation and its actualisation is the distance between the colonial/ postcolonial metropolis. Ordinary city is not, as has been suggested, places that did not experience or did not aspire to be Europe: it was in one

location in which the colonial modern was more able to take on the bourgeois form, while on the other, it retained its brutal and exploitative character.

Today, these settlements close to the sites of primitive accumulation, or separating producers from the means of production, bear odd traces of that earlier moment: long forgotten and now distortedly pronounced locations such as, for example, Bekar Bandh in Dhanbad, or once grand colonial structures now occupied for example by cattle or their owners, mired in disputes of provenance and inheritance that mark them as de facto unproprietered. There is no grandeur in this decrepitude, just decrepitude encroached and transformed into something far less alluring than nostalgia. Between the sites of primary, primitive accumulation and that of its administration were lines of flight, of capital, of labour and later of as much of the haute bourgeoisie that colonial and postcolonial political economy was able to produce.

These fantasies of the city as a site of liberation assume it to be an 'open' space, and to have an open culture. But we know that this is not true. A city, more than anything else, is marked by separations. And it is not only in the ancient or the medieval variants that the city's separation is marked by walls and gates and armed fortifications. But the history of cities is also a history of separations personified as the city of walls, both in its ancient and medieval versions, and in its more contemporary avatars – whether it was Housmann's Paris or Buenos Aires with its cordons sanitaire, or the racial separations marking white rule in the African colonies, or the class separations maintained by the police in Victorian England, or, in our own contexts, the civil lines. The paradox of the city as a site of universalist imaginaries is that it is also a site of enforced and continuous separations. We will revisit this question of separations in the city towards the end when we return to the issue of which city, when becomes amenable to life in common, and the ordinary moment in the lives of cities, as well as lives in ordinary cities, that make such a life in common at best a fleeting, ephemeral experience, nothing as transcendent as commonism.

Nowhere outside of 'the west' did the paradigmatic city hold sway over the popular imagination as it did Latin America, and those disappointed with the non-arrival of proper, bourgeois, modern cities in India would do well to briefly consider this history. Latin America is the most urbanised of all of the third world. More importantly, high percentages of population reside in very few cities, until recently, accounting for close to or over half of the national population, which began to change in the 1980s, with the collapse of Latin American developmentalism. The veneer of welfare assumed by Manuel Castells in his writings on the Latin American city was ripped by austerity. The city was a refuge from the civil wars. The city became a stage for those civil wars.

The brutal segregations of the paradigmatic cities were compounded in the colony. And again let me draw on the Latin American examples to set up my point, as it was in these post colonies that the myth of the paradigmatic city was most firmly entrenched outside Europe. Despite indeed perhaps due to the greatest creolisation and mestizaje-ization of the ruling elite in these ex-colonies, the spatial separation was more complete. The ruling classes were committed to Enlightenment universalism: one can recall the slogan of the Brazilian flag, Ordem O Progresso in this context. The origins of the favelas of Brazil and the barrios of the rest of Latin America all trace back their origins to the refusal of the colonial and postcolonial ruling classes to share space with descendants of slaves and the rise of settlements to service these ruling classes around them. Port cities, great centres of transport and industry reflecting Latin America's place in the empire of capital, all had large migrations both internally from the hinterlands, and also the detritus from Europe.

So much so that within a hundred years of decolonisation Latin America became in large parts Italian and German, much as also black and indigenous. Populism and authoritarian developmentalism both of which had social welfarist components fused together to produce the

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authoritarian populism of the classic Latin American variety. Buenos Aires was the most advanced and complete replica of Paris, more Paris than Paris itself some would say, but as Arturo Almando shows, this was not restricted to this context. Dictatorship, a commitment to a version of Enlightenment, availability of open space, allowed Latin American cities to experiment with urban planning in ways not possible in Europe.

It was the imperial cities of Europe and their replica cities in the colonies that were written in, and assumed to be, the stages for the politics of civility, universalism and transcendence. But the logic of replication went beyond, or deeper and further, than the paradigmatic city and its postcolonial off springs. Postcolonial replicas of the Fordist city included the factory towns, the steel towns that emerged as part of the dream of nation-building and of self sufficiency.

We often forget in talking of primitive accumulation how deeply the public sector firms were invested and implicated in primitive accumulation, via contract work with a range of other firms, many of which were private. And here we find other separations and settlements: not only coal and ore came to, say Jamshedpur, not only workers from the rest of India though primarily from the environs, but also indigenous populations dispossessed of the lands that were mined. These, as the magisterial work of Dilip Simeon on Jamshedpur shows, had other separations: separated from the main mass of industrial workers. It was here that ethnicity and caste were used deliberately as labour-disciplining mechanisms, where, to the extent possible, the separations operating in society at large were replicated within the organisation of the labour process itself.

It is only since the 1960s that social theory's enchantment with the paradigmatic city began to falter. Race proved to be an insurmountable obstacle in the Fordist cities of America. Race riots upended and exposed the myth of the city as a place of liberation. The logic of the mobilities of capital and of people in the service of capital unraveled. The paradigmatic city dissolved before the promises made on the model of the paradigmatic city could come to fruition. A cynicism crept in about the city. Edward Soja pushed the nail in the coffin of the modernist theory of the city with his eulogy of Los Angeles, a centreless seamless space of flows.

Ordinariness

The paper will now move from the city that was paradigmatic to colonial and postcolonial imaginings of proper cityness, and indeed to the postcolonial city that was paradigmatic to cities further from the administrative centres of state and capitalist power, to the deeper points of the application of that power. It is here that we can look for the 'ordinary cities' which will house 40-odd percent of India's population by 2035. Ordinariness is both, in my conception, a feature of the new outsides of old cities, and of other, more remote centre of inhabitation. For examples of the first, we can fruitfully work with Kalyan Sanyal and Rajesh Bhattacharya's notion of the 'new sites of labour', where, responding to Global circuits of production and circulation, we have concentrations of the information sector. Here, self-employment dominates, which is different from wage employment, a peasant form in industrial work, rather than the other way around? So in ordinary cities this is another feature?

Part of this informal sector is integrated with domestic and global capital, but a large part of it is non-capital. One could add to the list of lacks and presences that constitute ordinariness. They include: little or no international finance, banks, insurance, etc; little or no ATM; large power cuts ruling out certain forms of industry and industrial work; large informality in supply of utilities; Jugad: Katiyabaaz; informal sector as constituted by 'exclusion' or by 'adverse incorporation'. Redundant labour force is not only formed as Sanyal describes it, as the detritus of expansion of modern

capitalism but also increasingly of natural calamity and weather extremes. There is widespread violence and civil war which are now the generalised conditions of the post colony. There will be no lasting peace of a Kantian variety, as postcolonial forms of rule, having shed their once liberal-socialist ideal and increasingly barricaded behind a discourse and institutional apparatus of securitization, itself now conducts a near-continuous civil war both inside and outside the paradigmatic city.

If we take Sanyal and Bhattacharya's 3 tiers of labour schema: direct wage work in capitalist production; informal economy as a part of the global commodity chain and those activities that are part of the outside of capitalist relations. The ordinary city typically posses 2 and 3 and there is use of 'man power' to maintain order in 2 and 3. David Picherit in his work on *maistris* (a low caste group) in Andhra Pradesh observes that there is a hierarchy of middlemen in informal work. There is interplay of trust and force between the middlemen, recruiter and worker. Here, it is not the abstract universal citizen working as a worker, but a particular worker, who depends a lot on his or her particularity.

Here, we see not the Street politics and quiet encroachments by the poor, as in Asef Bayat's account, but by the propertied on nominally public lands and properties. Quiet encroachment is not really possible in the ordinary city as there is not enough anonymity. Powers circulates but it does so unevenly. In the ordinary city, there is greater concentration not so much in the state, as in some figures: bahubali, or strongman, a euphemism for a figure equally involved in politics, in criminality for the purposes of unaccountable domination and predatory accumulation (sand mafia, stone mafia, etc.) Their power makes possible the functioning (or not) of those who represent other institutional matrices, with which they are often enmeshed.

The developmentalist welfarism that is signaled by these writings too are missing from the ordinary city. Not only civil society proper, but also political society as described, which was part of the postcolonial modern in places like Kolkata, are missing. Ordinary cities too can be transnational, and have a history of translocality and transnationality: tourism, migration, old communities, etc. We must consider restrictions and separation in the city. What has happened to these ordinary cities: in the period after the emergency they no longer were the strongholds of the Congress or the Left, as they once were. They are bastions of caste and regional parties. This has also solidified caste as an organisational/ mobilisational category. It is in the ordinary city that the boundary between the rural and the urban is the most permeable and tenuous.

The ordinary city is the future of the postcolonial metropolis: not so much because of the migrations of the 1970s and 1980s, as much as those of the 1990s and 2000s. The compression of Indian capitalism, and its leapfrogging, both depend on classical and new forms of primitive accumulation, creating the compulsions for large scale migration to the cities. That is when we hear about the ungovernability of the metropolis. That is when the power of the bourgeoisie became contested by the new arrivals. That is when the movements by the new subalterns in the cities: for example domestic workers occur.

The promise of a better life in the city, of a good life, of civility, the dream of the bourgeois city, is just that: a promise deferred into the future, an impossible dream. Alain Badiou says that the fact that dream is impossible should not deter us from dreaming it because it is in the pursuit of the impossible that politics happens, which takes us to a place different from, and better than, what we have now.

The perfect city, the bourgeois city to which we compare ourselves and fall short, to which we aspire but produce imperfect and now crumbling replicas, is a city that will heal the wounds opened by primitive accumulation, and the civil wars that capitalism and the quest for sovereignty

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have unleashed. But primitive accumulation is not a trauma from which we have recovered, partly because it is an ongoing trauma, a constant finger in the wound. And sovereignty, much as we try to shore it up with the increasing securitizaton and militarization of everyday life is, and is likely to remain, an unsettled question.

A politics that takes as its foundational assumption the paradigmatic city is a politics that ignores the fundamental fact of our times: the ordinary city will not become like the postcolonial metropolis, even though, as Partho Chatterjee says, that metropolis is a city out of time, a pre-mature city. Nor will the post-colonial metropolis come to approximate the 'mother cities' of empire of which it was a replica. Rather, the reverse is likely to happen: in the age of austerity, the paradigmatic city is unable to provide the items of collective consumption as welfare or as entitlement, nor is it likely to be based on the assumption of the universal citizen: mass migrations, the wars on terror into these cities have transformed them into versions of the postcolonial cities. Likewise, it is unlikely that the ordinary city will begin to resemble the post-colonial metropolis; rather, the postcolonial metropolis will become a larger version of the ordinary city, as the new sites of labour, and new flows of capital and labour bring primitive accumulation right to the doorstep of the bourgeoise. No pedagogical relationship implied by civil society in the model of the paradigmatic city will suffice as a politics of pacification. Fluidity and instability, rather than settled citizenship, is the material for imagining new impossible dreams.

Hardt and Negri, in attempting to renew the left by moving its goals from communism to 'commonism', declare that "the city is the source of the common and the receptacle into which it flows". If we take this as a way forward, as versions of the new left seem to have done in the West, then we need to ask another, prior set of questions. How do we move from a conception of the paradigmatic city assuming the successful transition to capitalism, and therefore to private property, to one in which the commons not only escape primitive accumulation, but become the locus for the organisation of a new political subject? Heterogeneity and a non-teleological account of cityness should be our starting points. Ordinariness, not the paradigmatic city, is the given terrain on which to build new impossible dreams of the future.

The Generic City: Meta-political Remarks on the Future of the City at the Time of Absolute Capitalism

Livio Boni [*]

Plasticities

The Derridian or post-Derridian philosopher Catherine Malabou proposed a triple reading of the notion of "plasticity". This term can indeed signify both the capacity *to give* a form (as in "plastic arts"), and to *take* a form (as in the case of what is called "neuronal plasticity"), but also the possibility to *annihilate* any form, as in the French word "*plastiquage*", or in the case of plastic explosive invented by Alfred Nobel[1].

The author would like to transpose this tripartition of the meaning of plasticity to the heuristic understanding of the evolution of the city.

Obviously, to make a city, there must be a minimal stable form, sometimes identified with a historical or monumental core, which is supposed to remain unchanged over time. At the same time, a city changes all the time because, as Charles Baudelaire wrote, "the form of a city changes more quickly, alas! than the human heart." However, besides these two opposite modalities by which plasticity operates - a plain and closed form as opposed to a changing and open one - there is a *third* modality, which is particularly significant in the development of the contemporary city transformation by way of destruction. This happens through the sudden abolition of all established forms and the erasure of the social and economic organization of space prompted by Capital's occupation of the city as a crucial site of accumulation.

This process corresponds to what David Harvey has described as "accumulation by dispossession", or to what Mike Davies called "urbanization without industrialization"[2].

The author learned a lot on the topic while participating in the workshop on the New Town of Rajarhat during the 2011 summer, in Kolkata, which led to the publication of the book *Beyond Kolkata* [3].

The Aesthetic Overproduction of the City

What the author would like to try here is to dare some *metapolitical* considerations - he will explain later what he means by that - on the notion of urban plasticity in the threefold meaning he was talking about, bearing in mind that it is actually under the dominance of the "third type" of plasticity, the "explosive" one, that we have to consider the evolution of the urban matter. In order to do this, he will briefly analyze some of the categories proposed by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas,

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founder of OMA (Office of Metropolitan Architecture), one of the world's largest project firms, and, more importantly, one of the few contemporary architects who still feels the need to *theorize* the future of the city, through his well-known Manifestos, such as *Bigness, Junkspace* or *The Generic City*, written at the end of last century. These texts have attracted the attention of several contemporary thinkers, such as Fredric Jameson, Antonio Negri, Giorgio Agamben, Peter Sloterdijk and Bruno Latour[4], even if sometimes they seem to take Koolhaas' postmodernist provocations too literally. The author will try to follow their steps through one question: is there a form, or a pattern of forms, which regulates the evolution of the city at the time of "absolute capitalism" (quoting Balibar)? Can we understand the contemporary economy of the urban space in a way that is able to include its imaginary and fantastical production, without reducing it to a simple dystopia, and without falling back into nostalgia for an "enough-good" city which, in all probability, never existed? These are some of the questions that the author will try to ask here, in the form of a hypothetical proposition about the aesthetical production, or overproduction, of the city.

The Urban is out of Joints (The Big Displacement)

To introduce Koolhaas' vision of the future of the city, the paper will mostly refer to his pamphlet *The Generic City*, published in 1995, and included in his monumental *S,M,L,XL* - a 1346 pages book of one and a half kilo! - where he presents different figures of the Generic city, including Shenzen, Shanghai and Singapore, but also Lagos.

Notwithstanding his interest for the Nigerian capital, the Asian city, and the city-state of Singapore in particular, has a prominent place in Koolhaas' cartography, as it emerges as a prototype of the "*tabula rasa* city", i.e., a city that can permanently reinvent itself, from top to bottom, without any concern for its own background identity. This does not mean that Singapore, and the Generic city more generally speaking, is not concerned with the question of identity. It is actually, according to Koolhaas, "obsessed" by this question, but in a mode that has nothing to do with, say, European cities' obsession with their historical roots. While the European city, with a few exceptions, is still strongly attached to its historical heritage, or to the difference between its centre and its periphery, the Asian city, and particularly East Asian cities, have little concern for their historical identity. For example in Singapore, a big part of Chinatown, which dates back to the colonial era, was demolished between the late 1960s and the 1970s, and rebuilt in the 90s, during the island-state's Asian revival. Following a similar logic of endless plastic surgery, in recent years Singapore completely reinvented its tropical identity by planning beaches all over its coastal area, and by vegetalizing the town, after the massive urbanization that followed its independence from Great Britain. "The Eden" – says ironically Koolhaas - "does not precede development. It follows it ("*Après les pavés la plage*!")"[5].

Such is the model of the "Potemkin villages", these folk villages in Crimea which, according to a legend, were built by the Prince Potemkin to cheer up the visit of Empress Catherine II (in the eighteenth century). Identity becomes a fiction that can be changed according to circumstances.
If we accept this very first definition of the Generic city as a city without a stable identity and with no centre, it is quite clear that such a model does not originate in Europe and not even in North America. European cities are still struggling with the question of their historical identity, with some relevant exceptions such as London or Barcelona that, according to Koolhaas, are mourning their identity (London is becoming "ever more London" as it renounces its historical permanence) or have transformed it into a pure logo, like Barcelona. At the same time, the North American city also refuses, in some way, to become "generic", as shown by the case of Manhattan, the heart of New York, which is more and more disconnected from the rest of the town[6].

Western cities are certainly subjected to generic effects: Atlanta, Houston, Vancouver, and Perth are frequently mentioned by Koolhaas as examples of characterless, almost interchangeable, liveable but faceless cities. However, for the first time, according to Koolhaas, the future of the city cannot be observed in the West anymore, but rather in Asia, in the so-called Global South and under tropical climates.

This displacement of the future of the city from North to South, and from West to East is a crucial point for Koolhaas. If the urban generic is a trend, rather than a model, one must recognize the maximum intensity of such a trend outside the Western world's geographical perimeter.

In short, the Generic city does not correspond to Braudel's notion of the World-city, which is often a capital city, or, in any case, a town with a strong political identity, like Amsterdam, Venice, Isphaan or Calcutta, in a given time), nor to the "Global city", as it has been described by Saskia Sassen in terms of "organizational commodity"[7]. Braudel's research about the competition between World-cities and Nation-States in the development of capitalism, as well as Sassen's work on the Global city, played a major role in challenging the ideological representation of an atopic and disembodied globalization. By showing how the city continues to be a major player in the reconfiguration of Capital in the post-Fordist era, Sassen has provided an essential contribution, as well as David Harvey, to the analysis of the forms of spatialization induced by neo-liberal capitalism, or by "absolute capitalism" (according to Balibar's formula that the author prefers to employ here).

Does Koolhaas' Generic city also contribute to a topology of urban capitalism, or does it reactivate an *atopic* imaginary of globalization? This is the author's starting question.

In his opinion, Koolhaas could be included in this constellation of (Marxist) authors who, since Henri Lefebvre and Braudel, until Saskia Sassen and David Harvey, provided a theoretical framework to think the capitalist logic of the production of spaces, focusing on the function of the city. Of course, the author is not claiming here that Koolhas is a Marxist or even a post-Marxist (as a matter of fact, he can be hardly classified in any given political or philosophical current, except perhaps in the generic "postmodernist" frame). However, the author would like to argue that Koolhaas has contributed, in his own way, to a conceptualization of the *spatial translations* of Capital. Here are two or three examples of this translation, by the identification of some matrices of the Generic city[8]:

Three Fundamental Organs of the Generic City

The first one is the airport. In the fourth paragraph of his Manifesto, the airport is presented by Koolhaas as the real *Gestalt* of the Generic city. This is not just because the airport has replaced the railway station as the main urban collective equipment in transport or logistics. The airport is "emblematic" of the Generic city because of its paradoxical mixing of functional neutrality (all the airports around the world are very similar, and everywhere we find the same standardized goods and tax-free commodities) and imaginary supplementation (in the airport's shops we find folklore objects that cannot be found anywhere else, not even in the city whose airport is the gateway). According to Koolhaas, this mix between ultimate standardization and folklorization turns the airport into an "iconic" place, or, as he puts it: "a concentrate between the hyper-local and the hyper-global".

There is more. The "airport-Gestalt" is a closed space, an encapsulated zone, almost autonomous even from the city to which it is connected. It is a bubble with an artificial climate (air conditioning), much the same way as the Generic city.
But, beyond the metaphor, the airport also operates as a matrix for urban planimetry. The author quotes Koolhaas (*Generic City*, § 4.3):

The date / age of the Generic City can be reconstructed from a close reading of its airport geometry. Hexagonal plan (in unique cases penta- or heptagonal): sixties. Orthogonal plan and section: seventies. City Collage: eighties. A single curved section, endlessly extruded on a linear plan: probably the nineties[9].

The second fundamental *organ* of accumulation of the Generic city is the shopping centre. Not in the sense of the American mall, which still occupies a separate space in the urban landscape, but in the sense of the big complexes built in Singapore after the independence, at the end of the sixties, like the People's Park Complex, a megastructure composed of a tower of 25 floors posed on a socle of six floors, which includes offices, shops, restaurants and cafés, an huge parking area, and so on[10]. This shopping complex, which replaces a traditional bazar in the Chinatown's neighbourhood, is inspired by the Japanese "Metabolism", the first Asian avant-guard in the history of architecture. It works as an organ for the condensation and the intensification of different urban activities that are traditionally kept distinct. The "generic" shopping centre is not anymore a separate space conceived for serial consumers, like the mall, but a machine supposed to catalyze *all* urban activities (housing, labour, eating, meetings, shopping, entertainment, culture, logistics, and so on). Moreover, this kind of urban complex is often connected to other similar complexes, so that they constitute an "urban corridor", much the same way as the Paris arcades of the late 19th century did on a smaller scale. For Walter Benjamin, the arcade is the forerunner of the departmental store (or, *Grand Magasin*) it is the first half-closed, half-open urban space where the phantasmagoria of commodities becomes hegemonic in modernity. Since the epoch of Benjamin, and up until the time of Koolhaas, shopping has become a "total social fact" (Mauss), hegemonizing all social activities. To eat, to meet, to lounge, to look, to show, etc. - all these activities are actually dependent on the master-activity of shopping[11]. Thanks to the absolute centrality of the shopping centre, the Generic city looks like a technological caravanserai.

Lastly, the master-piece of the shopping centre, the essential feature organizing its fractal interior, is the escalator. The escalator plays a similar role than the one played, in the 19th century, by the "shop window" and by the "mirror", two elements that, according to Benjamin, transformed the city, and especially the arcade, into a scopic field: the triumph of commodity's fetishism. This is not Koolhaas' perspective, as he rather prefers to compare the escalator to the elevator, the mechanical invention which made possible to conceive the skyscraper. However his logic is quite close to Benjamin's line of reasoning, because he considers that the escalator does not have just a mere practical function, since it leads to *a praxis*, the fundamental praxis of shopping, by facilitating the displacements and, at the same time, providing the highest degree of exhibition of both, the commodities and the shoppers. In some way, there would be no shopping centre, as a total apparatus, without the escalator (so the escalator, as the shop window and the mirror, produces an imaginary)[12].

Other fundamental elements of the Generic city include the street that almost disappears in the Generic city (one could even say that the street is forcluded), the crucial role of vegetation, water and natural elements, on which Koolhaas insists in his Manifesto, and so on. The author would like to conclude with some more general considerations about the meta-political dimension of the Generic city.

The author's use of the term "metapolitical" follows Jacques Rancière's suggestion that the aesthetic dimension needs to be included in political analysis. The aesthetic dimension is not a pre-political dimension, but a kind of historical *a priori* of the political rationality (or, in Derridean words an "archi-political" condition). More precisely, every rational thinking proceeds to a "distribution" or

to a "partition" of the "sensible" (*partage du sensible*)[13], that is why Rancière considers Marxism itself as one of the last great metapolitics:

> Marxism has represented the ultimate form of metapolitics – argues Rancière – returning the appearances of politics to the truth of the productive forces and relations of production, and promising (...) a revolution in the very mode of production of material life[14].

We can easily invert such a statement, stating that every new invention in the aesthetic field has a metapolitical effect, producing a new range of representations and articulations, making thinkable a new critical horizon concerning politics. So the author's final question will be: what are the metapolitical implications of Koolhaas' aesthetics of the Generic city? The following two remarks make for the conclusion to this essay.

New Despostism and the Rural Counter-Turn

Firstly, we must take seriously the only short indication given by Koolhaas about the political regime, or about the political environment, of the Generic city:

> Usually the Generic City has a (sometimes distant) relationship with a more or less authoritarian regime – local or national. Usually the cronies of the "leader," whoever he was, decided to develop a piece of "downtown" or the periphery, or even to start a new city in the middle of nowhere, and so triggered the boom that put the city on the map[15].

This is not just a trivial consideration. The megastructures composing the organs of the Generic city need an huge concentration of powers (both private and public) to be realized, often embodied by a single person, like Lee Kwan Yew, Singapore's Prime Minister for more than 30 years, or like the real estate developer (and architect) John Portman in the case of the city of Atlanta[16]. Koolhaas seems quite fascinated by this kind of demiurgical individuals, who, like architects, were able to determine the city's structure. Unlike historical figures of sovereignty, such as Hausmann, who fixed the shape of Paris at the end of the 19th century, these new autocratic figures are, much like the Generic city itself, hybrid political makers. Lee Kwan Yew was both businessman and politician; John Portman, who conceived the modern city of Atlanta, was both a speculator and a visionary. But, when in his *Singapore Songlines* (included in *S,L,M,XL*), written in the middle of the nineties, Koolhaas describes the liberal-despotic style of the Generic city, it is clear that he has mostly in mind the evolution of the Chinese city. If one had to consider the anthropological and meta-political consistency of Koolhaas' diagnosis, one should investigate in that direction and take into account not only Shanghai or Shenzen, as the very prototypes of the Generic city, but also the evolution of the Chinese city more generally, which includes medium-sized cities (such as Shantou, Changsha, Xiamen, Nanchang, and many other "medium-sized" cities of 5 million inhabitants on average). What is the role played by generic urbanization, in China, in the construction of the authoritarian consensus during the last twenty years? Did the generic urbanization play the role of a technology of "disjunctive inclusion", as suggested by Negri in his text on Koolhaas?[17] How did post-Maoist China switch from ideological suspicion against the city and urbanity, towards a kind of exaltation of the metropolis on all scales, taking place during the most impressive process of urbanization ever observed in the human history?

After he spent more than forty years exploring the evolution of the city, Koolhaas more

recently turned his attention to the becoming of the countryside. He is preparing a big exhibition in New York, *Countryside. The Future of the World*, planned for 2019, at the Guggenheim Museum. He also wrote a half-manifesto, simply titled "Countryside"[18]. Koolhaas suggests that, because urbanization's growth is accomplished in the Northern Hemisphere (cities become bigger and bigger but the urban population is almost stable in Western societies, and, in some cases, one can also observe a diminution of the urban population, like in Greece after the crisis) we need to look at what happens outside the urban space. The countryside has become, according to Koolhaas, a new "*terra incognita*" (like Africa on the maps and the globes before the colonial era), especially in the developed world.

In fact, we know that, in developed countries, between 20 percent and 30 percent of the population lives in the countryside, but only a very little part of it is employed in agriculture and related activities (less than 3 percent in France, less than 2 percent in Germany, United Kingdom, USA or Australia, where the "flex farms" allow to pilot a farm or to plough a field from faraway, using a computer). This means that most of the countryside population in the West has no relation at all with agriculture, farming, or any other similar traditional or rural activity. So, what do they do exactly? How do people live and work nowadays in non-urban spaces in Western countries? This is, for Koolhaas, a new and urgent question: blinded by the city's development as we are, we are neglecting the countryside as a space which is much more regulated – Koolhaas says more "cartesianised" - than the urban one, and which is deeply marginalised in our sociological, anthropological and *aesthetic* representation. This is also why the countryside can become a political source for right-wing populism, as it's happening for example in France, with the Front National, in Great Britain during the "Brexit" referendum, and in the United States with the election of Trump. In all these cases, the populist-national reaction did not come from the urban centres, but essentially from the countryside.

The author agrees with Koolhaas' insight: we do not know anymore what the countryside exactly is, or what is going to be after the end of urbanization, the digitalisation of agriculture, and the end of the traditional opposition between city and countryside. Could we say that the population living in the countryside, especially in Western societies, is increasingly *re*-becoming subaltern, not because of its economic or social backwardness but, *quite on the contrary*, because of its massive integration in the global economy, and of the difficulty in thinking of the new forms of the "partition of the sensible" determined by this over-integration ? Are we witnessing a mix of social impoverishment, subculture, and hyper-rationalization of the rural spaces? Is the city the last haven for the "savage", while the western countryside has become a homogenous space, where any "heterotopia" is no more possible? And, if so, how to describe, after the Generic city, the Generic countryside?

If Koolhaas' intuition is right, we will have the task, in the near future, to think about these new connections between the urban turn in the southern world and a *rural counter-turn* in the so called western world.

Notes

[1] Cf. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

[2] Cf. Mike Davies, "Planet of Slums. Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat", *New Left Review*, 26, p. 5-34, 2006.

[3] Cf. Ishita Dey, Ranabir Samaddar, Suhit K. Sen, *Beyond Kolkata. Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination,*

New Delhi, Routledge, 2013.

[4] Among these contributions, one can see Fredric Jameson, "Future City", *New Left Review*, May-June 2003, pp. 65-79 ; A. Negri, "On Rem Koolhaas", *Radical Philosophy*, 154 (March/April 2009), pp. 48-50; Bruno Latour, "En tapotant légèrement sur l'architecture de Koolhaas avec un bâton d'aveugle", *L'Architecture aujourd'hui*, Nov-Décembre, n°361, pp. 70-79.

[5] Cf. Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines", in R. Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL*, op cit., New York, Monacelli Press, 1995.

[6] For a genealogy of Manhattan and "manhattanism" see the most famous book by Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, New York, Monacelli Press.

[7] Cf. Saskia Sassen, "The Global City: Introducing a Concept", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, XI, 2, 2005. The Global city operates in a network, both regional and global, which makes the American sociologist say that "There is no such thing as a single global city". Because the Global city, as described by Sassen, is both a city hegemonizing a megapolis (like in the case New York, a city which hegemonizes a megapolis of 45 million people, including others major cities like Philadelphia, Boston and Washington) and a city which is directly connected to other Global cities (so that New York is, in some ways, the *same* space as London or Tokyo, in terms of financial flows, trade in highly skilled services, flow of information and data, and so on.)

[8] The present investigation is limited to the Koolhaas's theoretical position, putting aside the problem of its consistency if compared to his architectonical projects and realizations.

[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 1252.

[10] Cf. Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines", in R. Koolhaas, *S, M, L, XL*, op cit.

[11] Cf. Rem Koolhaas et al., *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, 2001.

[12] Rem Koolhaas (dir.), *Mutations*, Actar, 2000.

[13] Cf. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Bloomsboory, 2004. The French syntagma: "*partage du sensible*" being quite difficult to translate: "*partage*" means as well "distribution", "partition", "cutting", and "sharing"; while "sensible" means, at the same time "sensible" and "sensory".

Let us observe, by the way, that the Rancière's category of "metapolitics", or of "metapolitical", does not coincide with the Badiou's notion of metapolitcs. For Badiou, metapolitcs is one of the figures taken by philosophy's qualified dependence on its conditions (…) the generic procedures that Badiou has divided into science, art, politics and love" (Alberto Toscano, "Communism as separation", in Peter Hallward, *Think Again. Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, London, New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 139). In this sense, metapolitics is opposed, in Badiou, to the "political philosophy", which pretends to judge the consistency of the political thinking from the outside; but it is also different from politics, which experiments, in a strictly intra-subjective way, a political hypothesis. Metapolitics does not concern, in Badiou's system, the aesthetical conditions of politics.

[14] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Cambridge, New York, Polity Press, 2009, p. 33.

[15] Rem Koolhaas, *The Generic City*, op. cit., p. 1255.

[16] Cf. Rem Koolhaas, "Atlanta", in R. Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL*, op cit.

[17] Cf. Antonio Negri, *On Rem Koolhaas*, op. cit.,

[18] Cf. Rem Koolhaas, "Countryside", in *O32C*, hiver 2012.

The Urban Turn

Ranabir Samaddar [*]

I

The urban turn of our time begins with agrarian crisis. In fact, the agrarian sector in today's capitalist economy the world over is facing crisis. The emphasis is now more on logistical services, and making cities the nodes of logical management of economy. Thus cities in comparison have become sites of greater investment, and the restructuring of cities is also under way. Cities are merging, gobbling up the suburbs and countryside, becoming greater and greater in size, accommodating more and more people, and are now the destination points of thousands and thousands of migrants. Camps are looking like cities, while cities are looking like camps, as cities become multi-functional, acting as big trading marts, points of large networks of roads or digital connectivity, sites of specialised services, haven for refugees and migrants, and centres of administrative management, besides functioning as venues of parliamentary-democratic politics. Cities today conjure up the "people", the "mass", and what some call the "multitude".

In this context over the past three years, the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) conducted research on the dynamics of urbanization in the context of the emergence of the migrant as the core of the urban poor in India. The research focused on practices and experiences of migration in Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. As these three sets of studies indicate, the neoliberal city encapsulates the central social contradiction of modern global capitalism, namely, increased return from global connectedness accompanied by hyper-commodification of land and new forms of social marginalization, most notably the increasing informality of labour and life.

Among the several issues raised in the research programme, attention was drawn towards the massive infrastructural programmes in and around the cities of India, and the study posed the historically specific problem of urban governance today: if the neoliberal city symbolizes infrastructural power (and some will say infrastructural sovereignty), how much can the city be a "State"? With all the Weberian attributes of a modern bureaucracy, can professional government agencies control the movement of the migrants and settle the population of a city; and at the same time can these agencies faced with all the republican demands of citizenship, free themselves, at least partially, from dependence on the fiscal resources to be obtained through extraction of revenues from the private sector, which in turn transforms the city into a site of rental and other forms of extraction?

The framing of the question was propelled by a certain understanding, namely, that India's story is not one of seamless hyper-urbanization, although the impact of urbanization in terms of resource transfer and perceivable increase in employment opportunities (particularly in the unorganized sectors) is far greater than what the official figures suggest. There is also a deep-seated

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contradiction between the two images of the city—as an engine of economic growth and as an inadequate civic space for interaction among its inhabitants. The paradox is all the more stark today as Indian cities begin to appear as sites of continuous fragmentation and gentrification after the advent of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. We can see in sum the following features: (a) infrastructure is re-organizing the city in a way that not only fragments work and reproduces the old social conditions, but also calls for the permanent presence of the migrant as the intolerable but necessary factor in this process; (b) this reorganization of the city is also a reorganization of space that depends on a rent economy; (c) yet, in terms of urban governance, the reorganized city (always in the process of reorganization) has a permanent problem posed by the anomalous figure of the migrant, who cannot be dispensed with and who cannot be settled; and (d) consequent to all these, the city, which produces violence, struggles, agitations, and movements, is not a harmonious entity brimming with the energy of its citizens, but an extremely contentious place marked by groups of people fighting for resources, space, rights, claims, and justice.

II

Theorists of urbanization seem to focus mainly on the various practices of space-making and architectural planning characterized and endorsed by State policies and programmes of urbanization, seldom taking account of the production side of these spatial exercises. On the other hand, the studies on new and emerging forms of labour usually bypass the impact of these space-making exercises and are caught in the binary of formal and informal economies, leading to imaginings of a 'pure' outside of capital. Even the most erudite of these studies fail to look into the connections between zoning practices, policy interventions, and informalization of labour in the cities. Our analysis has to now unearth the material conditions of spatial and labour reproduction and highlight their connection with specific issues like rent, wage forms, precarity, and the legal-administrative aspect of city-making. As it stands, the movement of a labour force cannot be studied in isolation from the statist impetus of neoliberal policy interventions; and, at the same time, the representational dynamics of space-making must be linked with the material conditions of production and circulation of urban and semi-urban infrastructure. Modern remaking of the city shows us the dynamics of entry and dispersal of a precarious labour force and this double operation becomes an occasion for restructuring a city along neoliberal lines, and the emergence of a neoliberal urban authority.

It will be instructive to note how studies in capitalism have had to negotiate through decades what I have termed as the "urban turn". Perhaps some members of the audience this evening will recall the round table discussion, held few months back, on some of the classics of urban studies. The modern city as our congealed consciousness of what a place is emerged with Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England*. Engels had squarely linked the city with the condition of the working class. The focus was on the condition of the working class and the city was a site of that. The next turn came with Walter Benjamin's writings, which as we know, had focused on the city as a place of desire of commodities produced by capitalism and a place of the wanderer with little roots. The shift had already started from class to commodification. It was followed by Henry Lefebre who had focused on the city as a produced space. The space produced had an actuality and a possibility: it was a bourgeois space, but also a place with the possibility of becoming a common. And now David Harvey's works tells us to emphasise the city as one having what we may call the rights dimension. We also have postcolonial studies of the city, which for instance, ask us to see it as a site of the politics of the governed. The postcolonial city is not a bourgeois city. It is characterised by endless negotiations between the subaltern, unorganised masses populating the slums and the governing

class. It is a feature of postcolonial politics – a feature reinforced by popular, if you will, populist politics, and electoral democracy.[1] Through these little more than one hundred and fifty years we can note the increasing dissociation of the city and a class angle. More fundamentally it is a dissociation of two dimensions: city as a site of production and city as a site of circulation. The urban turn emerges almost as an accomplished and sovereign reality, as the city increasingly appears as a site of circulation, hence a non-class site, almost autonomous by itself.

Today, the inter-linkages between urban policy, governance, forms of labour, migration, urban rent, and neoliberalism as the political ideology of urbanization are getting clearer. City and perhaps the sea are redefining the frontiers of migration. These links define the urban accounts today. They speak of neoliberal growth built on migrant labour that reshapes the space-making practices on which the city rests. Yet more than sociological accounts the focus on the outsider, the migrant, will tell us the implications of the links just mentioned. Thus, only with the eyes of an adversary, which the migrant figure is, we can speak meaningfully of a neoliberal *milieu*: thus, what is a new town, what is a service village, what is an airport city, or who is an urban refugee or an urban homeless person? What is the true significance of phenomena like urban renewal, urban recycling, rental economy, and the servicing of a city with the migrant's body?

In some sense then I am suggesting the methodological need to focus on the figure of an outsider to understand the dynamics of neoliberal growth, which is usually studied from inside, say from within finance, trade, the software industry, etc., and which makes the neoliberal city appear without fail to be a great consumption site bubbling with the energy of extraction and newer revenue-gathering exercises. The question of course may be asked: methodologically why do we need this figure—the figure of the migrant—in making sense of urban transformation, and for lack of better words, the 'urban turn' in our thinking?

We can spend some moments to make sense of the significance of this question. Our reflections will also help us in seeing the interconnections that the author was speaking of minutes ago. In the first two decades of the liberalization of the economy, Indian growth was largely financed by large public-sector bank credits, particularly in the infrastructure sector, notwithstanding the global economic crisis. This contributed significantly to urban expansion in the country; at the same time several policy initiatives to restructure and expand the cities were taken in this period—from setting up new towns, regularization of slums and hawkers, improving extension services, and, importantly, expanding educational institutions. Village-to-city migration accompanied this process, as agriculture was neglected, farmers' deaths spread across a wide region, and the old industries experienced closures, in the process changing urban land-use patterns. This was a period that also witnessed what Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, called in 2014 "riskless capitalism"[2]—the emergence of an economy fuelled by debts to big business which did not require repayment, a mad rush in construction activities, growth in private financing, insurance, etc., and finally the frenzied play of the interest-rent-debt game. Such a pattern of growth proved unsustainable with the expansionary phase inevitably coming to a close by 2012. Bad loans piled up in the banking system. Urban misery, which was there all along, but was covered by urban expansion, now stood out starkly in the face of stunted urban wealth. It is not that in the pre-liberalization era there was no urban transformation, but to make sense of what was transformed, we have to perhaps recall the rise of the industrial city in the past, and the urban transformation taking place in its wake. Finance-driven accumulation, reflected in public-private partnership policies and rent-centric urban growth, was most evident in the big cities, and was now spreading across wide regions as infrastructural activities including building airport cities, speedways, export processing zones, express tracts, new port cities, and dedicated corridors with hubs marked the logistical rush. All these

brought in new migrant labour in a variety of forms. While this transformation can be seen in bits and pieces through examination from the perspective of, say, banking and the spread of ATMs, or the growth in digital infrastructure, the migrant remains an *outsider* to the process. The migrant tells us of a labour force that must be available whenever and wherever required, but will not be deployed all the time. It has to remain invisible. The chapters in the forthcoming book, *Migrant and the Neoliberal City*, not only bring out various aspects of the transformation we are here discussing, they collectively reflect on the central contradiction in this process of transformation, namely, the necessity of a ready mobilization of labour—displaced, dispossessed, dispersed, and often mobile and yet unable to lay claim to the space called the city. But the city must have such a labour force with the new forms of servicing it requires, such as care, entertainment, infrastructure-maintenance, waste-processing, etc. The neoliberal city cannot do without migrant labour. This is a scenario different from the one we were used to—the city with a city centre, citizens, the politics of equality, factory, factory labour, a large and stable middle class, and a reciprocal relationship with the village, even though not always satisfactory. The focus on the migrant as an outside figure, though produced by capitalism yet remaining outside this neoliberal growth, helps us remove many of the unnecessary complexities and diversions in the task of understanding the transformation taking place. The focus keeps the task simple, straight. Such a focus also allows the class question to surface through various obfuscations. Indeed, the re-partitioning of city space with new flexible borders and boundary-making exercises cannot be understood without predicating them on the figure of the migrant, because the migrant brings to the fore the class question involved in urban space-making. We all know that the traditional way of thinking about class has always been to think about factory labour. Yet factories in many cities are dying, while the city as the space of struggle and claims has resurfaced. In this re-imagining of the city as a site of a struggle for justice, the migrant occupies a crucial place. It was, indeed, always so. The reproduction of capital proceeds by switching from not only one part of the world to another, but also from one city to another, even from one part of a mega city to another. In the last few decades, we have witnessed the partial destruction of cities like Kolkata and the appearance of new cities in places like Navi Mumbai. If moving things around is one of the ways in which capitalism manages to defeat its opposition, the migrant labour remains the constant irritant, the troublesome element, threatening to destabilize this strategy of accumulation. The migrant reminds us that the city is the theatre of the activity of capital that switches between different forms. From market of commodities to determination of relation between property prices, it is a moving space. Land prices in Mumbai, Delhi or Kolkata move not only in relation to each other and to other Indian cities, but in relation to, say, those in Dhaka, Dubai, or Singapore.

All this is connected with a discernible shift in governmental focus, which is also responsible for the enormous role of a policy regime in the making of the urban turn. For instance, it is governmental policies which are creating the "social" and redefining the "social". As economic and social historians know, unemployment became a particular problem for the government at a specific time in the history of bourgeois democracy. Employment was linked for the first time in the nineteenth century with urban peace. Factory legislations and trade unions became crucial parts of creating the social. The city began to signify the role of urban management in a proper management of society and democracy. That the agrarian scenario was marked by "idle labour" was not a social concern; "unemployment" in agriculture was a matter of the "economic" (economic transition, etc.). But urban unemployment was a social concern. Thus employment exchange bureaux opened. Unemployment was a social question, which called for social policies and social governance. Also collective identities linked to unemployment and socialist appeals had to be broken up if the cities as centres of rule had to survive. The city in this way emerged as a fully theorised object within social

science discourse. If economy provided the clue to "employment", social knowledge provided the clue to managing the city. In this way, the city became the defining feature of welfare state and Keynesianism a feature of government.

Yet this would not be enough for the urban turn. For, unemployment could not be managed without the periodic new deals, which could only come rarely. Thus the city had to be a place of self-employment, small employments, start up ventures, and a vast multifarious site of circulation of all kinds of commodities – from plastic toys to information and money to sex workers and pimps. The old welfare state offered only passive support to subjects; neoliberal governance was to integrate the restless workless urban population in the "active" economy, give them requisite skills, enable them to be competitive, and thus turn them into active urban subjects.[3]

Today, urban governmentality is at the core of the huge governmental exercises of management of economy, politics, populations, and institutions. In India there is an urban policy; likewise policy for different types of cities, policies for different occupational and settled groups (like hawkers, slum dwellers, migrants, etc.); again there are scores of Acts for administering cities, urban regions (such as the National Urban Region, various Metropolitan Regions), managing population groups, running transportation systems, restraining people from conducting in unruly ways, detailed codes of freedom and control, renewal system, defining the boundaries of a city, zoning a city, etc. Since there is an increasing shift in size in favour of urban population, governmental policy exercises aim towards conceiving the nation like a city. Thus measures of creating schools, hospitals, bazaars, bus stations, colleges, all end up as urban sites of social investment. Both material and social infrastructure are conceptually organised around cities. Restructuring the economy, politics, and the state – what we call as the agenda of passive revolution – begin with transforming the city.

I have tried to explain this aspect of government of the city in a co-authored book, *Beyond Kolkata: Rajarhat and the Dystopia of Urban Imagination*. Yet, as that book demonstrated, there is no apparatus that does not produce subjects—in philosophical language called subjectivation. This is a process through which the individual assumes individuality as well as becomes subjugated to an external power. Is this not what is happening to the migrant—the old, insecure, trafficked, precariously poised as informal labour, and the like? And the chapters in the forthcoming book *Migrant and the Neo-liberal City*, as also the Rajarhat book, show that there is no subjectivation without an accompanying process of de-subjectivation. By a strange ironical twist, the metropolis also produces unruly subjects who can only exist by defying the neat space-reordering rules of urban governance. The migrant in this case also acts as a catalyst in increasing the city's inhabitants' power to act. We need further research perhaps on the struggles in the immigrant quarters and ghettos in the city (classic struggles for water or against imposition of all kinds of extortions and rent, from old struggles in jute mill and textile mill areas to the footloose workers' struggles in our time for settling in the city) to understand how the migrant becomes a factor in exacerbating metropolitan conflicts today. Seen against this context, the aspect of legal and policy regime of urban governance becomes especially significant in terms of understanding the development of urban governmentality. While the view of urban policy shared by administrators and intellectuals alike is that it is a set of laws, regulations, and administrative procedures that together regulate the movements of people, setting the terms under which people will come, stay, work, yet this way of population management is increasingly dependent on a form of dispersed policing that is exercised over the urban population, ordering, dividing, distributing, and linking urban population groups and segments of urban territory. In this way mobile population groups help rationalize the management of organized interests of citizens and groups, moderate electoral politics, and shape strategically the economy of government. Thus, managing urban migration as a part of broad urban governance is a matter of policing as well

as step towards ordering of populations, territories, labour markets, and the administrations of all these. The process happens on multiple scales, ranging from the hierarchical division of urban territories, of segments of a single urban territory, and of urban institutions into ethnically and racially coded zones.

<center>III</center>

Few fundamentals need to be kept in mind when we think of the urban turn on a global scale. First, geographic dispersal of economic activities turns out to be a key factor feeding the growth and importance of central corporate functions. Second, as cities take on a more and more corporate character, highly specialized service firms engaged in activities ranging from accounting, public relations, telecommunications, digital work, care and entertainment, to waste-processing and reprocessing and other such services, call for more labour from outside. Third, in place of the cyclical nature of urban migration, which is usually presumed, the economic fortunes of the urban migrants become increasingly disconnected from the broader hinterlands from where they have arrived. They become subjects of transnational urban systems. Fourth, the strategic role of the services they offer as inputs for a city is matched by the informalization of these services even when connected with manufacturing or industrial services. The growing informalization of a range of economic activities is not possible without a market for these services, and they act as a supplement to the high-profit-making firms at the top of the urban economy. Indeed, the city becomes global only with the presence of the migrant.[4]

Yet the more fundamental shift comes in our own notion. The city merges into "the urban". Is the city the same thing as the urban? What is this urban that has been created as an outcome of the shift? Not all cities have transformed and transformed in the same manner and speed. Some towns have been on the contrary ruralised. Town infrastructure is neglected due to paucity of public investment. Cities do not produce citizens. As we know, in Max Weber's scattered thoughts on citizenship, citizenship in discussed in both historical and contemporary settings. In accounting for citizenship of medieval urban communities in Europe and modern citizenship of the twentieth-century nation state, especially in Germany during World War I, while Weber noted the military dimension of citizenship, his purpose in outlining early European citizenship was associated with his larger argument concerning the uniqueness of Western rationalization. Weber drew the idea of modern national citizenship from his political conception of national interest, and the fate such an interest imposed on those subordinate to its power. At the same time the idea of rights played an important part in his political thought. The rights bearer was a citizen. The ideal type was the citizen who laid the foundations for the future development of a rational capitalism, which accompanied the transformation from communal to individual rights. There could be many kinds of cities and their memberships, such as the *polis*, the city-state, the mediaeval city, and the modern nation state. Yet only in the modern state citizenship denotes membership of a national community, holding certain political rights. This type of citizenship, Weber argued, expresses the political unity of the nation, and its purpose is to create a certain counter balance to social inequalities. Clearly there is very little left in the notion of the "urban" to be associated with an idea of citizenship that would denote membership of a community. In the first place, cities here did not mean communities, and in the second place, the cities too on one hand resemble anything but a "closed settlement" that Weber thought of.[5] Cities are becoming classic frontier tracts of fortune hunters, strong army detachments looking out for brigands and outlaws, discovered and yet to be discovered wealth, and always surviving at two levels: the official, known routes of communication and transportation and the

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unofficial, secret, and newly made routes of communicating and transporting. So, like any displaced reality, the "urban turn" denotes both substance and an illusion. On one hand it indicates something new indeed is happening to the city, on the other hand, the "urban" we have turned our attention to is a ghost, a phantom, speaking of other realities of a world changing along neoliberal lines. Cities are like battlefields for control, or access to resources, by various groups. In many cases, cities, particularly urban economies, are producing frontiers that give lie to any notion of "urban". On the other hand while towns still retain their specialised roles, such as railway towns, port towns, steel towns, or cantonment towns, their particular existences are now overwhelmed by the urban. The public-private partnership has produced an investment pattern that is not aimed at reviving or elevating cities, but creating what we call the "urban". This urban is being produced from the process of emergence of global cities on strategic scales and as a special kind of spatial units.

An examination of globalization through the concept (and affect) of the urban tells us of the strategic components of the global economy rather than the broader and more diffuse homogenizing dynamics of globalisation. As cities get more and more different from one another, the situation begins to demonstrate issues of power and inequality within a city. The city exists only to perform the actual work of managing, servicing, and financing a global economy that requires increasingly financial and other specialized services, new multimedia sectors, and telecommunications services. All of these are marked by "cross-border networks and specialized divisions of functions among cities rather than inter-national competition per se" in order to cater to global firms and markets relating to law, accounting, credit rating, telecommunications", indicating a cross-border system, embedded in a series of cities. The counterpart of this reality is the profusion of urban extraction – of land, water, air, and human bodies – requiring armies of deployable labour, ready to march on command from one city to another. This double reality also creates an underworld at a hitherto unforeseen scale surviving and centred round easy money as the emblem of transactional cost of various kinds. Cities require policing on an ever increasing scale. Brutality becomes the mark of a city. The idea of urban turn, produced from this double faced reality ("the economy and society"), indicates something more – an ephemeral site of a new world.

Is the urban turn then like the "linguistic turn" in social sciences that took place from sixties to eighties in the last century? Twists and turns in a labyrinth of concepts? A displaced site of something else taking place – a change that is neither in the city nor in the village, but somewhere else, perhaps in the mode of capitalism and in its disciplining and punishing mode that we now term as "urban"? We can of course always say, has not the city always produced phantasmagoria? In the end, the city is the place of creating images. Thus, the ancient city produced the story of democracy; the *polis* created a notion of politics and the political; the medieval towns, the image of traders and merchants with global coming and going; and the modern city, of citizenship. All these images were overwhelming as they overwhelmed the society. Yet, and in all these cases, there were specific procedures of interning and confining, policing, financing, engaging platoons of labour gangs, and in the case of the irremediable deviants pushing them beyond the limits of the territory of the city, depriving them in the strict sense of the urban soil and exposing them brutally, without any recourse or support, solely to the power of the gods – the abrupt form of exile and expulsion.[6] All these particularities are to be found in the urban turn today. Perhaps the concept of urban turn is a mischievous one because it hides the power and brutality of modern power.

Notes

[1] The studies referred to here: Frederick Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) - https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/condition-working-class-england.pdf (accessed on 24 December 2017); Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" and "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" in Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, and Harry Zohn, and ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 30-133; Henry Lefebre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) and the collection of his various writings and interviews, *Writings on* Cities, trans. and eds. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), see in particular his recall of the Greek city as a common site o art and aesthetics, "No salvation Away from the centre?", pp. 205-208; David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the* City to the Urban Revolution (London: Verso, 2013), and finally Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), Chapter 3, "The Politics of the Governed", pp. 53- 78, and Chapter 7, "Are Indian Cities becoming Bourgeois At last", pp. 131- 147

[2] G. Raghuram Rajan, 'Saving Credit', Third Dr Verghese Kurien Memorial Lecture at IRMA, Anand, Gujarat, 25 November 2014, https://rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_SpeechesView.aspx?Id=929, accessed on 1 November 2017. Rajan said, "The consequences of the delays in obtaining judgements because of repeated protracted appeals implies that when recovery actually takes place…the present value of what the bank can hope to recover is a pittance. This skews bargaining power towards the borrower who can command the finest legal brains to work for him in repeated appeals, or the borrower who has the influence to obtain stays from local courts—typically the large borrower. Faced with this asymmetry of power, banks are tempted to cave in and take the unfair deal the borrower offers. The bank's debt becomes junior debt and the promoter's equity becomes super equity. The promoter enjoys riskless capitalism—even in these times of very slow growth, how many large promoters have lost their homes or have had to curb their lifestyles despite offering personal guarantees to lenders? The public believes the large promoter makes merry because of sweet deals between him and the banker. While these views have gained currency because of recent revelations of possible corruption in banks, my sense…suggests…the system renders the banker helpless *vis-a-vis* the large and influential promoter…"

[3] William Walters, *Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 140-141

[4] The phrase 'global city' is here invoked in the sense Saskia Sassen has used it. See Saskia Sassen, 'The Global City: Introducing a Concept', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. XI, No. 2, Winter-Spring 2005, pp. 27-43.

[5] In particular, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978),

[6] Also one has to note that at the very time when small towns languished for lack of attention, the image of the urban overwhelmed our social sense. The urban turn was made in this backdrop. Can one say that the deaths of children in the hospital in Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh have made any dent in the image of the urban?

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