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The Uninhabitable? An Essay on "Regions"*

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Abstract

The power of regions as constellations of emplacement lies in the ways they mediate between the stabilities of specific populations and ways of doing things and create more open-ended exchanges with a larger surrounds. This essay considers regions of the "uninhabitable" as a particular terrain within urban life that has been frequently described as "unfit for human habitation." The essay explores some of the things the uninhabitable might mean against a backdrop where the entirety of the earth may at some point no longer sustain human habitation, at least in the conventional forms by which we know it. For it is possible that the will to inhabit could result in the impossibility of habitation, or that this will derives from the very rendering of certain spaces as uninhabitable.

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Prelude

*"**Entire regions of experience**": the surfacing and distention of the details and gestures of everyday life and its interchanges, offerings, where nothing seems to be happening, nothing seems to be there (Hortense Spillers 1997)*.

*He created you from a single being, then made its mate of the same (kind). And He sent down for you eight of the cattle in pairs. He creates you in the wombs of your mothers – creation after creation – **in triple darkness**. That is Allåh, your Lord; His is the kingdom*. Quran, Surah 39.

Yohannes, a Jakarta bus driver, points out, *"(in our district) we knew each other pretty well; we knew what to expect and everyone knew that if they got too much out of line they would get what was coming to them; people knew that they were in for big trouble if they were to steal and cheat or get violent, but what was always a little bit strange was the way in which people would do all of these little things that were just a little bit unusual, the way someone might stop someone in the middle of the street they didn't know and simply tell them a little something about something taking place somewhere else, or the strange way they might decorate their door, or the way they might walk the streets in the middle of the night looking for god only knows what, or the way they might invite total strangers to sit and drink coffee with them in the front of the house. We always knew where we were living, but who knows for sure where we live."*

Abaye, the "unofficial" manager of a fruit and vegetable market points out, *"we do all kinds of strange things, most of them barely noticeable, but we take notice. And all these small things are simply a way for us to get up the courage and to get familiar with attempts to make something big happen, to look at the places where we worked and lived as something more than that, as full of hidden secrets and mysteries that could be turned into something useful and without it seeming that we were doing something big, because that would only get us into trouble, with our neighbors, the police and the authorities. There is that American expression about "living large"; we do that, but you keep your head down, stay close to the shadows, and act like you know all the small details of the places you have never been or probably will never be.*

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* A **draft** of an essay to be presented at the conference: *Spaces, Scales, and Routes: Region Formation in History and Anthropology* scheduled to take place at Harvard University from April 30 to May 2, 2015.

Introduction: Entire Regions of Experience

For some time now the predominant locus of urbanization has been *the region.* As urbanization operates at a planetary scale, whereby the entirety of the earth is affected by, drawn into, and remade by the need to continuously rearticulate discrete geopolitical, geomorphological, and atmospheric domains into the nexus of resource accumulation and the circulation of exchange value (Merrifield 2012, Brenner 2013), the city is no longer the exemplar or the culmination of urbanization. Rather, it exists in a plural field of multi-layered patchworks. Thus, the region points to particular trajectories of consolidation forging contiguities, adjacencies, complementarity, as well as peripheries.

The notion of regions has been used in many different ways. Regions point to macro-level articulations or points of orientation around particular physical terrain or modes of production, occurring within and among national states. Regions might refer to spatial distributions of similarity and covariance in terms of demographics, histories, and politics that cut across clearly delineated scales. Notions of "new regionalism" refer to administrative and political constructions of specific transnational or transurban regulatory frameworks of economic operation. They point to intensifications of particularity and clustering at sub-national levels (Agnew 2013).

Each of these instances of the regional raises questions about the logics of coherence. To what degree are regions administrative artifacts, platforms of affective solidarities, basins of attraction, analytical or vernacular clusters of flows and linkages, or concretizations of specific relationalities? Whether they "actually" exist or are simply ways of materializing particular ideas about critical differences of various kinds is a seemingly moot concern. What are more important are the performative dimensions of what regions do in various circumstances and times. For the power of regions as constellations of emplacement lies in the way they mediate between the stabilities of specific populations and ways of doing things *and* create more open-ended exchanges with a larger surrounds.

If we were to stretch this point of creating open-ended exchanges, there are also matters of adjacency and interweaving with components and relational dynamics that are not clearly delineated, where there is a fleeting sharpness of focus or coherence. There is a sense of something hanging together that it is difficult to put one's fingers on or hold in one's gaze or analytical language. Regions here are infused with the disparate, and while events, transactions and places may appear to "go their own

way", there is a surfeit of force that seems to hold them within view, where shifting ways exist for these to reach each other and exert both plausible and inexplicable impacts. As Hortense Spillers indicates in the prelude – *something surfaces in detail where nothing seems to be there.*

It is her invocation of "*entire regions of experience*" that I want to work with in this essay, which considers regions of the "uninhabitable." As particular terrains within urban life have been frequently described as "unfit for human habitation", I want to explore some of the things the uninhabitable might mean against a back-drop where the entirety of the earth may at some point no longer sustain human habitation, at least in the conventional forms by which we know it. For it is possible that the will to inhabit could result in the impossibility of habitation, or that this will derives from the very rendering of certain spaces as uninhabitable.

The thought that emerges from the seeming accomplishment of humans to mobilize and subject geophysical, morphological, linguistic, and technological processes to a genealogy of continuous development as accumulation has produced the now well-known deleterious impact on the atmospheres, climates, and earth processes in which urban regions are inextricably entangled. As is the litany of geo-philosophy, there is nothing that exists as a resilient arbiter of these earth processes in the long run. There is no definitive "nature" that can be addressed and be receptive to human entreaties and efforts to reverse engineer the damage done. For the thought that has emerged from cities is a thought that incessantly enjoins the city as its conceit and confidence in the ability to handle any problem, to outpace any damage done with expanding intelligence, engineering, or at least computing power (Cohen 2012, Colebrook 2012, Wolfe 2013).

Of course this does not impede an intensifying concentration on regions, particularly on the imagining of regions – about how global warming will prompt massive demographic shifts that may definitively alter the ethnic and racial underpinnings of discrete nations, latitudes, and continents, or how accelerated hybridization of the human body might enable the colonization of formerly inhospitable terrain, and how limited access to such possibilities will create specific geographies of extinction (Lorimer 2012, Matts and Tynan 2012). Precarity is not simply an existential ontological condition or the ordering of the effects of different political, social and legal dispensations (Lorey 2010). Rather, precarity is now something built into all landscapes, of course with different degrees. But this inscription of precarity thus forms the basis of possible new reconfigurations of biological individuals and social collectivities of all kinds.

The recognition of the limitation of human intentionality and capacity comes at the same time as new claims are being made about the "right to the city." This usually refers to the right of urban inhabitants to use the promise of the city, its convergence of domains, backgrounds, and possibility to make livelihoods compatible with their aspirations and their sense of things. While these claims for rights aim to ensure a broader sense of inclusiveness, they are also claims for clarity. Demands for the clarification of tenure and citizenship, while important in terms of securing livelihoods, also risk being complicit with the very rationalities of private property long instituted in liberal economies as the mode through which urban space is inscribed with a sense of clarity – of what can be done, without the messy negotiations of political contestation and transaction costs (Davies 2014). In some respects then, rights to the city thus require a city without rights, without superseding claims and abilities.

The primacy of *regions* as the object of urban analysis comes from recognition of the plurality of forces, spaces, densities, and demography at work in urban systems. It raises the question about who are rights to be accorded to in a complex milieu of different actors. The examples often cited for this problematic are the easy ones, such as the disqualification of rights for viruses or toxic substances. But what would the actualization of a broad distribution of rights look like in urban regions where the substance of equality cannot be measured simply by the application of some overall standard, some umbrella labeled as real "citizenship", or the equitable provisioning of essential resources or access to all that is the city. This question also goes beyond the artifacts of compensation and reparation. In highly differentiated fields of aspiration, history, capacity, feeling, and sense, actualized rights could only be concretized in constituting spaces of differentiated action. Inhabitants would have to approach each other with a certain indifference, where the playing out of scenarios of action do not necessarily embody a valuation of other scenarios, neither passing judgment nor demanding relevance or affiliation.

Yet judgments have to be made; inhabitants simply cannot do what they want. No matter how well cities and regions are surveyed, their population made known; no matter how big the data is, these matters of judgment are still those of political decision. A decision must be made to render some exertions of rights illegitimate. But "who" decides in a situation when sovereign decisions of the past have only been able to specify concretizations of togetherness based on division and separation. The divisions are not necessarily those of "friend" and "enemy", but of what counts and what will not count, or only count with some kind of negative connotation. If, more

than ever, the efficacy of the urban depends upon the constellation of various forms of enactment on the part of the heterogeneous things that inhabit the city or the region, what amongst them can decide, who accords the space for decision and the terms for its registration? (Connolly 2013).

As we become more familiar with the self-annihilating characteristics of human thought and self-regard, only the submission of such thought to decisions other than that which it renders would seem to enable the endurance of human as species. But what specifically do we pay attention to in this regard? Can we continue to assume that every urban context "gives evidence of internal features of figuration that reflect that the *world* is an *inhabitable* environment where persons are socially constituted?" (de Piña-Cabral 2014). Has urban life become so precarious for so many that they can no longer assume that they have a world in which to live? Or is a *regionalization of the uninhabitable* – a prolific engendering of zones where the conditions of a "normative" life are *imperceptible,* where ways of doing things cannot be included into any available coherent sense, a necessary condition for urbanization in itself? Does the uninhabitable refer to the continuous updating of the human, whose meanings are not found in any particular material situation? As Reza Negarestani (2014a) problematically states:

> To be human is neither sufficient condition for understanding what is happening to human nor is it a sufficient condition for recognizing what the human is becoming. It can neither fathom the consequences of revising the meaning of the human nor the scope of constructing the human according to this revisionary wave. The consequentiality of the human and the human significance is not in its given meaning or a conserved and already decided definition, but in its ability to bootstrap complex abilities and intricate obligations out of primitive abilities and simple duties. These bootstrapping abilities that signify the human are precisely the expression of a fully updatable definition of the human as a constructible and revisable mode of being.

Or, is the uninhabitable the condition whereby the impossibility of communicating what makes things livable or not also upends long histories of sacrifice – of people having to sacrifice this life for another one, sacrificing many ways of desiring and interacting with those defined by a dominating power (Wark 2014)? Here the uninhabitable is a completely unknown terrain, something both untenable, yet to which many strive. Note the long histories of heresies.

These are the questions that inform this reflection on the uninhabitable that is not simply a maneuver to either generalize the concept across the board, or render it inoperable. While the focus is on regions of the inhabitable that may be instantiated

as domains within and across cities, I will continue to talk about *the city*, even as it is increasingly a spectral object.

In-between collapsed yet still rigid distinctions

Many African and Asian cities and urban regions are considered bastions of the uninhabitable. They are the homes of marginalized black and brown bodies that cannot really be homes because their environments are incompatible to what normally would be required for human sustenance. Because these cities are widely considered to be the "responsibility" of those who inhabit them, the fact that they appear as uninhabitable also renders their inhabitants not really or fully human. There is a cruel irony in all of this as some of the most "spectacular" of urban built environments, architectural and engineering feats are also taking place right next to apparent wastelands, further eroding long-honed, albeit problematic, sociability (Roy and Ong 2011, Marshall 2013, Fu and Murray 2014).

That large numbers of these inhabitants were, and continue to be extracted from Africa and Asia, so that a global economy could be conceived and materialized elsewhere – once through slavery, and now through both forced and voluntary migrations – constitutes an inextricable dependency of the fully human on those considered not to be. It also solidifies the conditions through which that dependency can be disavowed or produced as a relationship of fundamental, natural inequality. That many African and Asian urban regions remain inundated with an underclass is thus proof of the normality of an uneven distribution of space that either will not be overcome, or alternately, is rectified only through an almost unfathomable deployment of effort and resources (DiMuzio 2008, Ghertner 2010, Gidwani and Reddy 2011, Heron 2011). This view also suggests that a definitive and unyielding image of urban efficacy and human thriving exists and should be the object of aspiration by those living in supposedly uninhabitable spaces (Legg 2007, Heller and Evans 2010, Roy 2009, Shepherd et al 2013).

Questions about what is inhabitable or not, have long defined the nature and governance of urban life (Foucault 2009, Thacker, 2009, Adams 2014). There is also a massive, variegated literature that articulates the relationships among dispossession, the expropriation of resourcefulness, the constitution of property, the dissolution of collective solidarities, the circumscription of maneuverability, the imposition of

law, and the autonomy of market; and in doing so, accounts for the figuration of what counts as urban habitation (Amin 1974, Lubeck and Walton 1979, King 1989, Bhala and Lapyre 1997 Glassman and Samatar 1997, Chakrabarty 2000, Hart 2002, Harvey 2003, Blomley 2004, Sparke 2007 Peck et al 2009, McCann and Ward 2010, Glassman 2011, Chaudhury 2012, Rossi 2013).

Without denying the ravages of long-term structural impoverishment to which many African and Asian cities are subjected, what if the so-called uninhabitable does not necessarily point to a depleted form of urban life but simply a different form – one that constantly lives under specific threats and incompletion. But as long as our imaginations, policies and governing practices adhere to a tightly drawn sense of what constitutes normal humanity, it is difficult to recognize such urban life as a generative difference (Huyssen 2008, Robinson 2013). As long as cities or large swathes of territory within them are seen as fundamentally uninhabitable, as incapable of generating new capacities, and in dire need of rescue and remaking through the massive infusion of external resources or a renewed commitment to a vast repertoire of disciplinary tools, the critical impetus from which to make these cities something else than they are now is lost.

As Deleuze (1995) indicates, these different modes of the habitable cannot be part of an overarching program of development for a particular social body or territory. They do not presume the existence of a living entity to which they contribute. Rather, maneuvers toward such equity of possibilities must disrupt the calculations that assume a particular kind of distribution of authority or capacity among pre-existent identities. Instead, the focus might be on the emergent figurations of social bodies constituted through the intersections of different ways of inhabiting the urban. "It is because of the action of the field of individuation that such and such differential relations and such and such distinctive points (pre-individual fields) are actualized" (Deleuze, 1995,247). As Achille Mbembe (2013) points out, inhabitants, situated in the crossfires of multiple trajectories of sense and subjugation do what they can to create fugitive, slippery spaces, always under the grip of some imposed redemptive maneuvers, which never quite succeed.

Given the persistence of base subjugations operating under the auspices of a continuously inventive capitalism, which has promised to leave colonially imposed differences far behind (Chakrabarty 2012), how is it possible to upend the distinctions between the inhabitable and uninhabitable as clear demarcations of specific dispositions? How might they be seen as operations of subterfuge or critique – practices that take nothing for granted, that lend stability and possibilities of transformation

to the precarious or undermine the pretensions of all which is considered secure? At the same time, we do need to retain these distinctions as a way of stopping ourselves from thinking that no matter what crises and conditions people face, that somehow resilient adaptation is always possible (see Strathern 2011).

Based on long term work in urban Africa and more recently Jakarta, this essay reflects on how to think about such an interstice of effaced and sustained distinctions between the habitable and inhabitable. This is particularly done in the context of accelerated transformations and obduracies in mega-urban regions of what was considered to be the Global South. In an era where the normality of any standardized version of humanity is continuously upended in the constantly mutating assemblages of biological, technological and digital materials, notions about what constitutes normal urban residence continue to be applied to the ways in which the value and efficacy of African and Asian urbanities are judged.

A supposedly countervailing move, whereby the resilience and resourcefulness of those who have almost nothing is emphasized, and ends up reiterating these same versions. This is because resilience is usually couched in a form of surprise, a kind of "yes, even the poor have a way of proving their humanity." Surviving the uninhabitable then becomes testament to a human will and capacity that minimizes the impact of injustices past and present (Dawson 2009). It feeds into claims that if only the inhabitants of these cities would do what humans are truly capable of doing, and really apply their skills of survival to the urgencies at hand, then new cities would be truly possible (Amin 2013, MacKinnon and Derickson 2013).

Such sentiments tend to occlude the violence of much of everyday life in the urban South. Violence seems to inhere in situations where decisions appear particularly arbitrary, in terms of what kind of persons have access to what kinds of resources and opportunities, and where expressions of discontent and arguments against proliferating injustices increasingly become visible through the extension of the arbitrary across the plural domains of everyday life are criminalized. Here, there is the dissipation of discernible forms of anchorage through which people elaborate sociability, come to know who they are dealing with and what their responsibilities are to them. The persuasiveness of the status of being neighbors, kin, classmates, co-workers, or co-congregants wanes as these statuses can no longer be generalized as expositions about how people act.

As the normative scripts for guiding attainment, efficacy, or a normal life seem not to work, and are not necessarily replaced by alternative ones, how do individuals know how to assess their chances for establishing a semblance of a viable and

secure life? If these dispositions appear arbitrary than there may be little incentive to invest in discourses and practices of continuity. However violent the atmosphere, codes and rules will continue to exist. The rules may do little to deter the infractions since the conditions that produce these infractions are intensified by both the persistence of injustice and arbitrariness and the climate of increasing violence itself. It is as if a radical egalitarianism ensues through the exposure to death, the dissipation of impediments to wound and be wounded that both mirrors a general criminalization of the poor and marginal – that reduces the heterogeneous lives of the impoverished to one calculation of valuation – *and* constitutes an albeit distorted means of upending this calculation of differentiated casualty figures and testimonies of survival.

Without clear prospects for collective mobilization that exceeds self-management and is situated on land and built environments that are either illegal or where the present status of legitimacy is tenuous, intensifying vulnerabilities can exceed appeals to traditional formats of solidarity and caretaking. Hedged into territories that may be increasingly isolated or carceral, and with the pathways across geographic, resource, and institutional landscapes constricted, districts implode as the tendencies toward differentiation inherent in collective operations can become violent. This is coupled with what Muller has called the "warehousing of the dispossessed", where long-honed practices of collective self-provisioning and social cohesion are actively undermined, thereby engendering disorientation, distrust, debilitating competition, and producing behaviors that are regarded in one or several registers as being a growing categorization of danger.

Whatever the complicities, antagonisms or even complementarities of state-induced and extrajudicial violence and local criminal violence, the result is not so much to render particular parts of the city uninhabitable as it is to establish habitation as an always precarious challenge compensated by quietude, the pursuit of middle class aspirations of individual "salvation", and the enforcement of an information economy that circulates constant threat as opposed to incessant possibility – the possibility that once characterized many collectively self-built domains.

From the townships of Cape Town, the *bidonvilles* of Casablanca, the southside wards of Chicago, to the favelas of Sao Paolo – the cultures of decision-making, opportunism, and indebtedness of "doing time" are folded into everyday life beyond the prison. The carceral, as Gottschalk indicates, it is own multifaceted modality of entrepreneurship – a means of capitalizing on the enforced immobility. The carceral extends beyond the prison as a means of monitoring and holding in place criminal-

ized bodies, which in turn have little choice but to find ways of upending these constrictions with practices cultivated inside the prison. Little room for negotiation and mistakes are available in either facet of this complicity.

At the same time, those that inhabit the supposedly uninhabitable are subject to seemingly endless lists of deprivation. Hundreds of research projects have demonstrated clear correlations between health, mortality, environmental conditions, economic poverty, spatial exclusion, racial identity, and political justice. But to what extend do these indices of deprivation and violence simply normalize as uninhabitable places where many people attempt to make a life. Normative moral inclinations would seem to render intolerable conditions that shorten lives, waste potentials, and produce debilitating traumas, misery, and chronic illness. Such inclinations would seem to compel the alleviation of suffering and the empowerment of human capacity.

But we have to consider the extent to which these moral inclinations get in the way of seeing the collective memories, the exchanges and reciprocities, the breakthroughs and failures, and the material residues of countless efforts to endure through conditions that are perceived and experienced in many different ways by these residents. While survival entails what has to be done; endurance considers what "ought to be done" (Negarestani 2014b). The two do not necessarily intersect or remain separate, and both are operative in the everyday lives of those who occupy the uninhabitable. There is the creation and relationship to a ground, a place, and an infrastructure of individual and collective existence, no matter how provisional, improvised, or run-down.

In cities where the machinery of decision-making, planning, resource allocation, and service provision hobbles along in bureaucratic ineptness, improvised deals, and massively skewed distributions, the majority of inhabitants still largely rule their worlds. They do so to the extent that they continuously construct and update the practices, designs, and materials that are put to work in engineering spaces of inhabitation. Perhaps more importantly, many continue to reticulate the experiences, skills, perceptions, and networks of the people around them in order to materialize circuits through which needed goods, services, and information can pass (Chattopadhyay 2006, Benjamin 2008, Bayat 2010, McFarlane 2011a, Nielsen 2011).

Everywhere and nowhere is habitable

The uninhabitable is a tricky concept given the global drives to render everything habitable no matter what. The impetus toward habitation appears across different scenarios and backgrounds. For example, while desert cities have existed for a long time, the massive conversion of desert climates into urban regions demonstrates a kind of perverse triumph of the built environment over physical terrain, albeit at enormous resource costs. This may be a long way from squatting on rubbish piles or covering squalid creeks with makeshift shanties. But it does point to a conviction that cities can refigure complex ecologies with complex adaptations and insulate themselves from adverse surroundings. That even the best-engineered cities can sometimes succumb to volatile weather and floods is not yet a sufficient deterrent to this conviction.

That much of Asia acted as fodder for the proof of developmental dreams – the fact that backward economies, with determined and sometimes coercive governmental action and inward financial flows, could produce well-planned, thriving metropolises – and that Africa now seems posed to follow in these footsteps, points to this sense of endlessly renewable habitation. But something else may also be going on, for some cities seem to expand without a clear economic logic.

Take Kinshasa for example, the world's poorest city of its size. Although the historic core of the city fronts a semi-circled river that acts as a national boundary – limiting the trajectories of where the city's physical growth can take place – the real boundaries of the city expand exponentially each year so that one can still claim to be inside Kinshasa some 90 kilometers from that historic core. It is hard to precisely determine the demographics of the city. Depending on who you talk to, its size ranges from 9-15 million, which is a lot of uncertainty, and even GIS analyses are hard pressed to come up with reasonably accurate figures. Allowing for even the vast tracks of land near the center that are tied up as military encampments or the remnants of colonially demarcated buffer zones, much of the city hovers across tightly packed nodes dispersed across long distances.

So while many opportunities for systematic infilling may exist, the near universal perception in Kinshasa is that the city is moving elsewhere. As a result, many inhabitants hurry to stake their claims at ever-shifting peripheries, which still seem to be in the middle of nowhere. In order to maintain a staked claim, a household has to implant someone on site in order to protect it, as the relative newness and vacancy of these areas mean that households stay where they are for the moment. As this sense

of expansion is materialized in all directions away from the river, households are also concerned about missing the "real action", so they will also stake additional claims in completely different parts of the city's periphery. While the actual acquisition of new property may not consume large amounts of money, the fact that households have to support some kind of physical presence in these different locations, run back and forth between them along congested roads, and still maintain household economies in the place where they have been all along and have been barely making it as it is, results in substantial expenditures of time and money.

As large numbers of residents are swept up in this anticipation, their efforts indeed urbanize the periphery, with markets, schools, churches, and outposts of administrative offices. The rendering of the bush into extensions of Kinshasa is in part driven by the "old standard" of escalating land values through speculation and the infusion of external finance that jacks up property prices in older residential districts near the commercial core. Yet there is something almost evangelical in the determination of *Kinois* to stretch the city, as if these efforts offer some redemptive compensation for all of the difficulties most of them face just putting bread on the table.

As Filip de Boeck (2004, with Plissart, 2011, 2012), in his magisterial writings on the city points out, Kinshasa is a city of micro- infrastructures and the power of the minimum, where the exigency is to make as much as possible out of articulating imagination and small things, as well as to insert oneself into every conceivable interstice, using whatever is available as a support for commercial activity. It is important to find just the right location to capture someone's fleeting inclination to buy something from you at a moment's notice, to perform everyday life as if it was full of abundance when in actuality most of the population is living with less than USD$1 a day.

As de Boeck indicates, Kinshasa is a city of the "now", in that it emphasizes the need for individuals to be prepared to act in many different places and in many different ways without warning or preparation. This orientation reinforces the tentativeness of social life, because the ability to affirm a collective body requires a sense of delay, of memory, and of rehearsing ways different backgrounds and capacities can work together. I talk to you, you talk to me, we talk to others, and in the process we acquire memory and develop understanding based on the delays involved in this process, the circuits of call and response and call again. But in Kinshasa the imperatives to act without reference, and the immediacy of the all or nothing makes the consolidation of social life difficult.

Kinshasa is a city that both frightens and surprises itself with its endurance, and so expressions of confidence take shape through these investments in the city's extension – to make habitable that which lies fallow. A bush is a city in waiting.

It does not seem to matter that these sentiments make daily life all the more difficult. Running around to manage an extended presence in the urban region leaves little time to tend to more localized relationships. In a city where many youth are deeply suspicious of the adults closest to them, where early death is usually explained as the malicious actions of immediate family, where the management of critical cultural conventions, usually the purview of elders, is seized upon by youth as expressions of the vacuum of any real authority, households would seem to make their current addresses more uninhabitable as the impulse for new habitation intensifies. So the relationship between the habitable and uninhabitable oscillates, diverges and reconnects in ways that make the provision of "new land" and new opportunities something that extends and builds upon the solidity of the existent city, but also seems to waste it at the same time.

The extension of Kinshasa into its hinterlands prolongs a game that potentially runs out of space and time as the impacts of urbanization "talk back" through the shrinkage of virtuous terrain. As such, there is much worried discussion in Africa and Asia about the massive demographic shifts portended by climate change, about future impossibilities for the inhabitation of coastal and semi-arid cities. These are addressed through the acceleration of technological innovations that attempt to re-adapt populations to increasingly aquatic urban environments, that seek to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather or shift developments to what is considered safer ground. What I suggest is not so much that the designs and technicities of adaptation are not useful. Rather, we have to find ways of detaching them from the belief that they can prolong our normative orientations and will to habitation.

Equally troubling is the inverse of this position. Instead of acting as if all places and conditions are potentially habitable, incipient forms of urban governance act as if the ability to inhabit is not as important as the ability to "ride the uninhabitable." It is as if to "reside" means to "surf", to ride the crests, the ebbs and swells of greater or lesser turbulence (Braun 2014). To sustain place is less important than to speed up the diffusion of crisis, to speed up the dissociation of places from cumbersome histories so that these places can be hedged against the other. Places become embodiments for the calculation of risks. They are emptied of specific content and repackaged as indices of investment, capable of turning damaged materials and lives into harvests

of yet to be determined products or capacities. The emphasis here is on the ability to harness whatever takes place, whether habitable or not.

No Secrets About What is Going On

Even when coupled as the mirror image of our will to habitation, notions of the uninhabitable would seem anachronistic in light of the evidence it is possible to amass about the facts of where and how people live. If a certain part of the definition of the uninhabitable entails the extent to which a particular place is closed off from access to a larger world or is, in turn, relatively impermeable to incursions from the outside, then in this respect no place is uninhabitable. Even in the most seemingly depleted cities – Maiduguri, Bangui, Juba, Homs, or Gaza – there are doors to walk through. It is not the absence of doors, of ways in and out, that particular cities seem to lack, but rather a question of where these doors lead. Are they like doors in a large house, which lead progressively across spaces a person can feel as connected, as somehow linked to each other? Or do the doors open into to some kind of "Alice and Wonderland" inverted reality, where the urgency of getting out of a particular city usually takes place only through doors that lead to completely disorienting experiences, and where it is nearly impossible to attain a foothold or a clear sense of what is going on? In a world where every inch of the earth's surface can be surveyed, from which information can be drawn and specific persons or buildings targeted, little remains unknown.

Once it was a matter of what surveying eyes were interested in paying attention to. Vast interiors of supposedly uninhabited neighborhoods were not worth the effort required to know or engage. For long periods of time, important population centers in major cities were not even designated on maps because they were bastions of illegal occupation and poverty. It was simply not worth paying attention to the *bidonvilles,* peri-urban settlements, shantytowns, or even long-honed popular working and lower middle class districts because there was nothing going on there of any importance. Nothing was taking place, and as such, there was nothing to see.

Such occlusion sometimes could operate to the advantage of a particular part of the city. In the outer regions of Khartoum's Omdurman district, where I lived for three years, just before the city met the desert, there was a densely compacted maze of mud structures that from the air appeared like the crumbling remains of some

vast and abandoned way station. Yet, Souk Libya, as this place was known, was a pounding market where virtually everything was for sale, from the latest East Asian electronics, to surface-to-air missiles, to herds of sheep and camels. Brokers of at least fifteen different African nationalities controlled specific sectors of the market and traders came from as far as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania, mediating deals across the Middle East. Everyone in Khartoum claimed to have known about the market, had gone there once or twice, but it still acted as a public secret, a place beyond regulation and policing because at its surface it always exuded the sense that nothing happened there.

Of course within specific towns and cities there is great variance in the availability of particular doors, as many inhabitants are relegated to highly circumscribed spaces of operation. They may barely know anything outside their immediate vicinity, let alone anything about a larger world. No matter how much the world may come to them, through media, cellphones, internet, information and rumor, most of the doors available lead to the same room. There are times when these doors are tightly controlled, as if in a larger world of operations, it is important to keep too many prying eyes away in order to protect the little you have or to exert a semblance of control over a capacity to reach beyond it.

For many urban inhabitants, walking through doors has left them feeling that their lives are situated in the middle of a doorway, that no matter how many thresholds they cross, they are somewhere in the middle between the habitable and uninhabitable, no matter how much knowledge they may have about any given place in their city. This is an ambivalence that all the information saturated tagging of environments will not undo. No matter how available regression analyzed correlations between real estate values, availability of amenities, public services, history of property transactions, rates of growth, demographic profiles, capital investments, and local government budgetary allocations may be to any smart phone user inquiring about a specific location, a gnawing sense of uncertainty may remain (Stiegler 2013, Fisher 2014).

This ambivalence suggests a critical conundrum in working through the politics of habitation. For who is to determine what is habitable or not, and according to what criteria? How do we take the present distribution of habitation across many places normatively considered to be inhabitable and decide where people can live or not, and under what circumstances? In the exigencies to raise money for needed infrastructure, to provide work for a more youthful urban population, to work out more functional balances between maximizing the value of physical assets and assuring

that the city remains affordable for its residents, the standards used in constituting normative habitation become more homogeneous and constrained precisely during an era in which we are more aware then ever of the sheer plurality of situations that people are inhabiting.

In providing a narrower series of formats for how people live, and for spatializing the distribution of these formats in ways that require many to live at great distances from "where the action is" without having much action really going on in the places they do live, the doors that residents navigate increasingly lead onto an open-ended, generalized world. The features of this world may be easily recognizable but without much of a sense of differentiation, anchorage, or mediation. No matter how race-infused the sensibility of *us and them* might have been, doors now seem to open up onto a diffuse sense of *us and us*, where inhabitants have to figure themselves out in relationship to a largely undifferentiated world of other individuals in almost exactly the same boat. These are doors that would seem to leave little room for exchange, reciprocity and collaboration (Berardi 2009).

Why doesn't what works actually work?

Today a key objective of urban transformation is to construct high density affordable neighborhoods with sufficient green space, access to transportation and work. If this is indeed the case, then many of the so-called "popular", largely self-constructed districts mixing working and lower middle class inhabitants would seem to pose viable concretizations of this objective. For the past eight years I have lived and worked in several intensely heterogeneous central city districts in Jakarta. These are districts replete with different residential histories, built environments, economic livelihoods, and social compositions. During this time, I have had hundreds of opportunities for both formal and informal conversations with residents from very different walks of life.

Critically, these districts have never rested on their laurels, nor have they become calcified into a shaping of property that necessitates the defense of integrity or tradition. The capacity of such districts to accommodate, manage, and make the most of their heterogeneous composition is largely contingent upon continuous renovation and recalibration. It is hard work, because if you want to create room for adaptation and for different economic activity and sociability to affect each other's productivity, then no single actor or activity should enjoy a disproportionate value or advantage.

While such districts may be at a disadvantage in terms of managing how energy, water, sanitation, waste removal, material inputs, and commodities are connected to each other in reliable fashion – the diversity of human resources goes a long way in enabling these different resources to remain attuned to each other. Districts may not simply be crowded with people, but are also crowded with aspirations, tactical maneuvers, and conflicts. These push their way out into district space and require significant expenditures of tolerance, local ingenuity, and mediation, as the strict delegation of responsibilities to specific individuals, groups or institutions cannot always come up with the adaptations necessary in a timely fashion. Because districts of such intensities may have to reproduce similar functions with a changing cast of characters, knowledge about how to run things is spread around, but also at times leaves gaps in terms of deciding who has the authority to intervene in particular problems. In other words, advantages come with disadvantages; it is not a univocally clear story of win-win benefits. Nevertheless, there is much that can be worked with in terms of what already exists.

If you walk through the central city districts of Serdang, Utan Panjang, Sumar Batu, Cempeka Baru, and Harapan Mulya in Central Jakarta, you will see an enormous diversity of residential situations. As is the case amongst residents of any city, there may be many complaints and irritations. But these largely self-constructed areas provide both enough differences from each other to allow the congealing of particular lifestyles and affordances, and enough commonality to mitigate any sense that residents of different walks of life constitute some kind of threat to each other.

The question becomes why such districts, embodying many of the characteristics that most urban policymakers and planners would want from so-called "sustainable development", aren't viewed as the resources they indeed may be. Undoubtedly the location of such districts near the heart of the city exerts all kinds of pressures upon them, particularly as medium scale enterprises, such as banks, automobile dealerships, restaurant chains, and supermarkets extend outward, escalating land prices and drawing commercial-based revenues into municipal coffers. Still, many districts have demonstrated capabilities of rolling with these punches, as local entrepreneurial networks coalesce and up-scale their own operations, or residents themselves add on rooms to rent in order to cover increases in property taxes. The crux of these considerations seem to imply less the technical or fiscal impediments to the local productions of centrally located districts and more a very truncated image of exactly what exists across these districts and a limited view of just what can be viable.

This is not a matter of looking closer in order to discover a kernel of real truth and salvation. Keep in mind Joseph Conrad's injunction that the closer we look at things the less pretty they are. In fact, a closer examination at these operations of central city life reveal messy, unwieldy, and often violent natures that push and pull people and materials in all kinds of directions, throwing them off balance and thus into a lifetime of half-baked compensations. They are both habitable and uninhabitable, and this coupling renders them problematic for official governance, if not necessarily for the machinic logic of neoliberal urbanism (Peck 2013).

When I step out of my house in Jakarta on a small lane and turn the corner into a busy street, I step into the midst of many things: I step into a seemingly interminable argument between two storekeepers over whose responsibility it is to make sure that the trash container doesn't overflow; I greet two young men who voluntary sweep the streets for several hours every morning in order to strike up quick conversations with people waiting for transportation to go to work; I notice the beginning and endings of furtive couplings in the cheap by-the-hour hotels; I join the same convocation of customers at the small *warungs* (eating places), where we "compare notes" and plot both sensible and outrageous conspiracies to elevate our incomes; I sometimes join the line-up of devotees in front of the shabby office of a major local politician who moonlights as a spiritual advisor; I try to avoid the constant loading and unloading of trucks that in the frenzy always deliver goods to "wrong" destinations; I some-times feel part of the constant milling about of people of all ages seemingly waiting for real responsibilities but nevertheless feeding the street with eyes and rumors; I am always surprised by the daily appearance of some new construction or alteration, of something going wrong and being left unfixed for only seconds or decades; and I am in the midst of battered or bored lives going about pursuing the same routines and routes, as well as those who approach this street where they have spent every day of their lives as if it were the first time.

These multiple encounters and parallel, separated enactments, neither "good" nor "bad" are the substrate of the popular district. They are its real politics, even as hier-archies of authority and institutions are also obviously in place. Varying distribu-tions of capacities – to affect and be affected, to bring things into relationship, to navigate actual or potential relations – are political matters. These are matters about who gets to acquire particular emotional patterns, thresholds, and triggers, and are connected to a complex virtual field of differential practice, what Protevi (2009) calls *bodies politic.* What he means by body politic is the unfolding of a history of bod-

ily experience, of *specific* modulations on ongoing processes of people and things encountering each other.

What we might think of as the *virtual* is not some hidden potential that informs what a person's life could mean or the potentials lying in wait in any event. Rather, the virtual is the way that any encounter spins off into all kinds of directions and inclinations, as that encounter has enfolded different kinds of desires and perceptions to begin with. The question is where does this spinning off take someone, what will they make it of it, what other encounters will be sought out, avoided or accidentally impelled. This activation of the virtual – all of the encounters a person has inside and outside the house, at work, in the streets, in institutions – informs what a body is able to do at any particular time, where s/he does it, and what it is possible to perceive and pay attention to in a given environment, as each body acts on, and moves through other bodies.

This notion of *bodies politic* is important because it shows how the functioning of districts full of different kinds of people, backgrounds and activities does not work by residents forging some sense of community or that collaborations amongst them are primarily honed through a consensus of interests, division of labor, or proficient organizing techniques. Rather, things work out through an intensely politicized inter-mixing of different forces, capabilities, inclinations, styles, and opportunities that stretch and constrain what it is possible for residents of any given background or status to do. That no matter what formal structures, stories, powers, or institutions come to bear on what take place, no matter how they leave their mark, there is a constant process of encountering, pushing and pulling, wheeling and dealing, caring for and undermining that tends to keep most everyone "in play" – or able to maneuver and pursue.

Nevertheless, the persistent repetition, even hounding of urban residents, with the supposedly proper images of middle class attainment and overall well-being chip away at the convictions residents may retain about their abilities to construct viable living spaces for themselves. Time becomes an increasingly precious commodity, particularly as maximizing consumption and skill sets remain a critical indicator of self-worth. A younger generation of urban residents is more eager to escape the obligations of tending for parents and kin, let alone neighborhoods where the "rules" for belonging may become more stringent and politicized. A widening dispersal of interests and commitments are harder to piece together into complementary relationships and collaborations. The efforts at repairing and developing things that were

once matters of voluntary association more and more seem to require a formalized, contractual deployment of labor.

There is a widespread sense that these popular districts in Jakarta's urban core are finished, overladen with anachronistic business practices, excessive demands on people's time, and altogether too enmeshed in uncertainty to prove dynamic in the long run. Another consideration is the enduring frustration on the part of residents with the tedious bureaucracies, corruption, and wasted time entailed in residing in the older formats of the urban core. At times, there appears to be universal vilification of how bad things are run, and these images are not innocent as they are used to encourage resettlement in mega-complexes that exude the impression of efficiency and transparency, where everything is "run by the book."

But these impressions are tricky. Because neighborhoods increasingly vilified for being full of shakedowns, skewed deals, money lending, compounding interest, favors, sorcery, over-invoicing, re-sale, gambling, extortion, loaded gifts, kickbacks, pay-to-play, and hoarding then morph into statistical tendencies, branding, big data sets, probabilities, risk profiles, stochastic modeling, pre-emptive intervention, analytics-as-service, inter-operable standards, clouds, and ubiquitous positionings whose ethical implications and efficacy are not necessarily more advanced or clearer. As thick social fabrics are torn asunder or coaxed into more individualistic pursuits of consumption and well-being, there are no clear visions or practices for how residents, still operating in close proximity to each other, will deal with each other in the long run, especially in circumstances where urban economies are unable to provide work for an increasingly youthful population.

Displacing outmoded urban governments with purportedly more efficient and transparent municipal administrations may provide momentary optimism to a more educated young generation of urban residents. But these municipal endeavors to ensure more just environments for both the poor and middle class fail to grapple with the degree to which the real economic underpinnings of cities are largely configured elsewhere. A vast substrate of deals, accommodations, and compensations are necessary in order to sustain the apparent lawfulness and efficacy of urban policy (Swyngedouw 2009, Chatterjee 2011). The normative rationalities of management and governance – not really then so rational after all – in their inability or unwillingness to engage with the multiplicity of relational forms at work in the making of heterogeneous urban space actually undermine them. As I have shown, these relational forms are never completely coherent, transparent, accountable or decipherable. They are replete with contradictions, inordinate manipulations and generosities that are

thoroughly entangled, and not easily subsumable to emerging values and practices of "open source" or participatory governance.

Part of the issue is that anywhere you go in the South", no matter where it is, cities become subject to an increasing number of claims. The ability for anyone to definitively stake a claim necessitates widening interdependencies on relations and things that on the surface might not seem to have anything to do with a particular piece of land, building, or urban resource (Ribera-Fumaz 2009, Goldman 2011, Raco et al 2011, Caldeira 2012 Gazdar and Mallah 2013). Dispossessions and repossessions then multiply (Banerjee-Guha 2010), and it is increasingly difficult to chart out clear trajectories of what works or what doesn't. In such uncertainty, which increasingly cannot be deliberated within local collective life, dependencies are intensified on the acquisition of property for the self and the treatment of the self as property.

Part of the work of being in the city entails a range of literacies that have to be honed over time. Part of the importance of everyday urban practices is that they constitute a repository of urban learning, with important skills required in how to forge and conduct new relationships among people, places, and things. Instead of engaging these relational skills, urban residents are increasingly herded into rigidly formatted built environments under the auspices of affordability and security, where there are limited opportunities to hone or rehearse these skills. An important role for public policy then, is how institutions can effectively pay attention to the logics and dynamics of the everyday in order to creatively animate a broader public awareness of the larger issues concerning the relationships between justice, redistribution, climate adaptation and infrastructural change. Recasting urban life is then at the core of such a pedagogic, social learning project. If digital and new media are introducing new parameters for subjectivity, how do we think about new collective practices, focal and aggregation points so that new cultural practices emerge? Rather than leaving the work of collective aggregation to consumption machines or so-called "fundamentalist" traditions, we need to explore new social contexts, procedures, modalities and institutions of social learning as ways of substantiating new ways of being together.

Conclusion 1: We'll go any which way

One district in Jakarta exemplifies a piece of such social learning. Kampung Rawa, near the Senen rail station, was historically the port of call for many incoming migrants to the city. As the city's densest district, it is crammed to the hilt with a mix

of long-term residents, mostly eking out a minimal income, and newcomers attracted to the possibilities of acquiring and remaking cheap property. The residents in this district have lived with strong ties to block-by-block solidarities, invented kinship relations among neighbors, as well as strong ties to tricks, scams, and petty parasitism in every sector of daily life. Its residents are widely known for maneuvering their way across different styles of being in the city, switching back and forth among performances of religious devotion, gangland bravado, entrepreneurial acumen, and inventive social and political collaborations.

Yet, the district remains heavily redlined by all official institutions; youth have a hard time getting more than low-level jobs. The place is so crowded that most household members have to take turns sleeping, leaving some to roam the streets at all hours. At the same time, more renovations and physical adaptations are going on in Kampung Rawa than in almost any other part of the city, and on any given day the place can be repeatedly celebrated and vilified by the same mouths. Whatever objective readings could be taken of the conditions here, the sense its residents make of the place seems to go in all kinds of directions. The words they use to identify themselves vary across a wide register, as does their assessments of the likely future. Is the place poor or not, safe or not, viable or not? Most residents can indeed provide detailed and reasonable answers either way. But the sense they make collectively remains something in-between, most are prepared to act strategically, no matter which way the answer goes.

Conclusion 2: The region that can never be pinned down

Far away, but not all that far, from the normative expectations of calibrated diversities, the irruptions of terror, the imperatives to stay connected, and the emplacement of subjective life within ever-proliferating networks of algorithmic anticipation, there are urbanities and urbanites that remain unreachable. They may be *remainders* of another time and other ways of doing things, now sediments of marginality, whose practices are not fully subsumable or values extractable. Or, they may be unidentifiable through any known rubric of assessment, as they fleetingly, if ever, appear as the transmutation of discordant things coming together, without any institutional gravity to congeal them. Whatever form, there are significant *actors* that remain incommunicable, as a kind of urban darkness.

This darkness could be construed as a kind of *generic blackness* – an entire *region* of urbanity that remains unaddressed. It is unaddressed since fundamentally many

cities, particularly those of the Americas, were built on the very conditions of black labor being unaddressed, where black subjectivity and will is only recognized as prohibited or punished (Sexton 2010, Cañizares-Esguerra et al 2013). While blackness as the specific histories and experiences of Black people may operate as the primary expression of such generic blackness, it is not limited and totalized by the ontological and political conditions of Black people. The blackness of Blacks is a way into considering the generic, and the ways in which cities render particular bodies and ways of doing things expendable for no reason except to demonstrate their ability to do.

Regardless of whether the African American presence within American cities has been analysed *ad infinitum* and is at the core of the establishment of American urban sociology itself – note W.E. Dubois opening salvo, *The Philadelphia Negro* – blackness as a mode of urbanity remains out of reach. It remains ever present despite the massive demographic shifts that are emptying many Northern U.S. cities of their black populations, but it remains incommunicado. Blackness, then, is a region where no one seems to live. But it is at the heart of American living. The economic, cultural, and legal underpinnings of American urbanization could not have taken its current shape without black subjugation. Black subjugation meant the erasure of nativity and genealogy, the foreclosing of the possibility of recuperation, and assigning people to involuntary reinvention, always to be interrupted and messed with (Johnson 2001, 2013; Baptist 2012; Grandin 2014).

Blackness is the constant shadow of each urban formation. Many African Americans would appear to functionally live outside of this shadow, to be fully integrated into the normative rhythms of everyday life and to enjoy the guarantees of citizenship. Yet, this attainment, instead of pointing to the dissipation of a generic blackness or to the viability of the society's diverse composition, ends up reinforcing the intensity of the shadow. For, in the continued precarious economic or social status of the majority of Blacks, these attainments become their own states of exception, rather than evidence of progressive rectification or a continuous trajectory of change.

Generic blackness is not a world in which it is possible to reside. Yet, residence has been rendered possible on the basis of this blackness. The generic is not invisible; it is not an underside, **for it appears, time and time again**, always awaiting occupation, always already the place where everyone does live, but not a place where laws, norms or economies are made. It is that aspect of each and every place where we live that operates without these markers. At the same time, blackness is a way of "honouring the city differently" as Kathrine McKittrick (2013) puts it. For, even as the plantation became the place where black people were planted in America as its primary capital

investment, entangling economic growth with anti-black violence, sexual cruelty, and racial surveillance, it spurred secretive histories of urbanization rooted in different kinds of emplotment. At its most concrete, this entailed the folding in of aspects of plantation life into other ecologies, as well as the developing of various immersions into the physical surrounds that cultivated routes of circulation under the radar. Here, McKittrick (2013) refers to "the actual growth of narratives, food, and cultural practices that materialize the deep connections between blackness and the earth and foster values that challenge systemic violence" (p. 10). While the plantation laid the economic base for American urbanization, these different kinds of emplotment provide that urbanization with different possibilities.

Settlement patterns, economic practices, labor and housing conditions of black migration to major American centers could be described and accounted for, as well as the systematic ways in which urban residence was continuously undermined and made vulnerable for black inhabitants. But, the affective, heretical, and mutant figurations of sociality seemingly able to retain a sense of cohesion and solidarity in face of the constant violence and suppression remain opaque, outside accounting, even if as, Zora Neal Hurston puts it, they were always there to be "called upon." Blackness is shadow, the condition of insufficiency that haunts the city, which conveys its conceits and illusions of completeness and coherence. It is also the possibility of ways of rendering the city uninhabitable through normative conventions, protocols, property formations, and modes of governance. Blackness does not come with a particular set of visions or ontologies, but rather the impossible capacity to "be anything whatsoever", and thus envisions the city not so much as a place of human habitation, but as the possibility of the inhuman – of something still to be worked out, refigured (Allewaert 2013).

What often bothered the "managers" of cities in the North between the world wars, with their swelling numbers of black immigrants, was the matter of trying to count who belonged where, who belonged to whom. How would a population be managed if not corralled into clear alignments of affiliation? Later, the implicit deal of Fordism in Detroit was to avail jobs to Blacks in the automobile manufacturing industry as long as black social life was sufficiently domesticated into identifiable and countable household units. Employment was to be predicated on the black assumption of particular modes of making themselves visible and accountable. (Farley and Holzer 2000, Sugrue 1996, Muhammad 2011). Long honed sensibilities of space, of spacing-out, of affiliations premised on covering the different angles, and on seemingly amorphous collectives spanning oceans were to be tempered or associated with

various forms of being dysfunctional. What Spillers attempts to do in her notion of regions is to restore these histories, sociabilities, and sensibilities of spacing out.

In the essay "Black Beach", Edouard Glissant (1997) describes *Le Diamant* in southern Martinique, as terrain with a subterranean existence. Even at the surface of things, there is a sense that there are precipices all around, not precipices that one falls into, but through which the surface repeatedly emerges, as if viscous and constantly remade even when it seems to be unyielding, mundane. *Le Diamant* is an ever-swirling, constantly shifting landscape of volcanic sediment, changing colored sands, indiscernible winds, falling rock and trees, washed up foliage and stone, and seemingly interminable backwash – a volatile, heaving place neither part of sea or land. A solitary man constantly paces up and down the beach at different speeds, never saying anything, but always adjusting his steps to the chaos.

Glissant sees this walker as a metaphor for all of "the rhythm of the world that we consent to without being able to measure or control its course" (124); all of the commonplaces that produce a roar. For what could the walker on the beach say to get to the bottom of things, to make anything understood? The beach lives in its right to opacity, not as a secret removed, but simply as the excessive tracing of too many journeys and crossings of the flotsam of the world. All of the flailing, rubbing against, working through, clashes and caresses, promiscuous mixing and friction that keep bodies, times, memories, and cultures moving, without having to always take a reading of position or imaging the source of problems or potentials.

So, there is a "city" that cannot be enclosed or colonized, where there are no terms to hold people or things in common. Cities need to be full of diverse things. Regardless of the particular political reality of any city, there must be a way for these diversities to exist, at least partially, without differentials of force or value. In order to keep pace with the volatility of their continuous recombinant associations, no thing can become too indebted, too dependent upon specific characteristics or composed relations. Of course there are orders of things; things can only be comprehended through their incorporation, through being held in place, kept in line. At least in U.S. America, blackness has long been the preeminent vernacular for this holding down and letting go of things, of both enforcement and freedom, of the refusal to "hold down the hatch", born of being brought to the Americas in the "hold" – referring both to the material conditions and ontological nothingness of the Middle Passage. Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in (Carter 2013). And, as Lewis Gordon (2013) points out, there is no greater obligation to urbanization than to create a world where Black people everywhere can be at "home."

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