**The cosmopolitan contradictions of planetary urbanization**

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The urban presents itself as a place of conflict and confrontation, a unity of contradictions (Lefebvre 2003: 175).

This paper explores the empirical, conceptual and theoretical gains that can be made by using sociological cosmopolitan literature to think through the historical urban transformations that scholars in recent years have termed ‘planetary urbanization’: a nascent metropolitan space so elaborate it prompts consideration whether ‘[…] we really know, today, where the “urban” begin and ends, or what its most essential features are, socially, spatially or otherwise?’ (Brenner et al 2011: 226). It is suggested that urban sociology can be invigorated by focusing upon the disconnect that Henri Lefebvre (2003; 2014) posits between ‘the planetarization of the urban’—which he views as economically and technologically driven—and his dis-alienated notion of a global urban society, based upon ‘the re-appropriation by human beings of their conditions in time, in space and in objects—conditions that were, and continue to be, taken away from them […]’ (Lefebvre 2003: 179). The irony is that urban society is made possible by the same urbanization processes that also threaten to diminish urban life. Merrifield (2014: 8) suggests that the urban is not an analytical trope so much as a political strategy for Lefebvre: a set of relations premised upon simultaneity, gathering, convergence and encounter (Lefebvre 1996: 131). Moreover, the urban is a quality born from quantities, ‘it is a difference, or rather, an ensemble of differences’ (Lefebvre 1996: 131). The problem with market and state driven urbanization (as opposed to a self-managed urban society) is that, through its tendency to homogenise, segregate and exclude, it may prevent such ensembles from occurring. The relationship between planetary urbanization and urban society is not a zero-sum game however, whereby urban society is either wholly present or absent. Rather, urban society persists as an ‘illuminating virtuality’ (Lefebvre 2003: 16) or ‘possible object’ (ibid: 3) that cannot take shape until ‘the end of a process during which the old urban forms [such as the city] burst apart’ (ibid: 2). This raises overlooked cosmopolitan questions, such as how might a global urban society be achieved and what might it look and feel like? Indeed, Delanty’s (2009: 251) suggestion that globalisation provides the *external* preconditions for the *internal* emergence of cosmopolitanism is, this paper argues, analogous with Lefebvre’s urban problematic. Globalization and urbanization connect the world in a logistical, technological, political and economic sense but they negate or often fail to produce what Axelos (2005) calls the *mondialisation* of thought and action: the process of *becoming worldly* and sensing the world as *opening* (see also Elden 2015; Nancy 2007, Madden 2012). Lefebvre’s hope is that from the ‘shaky foundation’ provided by planetary urbanization, urban society may persist and intensify, even ‘through the most painful contradictions’ (Lefebvre 1996: 129). Although Lefebvre was to become less confident in these hopes (see Lefebvre 2014), recent scholars of planetary urbanization have retained Lefebvre’s optimism pointing to the ‘encounters’ (Merrifield 2012) or ‘transformations’ (Madden 2012) that contemporary urbanization encourages. This paper advocates a sceptical position that acknowledges these potentials but does not under-estimate the obstacles that delay or prevent the realisation of a global urban society.

Although urban sociologists have long been interested in cosmopolitanism (e.g. Sennett 2002; Sandercock and Lyssiotis 2003; Binnie *et al* 2006; Jones and Jackson 2014), the argument contained here is that recognition of tendencies towards planetary urbanization and the dissolution of the city makes the need for a cosmopolitan urban sociology more pressing than ever. Such developments (in actuality and theory) pose different cosmopolitan questions than those previously asked by urban sociologists. There are many reasons why urban sociologists might resist proclamations of planetary urbanization and/or the notion that the reign of the city is over, pointing to the increased rather than diminished influence of ‘global cities’ such as London, New York or Tokyo, the continued importance of neighbourhood bonds (Blokland 2003), or how city authorities remain responsible for organising public services such as health, education and transport, services that in turn shape the everyday lives of residents. These are important points and yet, in all these cases, what is preserved, arguably, is not the city itself—in an historical sense—but an ‘image’ of it. Albeit that this is a representation with ‘real’ effects (Lefebvre 2003: 57). Yet, these effects should not blind us to the more significant historical development, which is the vast expansion and extension of the urban fabric and the cosmopolitan questions this raises. Scholarship on planetary urbanization and cosmopolitanism can seem far removed from the realities of life in cities, suburbs and exurbs, but it is hoped this paper will help researchers working on topics as varied as say, asylum seeker detention, urban heritage or suburban poverty to understand broader urban and cosmopolitan challenges and the critical issues these challenges raise in relation to each topic.

The *first* aim of this paper is to highlight the benefits of using ‘cosmopolitan’ social theory to understand Lefebvre’s urban problematic (and to establish why this is also a *cosmopolitan problematic*)*;* the *second* is to identify the core cosmopolitan contradictions of planetary urbanization, tensions that are both *actually existing* and reproduced in scholarly accounts. As Highmore (2005) points out, analytical discourse is never ‘outside’ the purview of the urbanization process. Lefebvre’s (2003: 175) view is that the urban should always be conceptualised in opposition to segregation, that ‘which attempts to resolve conflicts by separating the elements in space’. Consequently, this paper attempts, in modest fashion, to contribute to a becoming urban society that no longer ‘resolves’ discord or difference through division and isolation. There are, then, both normative and epistemological consequences to the arguments made here.

The article begins by examining the challenges presented to urban sociology by planetary urbanization, before considering how cosmopolitan sociological theory helps provide an analytical ‘grip’ on the social realities of contemporary urbanization especially in relation to questions about difference, culture and history. This insight is used to identify three cosmopolitan contradictions that exist within urbanized (and urbanizing) space, tensions that provide a basis for a thoroughgoing cosmopolitan sociological investigation of planetary urbanization.

**Planetary Urbanization**

Whereas urban sociologists once saw the city as a world, it is now increasingly possible to recognise *the world as a city* (Zukin 2011: 15). It is less obvious today where exactly to locate the non-urban ‘elsewhere’—the exteriority—needed to demarcate *urban* studies. If urbanization is one consequence of the unthinking, unfettered realisation of the technological possibilities created by capitalist forces (Harvey 1996) then, as Merrifield (2013: 910) explains, urbanization is increasing its reach everywhere: ‘the urban is shapeless, formless and apparently boundless […] making it hard to tell where borders reside and what’s inside and what’s outside’. Despite the ubiquity of urbanization scholars are less clear about what urbanization actually *is.* Brenner (2013: 98) suggests that urbanization is comprised of ‘constitutive essences’: ‘the processes through which the variegated landscapes of modern capitalism are produced’. Yet, what these essences are remains unclear.

Most discussions of planetary urbanization are inspired by Lefebvre’s (1996: 70-1) theory of ‘implosion-explosion’ which suggests that as cities achieve greater concentrations of property, speculation and (post)-industrial activity, the urban centre implodes, acting as a spur to the expansion, or ‘explosion’, of urbanization. Brenner (2013: 102) suggests that concentration and extension comprise the two dialectically intertwined moments of planetary urbanization:

Within this extended, increasingly worldwide field of urban development, agglomerations form, expand, shrink, and morph continuously, but always via dense webs of relations to other places, territories, and scales, including to realms that are traditionally classified as being outside the urban condition. The latter include, for example, small- and medium- size towns and villages in peripheralized regions and agroindustrial zones, intercontinental transportation corridors, transoceanic shipping lanes, large- scale energy circuits and communications infrastructures, underground landscapes of resource extraction, satellite orbits, and even the biosphere itself (ibid: 103).

Nowadays it makes little sense to conceive of urbanization, urban life or urban sociology as organised around the city; rather, an expansive urban fabric ‘outstrips our cognitive and sensory facilities; the mind boggles at the sensory overload that today’s urban process places upon us’ (Merrifield 2013: 911). Brenner and Schmid (2014: 161) even suggest ‘the category of “city” has today become obsolete as an analytical social science tool’. The city is reduced to an image or ideology, or in Lefebvre’s (2003: 57) words, a pseudoconcept (see also Wachsmuth 2014). Brenner (2013: 92) argues the fragmentation of urban reality is replicated within urban studies. Concrete investigations of urban phenomena, such as labour markets, diversity or housing, constitute a ‘blind field’ in that the underlying process of planetary urbanization remains obscured from view (ibid: 91). One of the ongoing problems with urban sociology is its default position of ‘methodological city-ism’, meaning ‘[t]he city is a near-exclusive analytical lens for studying contemporary processes of urban social transformation that are not limited to the city’ (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2014: 5 added emphasis).

Lefebvre (2014: 205) worries that planetary urbanization is a homogenising force, reducing all spaces to their exchange value, thereby reformulating them as ‘abstract space’ (Lefebvre 1991). In this way urbanization can annihilate diversity and enforce hierarchy and segregation (Lefebvre 2006: 210). Expansive urbanization produces new vectors of inequality and exclusion as well as contestations around space itself, especially the right to centrality, assembly and expression. Of course, this has implications for Lefebvre’s (1996) rallying cry of the ‘right to the city’: a ‘superior right’ concerned with inhabiting, appropriating and actively contributing to the city as *oeuvre* or work of art. If the city really is at the point of dissolution, then what point or value is the right to it? Madden (2012: 782) interprets Lefebvre’s right to the city not as a return to the historic centre but as a challenge for ‘urban inhabitants to develop *new* spaces, institutional forms, and political frames’ (original emphasis). Merrifield (2013: 918) is also willing to reconfigure Lefebvre’s formulation, hopefully suggesting: ‘[…] a *politics of the encounter* will punctuate and define our urban landscape of the future’ (original emphasis). In response to explosive urbanization Lefebvre reformulated his notion of the right to the city to comprise instead a ‘revolutionary citizenship’ based upon themes such as ‘the possibility of conceiving difference and equality together’ and ‘the emergence of urban society on the global scale’ (Stanek 2011: 234). The intervention made here follows such logic and suggests that progression towards global urban society (premised upon the right to difference) depends, in part, on the emergence of a radical outlook based upon ‘a cosmopolitan epistemology of shared reality’ (Delanty 2009: 7): a general, but profound understanding of the socio-spatial-historical other.

**Urban Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitized Urbanization**

Cosmopolitanism is a ‘switch off’ word for those who associate the term with an ‘irredeemably European and universalizing set of values and human normativities’ (Jazeel 2011: 77), or are suspicious that cosmopolitanism presents a political ‘cover’ to make the world safe for capitalism and market freedoms (Harvey 2000). These qualms are understandable, yet within urban sociology cosmopolitanism has tended to be deployed more discreetly—at a lower level of abstraction—as a way of exploring diversity and belonging in a range of city spaces. Cosmopolitan urban sociologists have tended to see the goal as ‘[…] the recognition of plurality rather than the creation of a universal order, such as a cosmopolis’ (Delanty 2006: 35), stressing how global citizenship is only made possible through the scale of the urban (Binnie et al 2006: 5). For example, Hall’s (2012; 2015) ethnographic study of a south London street reveals in impressive, intimate detail the ‘multiple allegiances and visceral forms of mixing that spontaneously occur in urban life’ (Hall 2012: 4). Her study of micro-environments such as ‘Nick’s Caff’ reveals ‘a congregation of difference where both conviviality and contestation are at hand’ (ibid: 53). Jones, Jackson and Rhys-Taylor (2014) focus on how urban cosmopolitanism is linked with belonging and emotion, suggesting that cosmopolitanism is not about ‘living together’ or ‘tolerance’, but is a way of understanding deep connections between place, power and feeling.

In considering the cosmopolitan questions raised by the urbanization of the planet and the prospect of global urban society, Ulrich Beck’s notion of cosmopolitization is especially useful. For Beck (2002: 29) cosmopolitization is a realisation of global power relations and inequalities, a side-effect of economic globalisation. It refers not to universal principles but to an *actually existing* condition common to societies that have undergone a multi-layered, multi-scalar process of *internalisation* (Beck and Grande 2010: 417). Referring to the irreversible, agonistic interconnectedness of contemporary social life, Beck (2012: 9) suggests we are entering a global social milieu where there is no ‘other’:

The age of cosmopolitization stands for a world that for better or worse we all share, a world that has ‘no outside’, ‘no exit’, ‘no other’ anymore. […] We are destined to live with these interwoven, contradictory framings and situations […], not only subject to its power of domination but also contaminated by its self-endangerment, corruption, suffering and exploitation. Abandon all dreams of autonomy that would allow anybody to remain outside! (ibid)

Beck provides a darker reading of the ‘skeins and swirls, spirals and drips’ of the Jackson Pollock-like urbanization that Merrifield (2013: 219) describes, where ‘there’s no centre, no beginning, no middle or end’ (ibid). His notion of cosmopolitization helps capture the ambivalent, claustrophobic experience of being caught up within the perpetual churning of socio-spatial formation under capitalism (Brenner 2013: 99).

Harvey (2009) points to how the cosmopolitan imagination often relies on abstract notions of space and ignores cosmopolitanism’s material spatial groundings. Despite an emphasis on transnational interconnections, the spatial and urban and dimensions of Beck’s notion of cosmopolitization remains similarly under-specified. Nevertheless, a particularly suggestive example of cosmopolitization concerns how the economically and politically dispossessed are lured into selling their organs; meaning: ‘the secular millionaire survives thanks to the liver carved from a Protestant prostitute living in a Brazilian favela’ (Beck 2012: 8). Transplantation is an important metaphor for Beck in explaining how cosmopolitization implicates enmeshment with the other. We are immersed, he argues, in a dialectical process where the universal and particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and local are interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating (Beck 2006: 72–3); even if for the most part this is a coming together without dialogue or reflection of the involved persons (Beck 2012: 9). Cosmopolitization occurs behind people’s backs. They are agents in its creation but they are not in control of its direction or effects.

Cosmopolitization is argued here to be a ‘constitutive essence’ (Brenner 2013) of planetary urbanization. Metropolitan modernities—related to various stages of capitalist development—have become enmeshed within the contemporary urban fabric. The socio-spatial other is increasingly internalised in urban space. This process plays out in an extended, yet uneven spatial form. Two examples of cosmopolitized urbanization are now briefly discussed. The first concerns the ‘conversion’ of manufacturing and warehouse spaces in London’s industrial parks to places of Afro-Christian worship (Garbin 2013). These conversions challenge dichotomies between sacred and profane, religious and secular yet are also evidence of enmeshment between increasingly obsolete Western metropolitan modernities and transnational forms of African urbanism (see also Jackson 2014): ‘[T]he intensity of collective prayers and the embodiment of charisma provided a striking contrast with the quietness of an insipid surrounding landscape punctuated by anonymous warehouses, garages and workshops’ (Garbin 2013: 678). This represents a radical break with the zoning of previous waves of urbanization, providing also a sense of the ‘double time’ of urbanization, that ‘behind the present moment there is another time operating, other things taking place’ (Simone 2010: 9). Cosmopolitization describes the ambiguous coming together of space, time and social process in the ‘present past’ of contemporary urbanization, the urban palimpsests where improbable material spaces are ‘re-written’ and provided with new meaning (Huyssen 2003: 7).

A second example of how urbanization enmeshes metropolitan modernities and internalises the socio-spatial other is the rise of Lagos, Nigeria as an exemplar neoliberal, ‘self-service’ city. Whereas during the 20th-century the ‘African’ sections of the city were viewed by colonial rulers as rooted in ‘helpless tradition’ (Gandy 2006), the irony is that these same districts are now viewed as models of self-organisation that the West can learn from. As Rem Koolhaas argues, ‘Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos’ (cited in Roy 2011: 227). What is more, as Simone (2004: 2) recognises, ‘there is burgeoning interest within several European Union ministries as to what the apparent ungovernability, yet ongoing survival of cities like Lagos and Kinshasa may have to say about the future of urban governance in general’. That roughly seventy-five percent of basic needs are provided informally in the majority of African cities (Simone 2010: 210) reads as opportunity rather than catastrophe for economists in the West seeking to justify austerity budgets in the context of widening inequalities. Also, as Gentleman (2014) reports, ‘Kolkata style’ slums are now emerging in the back yards and interstitial spaces of London boroughs such as Newham, a cosmopolitized scenario intensified further by reports of Italian and Portuguese migrants ‘fleeing recession-hit Europe for the slums of Rio—a sort of reverse colonialism with its tail between its legs’ (McGurk 2014: 100). In such ways the sub-altern and the hegemonic can become entangled within planetary urbanization.

Cosmopolitization describes the clashing and enmeshing of metropolitan modernities and the novel ways in which contemporary urbanization incorporates or interpenetrates its socio-spatial other. The ambivalence of planetary urbanization is revealed in these examples. On one hand there is the exclusion, confinement and exploitation of difference, proving that cosmopolitization is ‘[…] not an elite, “pure” matter but an everyday, coercive, impure matter’ (Beck 2012: 12). On the other hand, the cosmopolitization of hitherto ‘empty’ sites such as the urban periphery or disused industrial spaces is a revelation, evidence of the transformative potentials within the present (Delanty 2014: 219), exposing also the ‘melange principle’ that ‘cosmopolitanism without provincialism is empty, provincialism without cosmopolitanism is blind’ (Beck 2006: 7). Cosmopolitization helps capture the great paradox of our global urban age (see also Skrbis and Woodward 2007). As such it is much more than another metaphor for globalization or transnationalism. Cosmopolitization points to the profound need to pay attention to the temporalities enmeshed within contemporary urbanization, not least the complex dynamics of colonialism, imperialism and postcolonialism (Gilroy 2010). Such dynamics complicate the advancement of urban society along the lines envisaged by Lefebvre. As Huyssen (2003: 11) states, much recent innovative work on categories of space, maps, geographies and borders neglects to focus on issue of temporality. This too is a limitation of scholarship on planetary urbanization though it is a weakness that a critical cosmopolitan approach can endeavour to overcome.

**Three Cosmopolitan Contradictions**

This section uses the focus on difference, culture and history conferred by the notion of cosmopolitization to propose and explore three cosmopolitan contradictions fundamental to understanding the pull and thrust of contemporary urbanization. These are: homogeneity and diversity; conflict and reconciliation/repair; and supercentrality and polycentrality. Each contradiction is inspired by empirical research, but calls for further concrete enquiry. As Lefebvre (2009: 74) says of the dialectical method: ‘[t]he content comes first, it is the real Being which determines dialectical thought’. Contradictions are not dualisms. As opposing tendencies they avoid the dilemma of either/or. For example, the cosmopolitan contradictions outlined below are all articulated both locally and globally, just as urbanization itself occurs across spatial scales (Brenner and Schmid 2014: 161-2). These contradictions are important for two reasons. *First*, they deepen understanding of the disjuncture that exists between the urbanization of the planet and global urban society. Understanding these contradictions is critical because as Lefebvre (2003: 17) states, ‘to realise it [urban society]—we must first overcome or break through the obstacles that make it impossible’. *Second*, each contradiction reveals the interplay between actually existing forms of urbanization and their conceptualisation and theorisation in social science and public discourse, pointing where appropriate to the ‘epistemic fallacies’ (Bhaskar 1979) that weaken empiricist, *city-ist* or architectural forms of urban inquiry. The series of cosmopolitan contradictions introduced here are an attempt to construe the urban world in a nuanced and sceptical manner. While they unapologetically reflect a cosmopolitan concern with difference, culture and history, these aspects of urban life are argued here to be articulations of material contradictions (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Moreno 2014). At root, this approach rests upon a conception, following Lefebvre (who follows Marx), of the concrete as a unity of multiple determinations (see Lefebvre 1982). As such, the resolution of material contradictions would not automatically dissolve the tensions reviewed here.

*Homogeneity and Diversity*

Eking out a living within the uneven fabric of planetary urbanization is an extraordinarily diverse array of peoples with divergent histories and experiences. Few would disagree that human diversity is an essential constituent of the urban (or cosmopolitan) mix, but diversity has spread far beyond the ‘zone in transition’ of modern myth. It is also generalised in the sense that, in the West at least, diversity has become a ‘catch all’ category used to incorporate—and potentially *homogenise*—those who are ‘racially’ or ethnically other (e.g. Vertovec 2007). This act of epistemological separation, while valid in terms of capturing novel immigration patterns since the 1990s and distinguishing these patterns from the immediate post-WWII decades, can obscure underlying urban questions. The configuration of diversity within any urban setting requires considerable scrutiny. *In itself*, diversity is not evidence of flourishing urban or cosmopolitan life. For example, Jackson (2014) reveals how geographical borders and social, moral and aesthetic boundaries are continually reconstituted in a diverse district of South London. The multicultural feel of the area is valued by residents who, in apparent contradiction, also seek to place the heterogeneity of their neighbourhood under some kind of control (ibid: 69). This is just one example of why Beck (2002: 18) chides scholars who rather too optimistically elide a cosmopolitized reality with normative-ethical cosmopolitan*ism*:

The study of cosmopolitization must not be confused with wishful thinking primarily concerned with projecting the cosmopolitan intentions of the scholar. There is no necessary connection between the study of the hidden cosmopolitization of nation-state societies and the rise of the “cosmopolitan subject”, even if some cultural theorists appear to believe there is.

This ‘cosmopolitan fallacy’ haunts a great deal of writing on cities and urban life. For example, Finney and Simpson (2009) use statistical sources to disprove a number of myths about immigration in the UK. While one sympathises with their stance against anti-immigration and anti-Islamic political rhetoric, their presentation of ‘facts’ within a wider ‘diversity as advantage’ discourse (ibid: 173) underplays sociological factors such as the segregation (if not quite *ghetto-isation*) of non-white residents (e.g. Kalra and Kapoor 2009); housing market discrimination against minorities (Rutter and Latore 2009); the ongoing geographical correspondence between diversity and deprivation (MacInnes and Kenway 2009); the denial of the right to the city caused by asylum seeker dispersal policies (Robinson 2003; Schuster 2004); the continued presence of racism and xenophobia in city and suburban environments (Millington 2005, 2010; Burnett 2012, Burdsey 2013); how migration—and therefore diversity—often results from expulsions rather than choice (Sassen 2013); and the misery endured by immigrants working in illegal urban economies (Ahmad 2008). Just as diaspora refers to a ‘relational network, characteristically produced by *forced* dispersal and *reluctant* scattering’ (Gilroy 2000: 123-4 emphasis added), diversity can also be an unintended outcome. This is why diversity itself ‘should not deceive anyone into believing that that we are all going to become cosmopolitans’ (Beck, 2002: 29).

In describing or analysing the diversity of urbanized space, an important concern of cosmopolitan urban sociology should also be to ‘ask how contemporary modes of proximity reopen prior histories of encounter’ (Ahmed 2000: 13). This involves bringing questions of ‘race’ and racism into analyses of planetary urbanization. The modern Western city has long been shaped by a ‘white city fantasy’ (Millington 2011). To imagine that urbanization processes, tied as they are to competing forms of capitalist imperialism, are no longer structured by ‘racial’ logics is wishful thinking indeed. The world is becoming urban, but as Winant (2001) states, the world is also becoming a ghetto. And yet some accounts of planetary urbanization or cosmopolitan urbanism do contribute, unwittingly, to imbuing our most pressing urban issues with a ‘post-racial’ sheen. As Goldberg (2009) explains, commitments to ‘do away’ with ‘race’ are often viewed as noble attempts to end racism. Yet being against ‘race’ does not mean the ‘end of racism’. Goldberg asks,

‘[…] what is refused in this collapse, what buried, what buried alive? What residues of racist arrangement and subordination—social, economic, cultural, psychological, legal, and political—linger unaddressed and repressed […]? What doors are thus closed to coming to terms with historical horrors racially inscribed, and what attendant expressions of racial grief and group melancholia, on one side, and racial self-assertion and triumphalism, on the other, are left unrecognised?’ (ibid: 1).

Cosmopolitan urban sociology can play an important role in unearthing the racisms and ‘racial’ fantasies festering within the fabric of contemporary urbanization, be this police brutality towards blacks in US suburbs such as Ferguson (Gordon 2014) or the tragic racialization and securitization of the Mediterranean that has occurred in order to stem the flow of refugees into the EU from countries such as Syria, Eritrea or Somalia (Huysmans 2006). The doors Goldberg that argues are closed in coming to terms with both ‘racial’ horrors and senses of entitlement, are doors that also need to be opened in any progressive movement towards global urban society.

Diversity can be as tragic as it is captivating, and so it is important to recover differences in experience rather than to describe, or worse, *marvel* at high levels of human diversity. Either as a numbers game or as measured through an index of dissimilarity, diversity brings no guarantees of urbanity or cosmopolitanism. Contemporary urbanized environments are full of people who have experienced trauma elsewhere; people escaping wars, family sorrow and persecution (Simone 2010: 10). They may also experience racism, xenophobia and poverty in their new ‘homes’. None of this precludes cosmopolitan openness—*of course*—but, as Avery Gordon (2008: 4) points out, people do ‘get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles’. The duress of cosmopolitized/ urbanized space—a milieu where the world’s antagonisms are internalised (Beck 2007: 10)—can exacerbate such symptoms. Sociology should therefore be wary of creating a pastoral that de-antagonises or homogenises urban diversity; of endorsing an epistemological separation that silences the expression of difference (Lefebvre 2003: 175-6). The flip side of this is that while Beck’s (2005: 285) argument that ‘[c]osmopolitanism does not entail a timeless levelling or elimination of all differences but […] the radical rediscovery and acknowledgement of the other’ is welcome, scholars should also be wary of fetishising or essentialising the difference of ‘the stranger’ (Ahmed 2000).

*Conflict and Reconciliaton/ Repair*

To adapt what Beck, Levy and Sznaider (2009: 125) write about the nation: *the city must be remembered in order to overcome it*. If settlement in urbanized space is often the result of coerced choices or unconscious decisions and the product of dependencies and force rather than choice (Beck and Grande 2010: 418), then consideration must be given as to whether this conflicted and divided terrain can ever be socially reconciled—glimpsed in terms of its totality—or whether it is broken beyond repair. The problem, once again, is the ‘disjuncture between the actually existing technocratic “urbanism” of neocapitalism and a possibly more liberatory, humanistic urban practice of the future’ (Wachsmuth and Brenner 2014: 199). Global urban society depends upon a shared ‘ethos, a habitus, and an inhabiting’ (Nancy 2007 cited in Madden 2012: 775); it involves the creation of such values *through* conflict, political struggle and ultimately, reconciliation or repair. It is the suppression of the creation of meaning—the denial of each possible struggle—that, for Nancy (2007: 54), constitutes injustice. Sennett (2012) offers three ways to perform a repair that are used to guide the discussion that follows: *restoration* involves remaking an item ‘just like new’ by producing the illusion that what has been fixed was never actually broken (ibid: 213); *remediation* substitutes better parts or materials resulting in detectable change but still allows the object to be used for the same purpose as previously (ibid: 214); *reconstruction* offers the most radical form of repair. Here the breaking of an object is seized as an opportunity to *re-make* the object in terms of both form and function (ibid: 215). Two examples of how the dialectic of conflict and reconciliation/repair is expressed as a tendency in contemporary urbanization are discussed below.

Recent attempts to reconcile or repair traumatic social pasts have seen the growth of de-territorialized cosmopolitan memory cultures that contribute also to the emergence of a global urban culture. Yet, as Macdonald (2013) notes, attempts to nurture cosmopolitan memory are always vulnerable to re-territorialisation or co-option by the powerful. Attempts at social repair can, despite cosmopolitan intentions, serve anti-cosmopolitan ends. For example, Wells (2007) discusses public sculptures in Brixton, London to commemorate the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 and the Soweto student uprising of 1976 (unveiled in 1987 and 1998 respectively). Wells argues that despite cosmopolitan appearances both sculptures ‘empty out’ the specificity of each event in order to promote the image of Brixton as a post-conflictual, post-racial place (ibid: 202). The iconography of anti-apartheid struggle and the immorality of racial exclusion in South Africa is drawn upon to pull a veil over the persistence of racism and inequality closer to home (ibid: 205). This constitutes what Sennett (2012) calls *restorative* repair: the post-conflictual veneer of the liberal, capitalist city is polished by reference to ‘racial’ inequalities, segregation and exclusion elsewhere. The past is literally a foreign country as Brixton, with its pacified ‘boutique multiculture’ (Keith 2005: 81), is restored ‘as new’. Here, the prospect of a self-critical cosmopolitan urbanism deeply engaged with the historical experience of the other (both near and far), is compromised by tendencies towards boosterism, which, alongside gentrification and displacement, creates rather than alleviates division and conflict. Delanty (2009: 83) suggests that cosmopolitan culture should eschew self-celebration in favour of self-critique and historical reflexivity. Rather than *jeopardising* identity, self-critique promises an inexhaustible, more open sense of place. As Sennett (1970: 139) famously argues, the goal is to *learn* from antagonism rather than fostering a ‘solidarity myth’.

A very different example of how urbanization induces conflict and reconciliation/repair can be seen in the history of the 23 de Enero housing complex in Caracas, Venezuela. This bold Latin American example of modernist mass housing—now a World Heritage site—was built in the mid-1950s during the military junta headed by Marco Pérez Jiménez. As McGurk (2014: 151) explains, during the 1940s the population of Caracas doubled, swelling slums and prompting conflict over legitimate uses of the city. The response of the military, an attempt at repair as remediation, ‘was to forcibly decant the barrio dwellers into a social housing project on a scale that the continent had never seen’ (ibid). Slums were replaced with sanitary forms of housing in an attempt to make the city more governable. Yet, in advance of the official opening, Jiménez fell from power in the popular uprising of 1958. Before tenants for the new housing had officially been decided, thousands moved in and occupied the apartments. Decades later, when buildings became overcrowded with squatters, ‘new arrivals began building their homes in the verdant spaces inbetween’ (ibid: 152). Successive governments ignored the new barrios, which to survive ‘plugged themselves into the old housing, from which they took their electricity, water, and sewerage, while at the same time integrating with them socially, as extended families now lived in both the high-rises and adjacent barrios’ (Byard and Klein 2005: 63). Today, 23 de Enero is a truly cosmopolitized space, juxtaposing and interweaving the modernist and informal city. Yet, despite the apparent chaos that delights *architectural* critics, ‘the similarities of the two housing types is startling: the composition of the inhabitants, the physical squalor at the bottom of the global social ladder […]’ (ibid: 64). Mass housing and slums are shown to perform the same function, with neither eradicating patterns of segregation or poverty. The city remains conflicted despite both attempts at ‘repair’. What has changed is that government can no longer *afford* to view informal settlements as a provocation. There is no funds or will for more attempts at repair. And yet the cosmopolitization of 23 de Enero has enabled it to become a symbol of social reconciliation: ‘rather than the defeatist image of modernism overrun by the barrio, it’s a though the informal city has become the connective tissue joining together what were once isolated tower blocks’ (McGurk 2014: 153). Urban society finds its practico-material base in the interstices of urbanization, in the gaps between conflict and repair. 23 de Enero stands today as a centre of radical, spontaneous, self-organising and heterogeneous urban life. It is a contradiction; a redolent symbol of all that cosmopolitized urban space is, and all that it *could be*.

Planetary urbanization conceals but also, in surprising ways, makes visible past conflicts and trauma. The failings of urbanization inspires countless attempts at repair, many of which—driven by the urge to govern or by more narcissistic motives—might ultimately be deemed anti-urban and/or anti-cosmopolitan. Attempts at repair may also be co-opted or appropriated for ends that may result in further conflict, prompting yet more rounds of repair. As Sennett emphasises, the *kind* of repair work undertaken matters, since most forms of repair simply permit a faulty or poorly conceived object to (dys)function in the same ways it had previously. Cosmopolitan analyses of planetary urbanization should be alive to how past conflict and trauma and historical attempts at repair are interwoven—sometimes carefully, oftentimes callously—into its fabric. A cosmopolitan urban sociology that seeks, however modestly, to help usher a global urban society should therefore avoid ‘presentism’—a fetish for new models and maps of planetary urbanization —and instead be infused with ‘a strong consciousness of historical complexity’ (Inglis 2014: 1). What this consciousness involves, as Nancy (2007: 52) beautifully puts it, is the creation of ‘meaning in the strongest and most active sense of the term: […] meaning, absolutely, as possibility of transmission from one place to another, from the one who sends to the one who receives […]’. Urban sociology can and should be alive to the possibility of finding such forms of meaning within urbanization (regardless of how bland *or* fascinating it might appear on the surface); to critically explore its hidden and visible conflicts and/or divisions and the subsequent attempts at repair, at once contributing to, but also hoping to instigate, yet further attempts at cosmopolitan reconciliation (a process which is ‘always at work’).

*Supercentrality and Polycentrality*

Cosmopolitization is Janus-faced, pulling people together and apart simultaneously (Beck 2011:13). Contemporary urbanization works similarly, containing leanings towards supercentrality and polycentrality, towards both concentration and extension (Brenner 2013). The former—the kind of centrality implied by Sassen’s (2001) notion of the ‘global city’—has anti-cosmopolitan propensities towards securitization, exclusion and dispersal (Millington 2011). The latter, however, contains the seeds of a more hopeful polycentric and cosmopolitan urban society, providing evidence of the ‘possibilities for transformation that an urban world might still contain’ (Madden 2012: 784). Each tendency is outlined below.

Global supercentres are increasingly dominant, their influence stretching far beyond the national scale (Sassen 2001). They seek to concentrate *everything* while leaving the periphery—comprising sites such as ‘outer-inner cities’ (Millington 2012) and the slums of the global South—to become examples of *heterotopy*, referring to ‘the other place, the place of the other, simultaneously excluded and interwoven’ (Lefebvre 2003: 128). The danger then is that the urban, cosmopolitan potential of the periphery is foreclosed by hyper-functionality and nurtured dependence upon the global city’s repressive monopoly over economic, symbolic, cultural and political capital. The global city becomes a ‘gilded ghetto’, of which ‘London is an instructive, perhaps the pre-eminent, exemplar given its highest concentration per capita of billionaires and super-wealthy households’ (Atkinson and Burrows 2014). In discussing prospects for cosmopolitan consciousness to emerge from the wreckage of market-driven urbanization, there is compelling evidence that cosmopolitization is resisted from centre to wave: by privilege, securitization and revanchism in the centre and ethnoracial conflict, poverty, invisibility, resentment and community fragility and on the periphery (Millington 2011). Rather than creating openness, supercentrality can cause people to become resistant to ‘alternative ways of life and rationalities, which include the otherness of the other’ (Beck 2002: 18).

Beck (2002) identifies three ‘enemies’ of cosmopolitanism, each of which might be associated with tendencies towards supercentrality: nationalism (and other forms of essentialism), globalism (liberalised markets) and democratic authoritarianism (how neoliberal states compensate for their loss of democratic power by resorting to authoritarian responses to issues such as immigration). According to Beck (2012: 11) these forces help explain why ‘[t]he cosmopolitization of living conditions and life-worlds does not necessarily engender cosmopolitanism as consciousness and mentality’. Urban society faces similar foes. For nationalism, read racism and xenophobia; for globalism, read the socio-spatial repressions of neoliberal urban governance (e.g. Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2009); and under the category of democratic authoritarianism one might include ‘roll out’ gentrification (Smith 2002), the deportation, detention and dispersal of immigrants (Bloch and Schuster 2005) and the increasing militarization of urban space (Graham 2010). The enemies of cosmopolitanism contribute also towards the separation and segregation of difference and the hierarchisation of urban space; they break the potential ‘unifying power of urban form’ (Lefebvre 2003: 124).

And yet, the opposing tendency of planetary urbanization is towards a polycentric urban society, a dispersed cry and demand for centrality expressed by a ‘global *banlieue*’ of differently excluded and oppressed groups. Polycentrality evokes a post-universal cosmopolitan urbanism that opposes homogeneity and promises even to ‘create difference where no consciousness of difference existed’ (Lefebvre 2003: 174). Polycentrism dissolves rural-urban-suburban demarcations and shifts the contradiction to urbanized space itself: ‘between the centrality of power and other forms of centrality, between the wealth-power centre and the periphery […]’ (ibid: 170). Connections between these ‘other forms of centrality’ are of enormous importance in terms of investigating urban society as an immanent transformation of urbanized reality (see, for example, reports that Palestinian youth tweeted advice on coping with tear gas to protestors against racism and police brutality in Ferguson, Missouri[[1]](#endnote-1). Perhaps there were messages of solidarity from 23 de Enero too?). Such *encounters* demonstrate how emerging urban centres might form transnational alliances in the articulation of an urban civil society previously associated with the city itself (Delanty 2000: 101). Such sites may appear on the periphery of the city (Watson and Saha 2013), or found flowering within the forgotten margins of the global city itself (Hall 2012). The broad point, which is also a dialectical one, is that the exclusion/expulsion of immigrants, racialised others and poor from supercentres provides necessary conditions for the occurrence of ‘cities of refuge’, ‘allied to each other according to forms of solidarity yet to be invented’ (Derrida 2001: 4). Polycentrism materialises from an impure, grounded cosmopolitanism that may not look like progress; rather, it is ‘deformed and profane, cloaked with the anonymity of a side effect’ (Beck 2006: 20).

Polycentrality implies not a homogenised, claustrophobic and barely habitable urban ‘nowhereville’ (Bauman 2002), but a differential space produced as a result of the heterogeneous elements that assemble in space and how these elements confront and reflect upon a shared urban reality (Lefebvre 2003: 125). Polycentric urbanism veers between a conviviality marked by unruly, chaotic and antic interruptions (Gilroy 2005: 131) and a more sober, dialogic cosmopolitanism concerned with plurality, repair and restitution[[2]](#endnote-2). Here, obscure points in urbanized space transmute into *real* urban places—centres, no less—that slowly but surely exert a pull on people and objects settled elsewhere. This is why Lefebvre (1996: 170) is adamant that ‘the possibility of an urban society […] cannot be satisfied with centralities of the past […]’. Polycentrality represents Sennett’s (2012) most radical form of repair: repair as reconstruction.

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Cosmopolitan social theory is helpful, possibly necessary, in analysing the social, cultural and historical dimensions of planetary urbanization, especially Lefebvre’s dialectic between the ‘planetarization of the urban’ and ‘global urban society’. The cosmopolitan contradictions outlined above point to core social, cultural and historical tensions within planetary urbanization; tensions that act as both obstacles and pathways to urban life as idealised by Lefebvre. They also raise four important points regarding how cosmopolitan urban sociology might be conceived. First, is an emphasis on empirical and theoretical work on urbanization (in cities or otherwise) that seeks to untangle connections between places, spatial scales and temporalities and to view these connections as ‘differentially located within wider power-geometries’ (Massey 2005:102). Second, is the need to make expansive urbanization *meaningful*, to recognise the current urban problematic as one that, still, concerns (and combines) issues such as belonging, alienation, discrimination, inequality, hope and desire. Third, if planetary urbanization is ever to transmute into an urban globality of sense, it demands to be viewed from a variety of situated perspectives, that ‘folds the way it has been understood by its others back into its operations’ (Gilroy 2010: 622). Cosmopolitan urban sociology must then defend cultural difference and pluralisation against the homogenising forces of planetary urbanization (in actuality and theorisation). Urban space serves a pedagogical role if we let it; it can teach about difference and otherness, while also encouraging a process of collective self-discovery and dis-alienation that is ongoing (Lefebvre 2003: 176). Finally, there is a need to not downplay the discontents of planetary urbanization, whilst recognising the unprecedented openness of our current metropolitan age. It comes from a surprising source, admittedly, but Beck (2006: 3) offers a fertile definition as to what a sociological cosmopolitan response to the challenges of planetary urbanization might look like:

[A]n everyday, historically alert, reflexive awareness of ambivalences in a milieu of blurring differentiations and cultural contradictions. It reveals not just the anguish but also the possibility of shaping one’s life and social relations under conditions of cultural mixture. It is simultaneously a sceptical, disillusioned, self-critical outlook.

**Conclusion**

Planetary urbanization raises important cosmopolitan issues, not least of which is the tension between technocratic and market-driven urbanization processes and the emergence of a global urban society along the grounded utopian lines envisaged by Henri Lefebvre. A useful, and critical, way of conceptualising this disjuncture involves the use of sociological cosmopolitan literature. A cosmopolitan imagination foregrounds the social, cultural and historical in the study of planetary urbanization, aspects that have thus far been neglected. Cosmopolitan social theory brings greater awareness of the divergent unities of time, space and process that are tied up, or enmeshed, within contemporary urbanization. Beck’s (2012: 11) seminal observation that ‘[t]he cosmopolitization of living conditions and life-worlds does not necessarily engender cosmopolitanism as consciousness and mentality’ allows critical urban scholars to engage in cosmopolitan questions *that are also some of the most pressing urban questions*. In identifying three core cosmopolitan contradictions of contemporary urbanization, this article explicitly focuses on issues of difference and otherness, issues that are uppermost in Lefebvre’s understanding of a global urban society based upon the ‘right to difference’. Those contradictions outlined in this article—between homogeneity and diversity; conflict and repair/reconciliation; and supercentrality and polycentrality comprise a far from exhaustive list. Yet, individually and taken together, these contradictions—derived from concrete research—reveal how contemporary urbanization produces ambivalent spaces of contrasting tendencies, spaces of antagonism but also remarkable potential. The aim of cosmopolitan urban sociology should not be to resolve contradictions, but to identify and release tensions into the open; to act as urban society might: by recognising, creating and enhancing difference and through meaningful engagement with the socio-spatial-historical other. Cosmopolitanism has fascinated urban sociologists for a long time but there is reason to believe that, finally, planetary urbanization presents *the* moment for a cosmopolitan and critical urban sociology to flourish.

**Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to Paul Watt, David Beer and the three anonymous reviews from this journal for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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1. See this article: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11036190/Palestinians-tweet-tear-gas-advice-to-protesters-in-Ferguson.html> [accessed 9.12.14] [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. As Lefebvre (2014: 205) writes, in urban life ‘play and gravity are at once opposed and merged; dwelling, going down the street, communicating, and talking—they are both serious and fun’. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)