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– MOVEMENT 5. SENSING THE AFFECTIVE LIVES OF ARRANGEMENTS

THE RE-ARRANGEMENTS COLLECTIVE

Abstract

This final movement explores whether thinking with re-arrangements can help us account for that which is hidden, unseen or nested in the recesses and folds of urban practices. And if so, how we might then talk about and account for elusive parts of an arrangement that both exert an influence and are influenced. This essay uses sensibilities as an entry point into the intangible interactions between subjects and (re)arrangements.

> 'Something throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation; a something both animated and inhabitable.'
>
> Kathleen Stewart (2007: 1)

Introduction

Can thinking with re-arrangements help us account for that which is hidden, unseen or nested in the recesses and folds of urban practices? And if so, how might we talk about and account for elusive parts of an arrangement that both exert an influence and are influenced? This final movement uses sensibilities as an entry point into the intangible interactions between subjects and (re)arrangements. It is concerned with the ways in which the embodied and spatialized ricochet off each other in relational ways—it attends to the 'roiling maelstroms of affect' described by Nigel Thrift (2008). Although they shape the ways in which we approach the world, the elusiveness of sensibilities makes them hard to work with; they emerge from muddled, imprecise spaces and moments to structure life in cities such as Birmingham UK, Brussels, Karachi, Abidjan and Cape Town.

Focusing on these five cities, and using the rich concepts of affect, aspirations, sensoria, atmospheres and 'atmotechnics', we sketch out some of the questions concerning positionality and atmospheric or affective agency within shifting and antagonistic urban constellations. Because sensibilities are embroiled in what we think of as gut reactions, intuitions, feelings, and the ways in which our senses and sensibilities have been cajoled into shape, we place the sense-able subject at the heart of our investigations. It is the subject's body that is at one and the same time permeated by the forces that influence the arrangement, and an agentic tool through which to have an impact on the arrangement. Gesturing to this relationship between sense-able subject and (re)arrangements, we outline another way of knowing the urban, one that accepts incompleteness, absences and incomprehension; one that doesn't 'hold' the city but 'feels it out'.

In this fifth movement, we explore how arrangements are sensed, felt, worked with and acted upon in embodied and ephemeral ways. We are concerned with the sensory, the visceral, the (subconscious and non-conscious) memoried dimensions of arrangements; with that which is simultaneously subjective and a shared disposition. Connecting the cities we work in—Birmingham UK (Hussain), Karachi (Suhail), Abidjan (Conte), Cape Town (Sitas) and Brussels (Osbourne)—we probe the relational and political aspects of sensibilities.

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Arrangements have tangible effects. People 'sense' the common contextual categories and relational processes that they navigate daily, even where these elude clear definition or are held together tentatively through a range of usurped materials, makeshift brokers and provisional places. Arrangements may be utterly mundane, easy to identify, familiar in their shape, clear in their occurrence. Yet they may simultaneously hold—or exist as—spectral presences, remainders and potentialities; as cosmological engagements with life and death, with past and future, with what might have been. Something else, then, also inhabits the urban; something which makes itself felt—sometimes through the re-shuffling of routine actions and in the fissures that emerge within known and well-trodden urban patterns. At other times (no less enigmatically) it manifests in the spectacular, in the urban on display. This ghostly dimension of arrangements blurs the distinction between material and immaterial as it etches itself onto the surfaces of the city, sediments in the silts of the metropolis, informs sub-texts and unuttered words.

This spectral presence is a sense-able force that holds the arrangement together, allows it to press, thicken, quicken and precipitate toward re-arrangements, propelling the *re-making of urban terrain and social composition* as signaled in the first movement of this intervention. The disorienting and (dis)assembling dimensions of arrangements ask us to be attuned to what lingers, what acts as an undercurrent in how people experience and make a life, or collective lives, in cities (Bhan *et al*., 2020). If arrangements are shifting and volatile, and since re-arrangements do not always announce themselves, they cannot only be perceived cognitively, they must also be made sense of intuitively. Because arrangements operate in the realm of the indeterminate, it is impossible to know their truth, to separate the feeling from the reality; arrangements require probing and 'sounding' (McCormack, 2020).

At the center of our concern with arrangements is the 'sensible/sense-able subject' (via Haraway, 2006) who, as we move from city to city, takes different guises in this text and through which we gesture toward existing narratives and concepts that theorize *sensoria*, *atmospheres*, *affects*, *aspirations* and '*atmotechnics*'. Far from being exhaustive, we draw on these sensibilities to illustrate a relationship between the unmarked and often unremarkable becoming palpable, instrumental and essential in the correlation between subjects and (re)arrangements. We use the term sensibilities as an umbrella to gesture to the tectonic energies that characterize the lives of city dwellers but which cannot be subsumed under the categories otherwise used to think through urban (dis)orders.

Sensibilities provide us with a 'key to decipher deeply embedded dispositions, desires and concerns that steer us towards a particular kind of response that is most resonant, most appealing and most promising' (Sitas and Pieterse, 2013: 330). Attuned also to the contemporary desire for a return to normal (or the anticipation of a new (ab)normal) that the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust on our capacities to live with uncertainty, our attention to sensibilities is charged with politically loaded questions: how do city dwellers contend with the normativizing powers that simultaneously constrain and discount them? How can they be a part of, navigate and survive arrangements that are designed to exclude? What politics and techniques of hope, aspiration and invocation are necessary to re-imagine and re-shuffle pernicious urban arrangements?

In using sensibilities as an entry point into the interactions between subjects and (re)arrangements, we are indebted to scholarship on affect and atmospheres (e.g. Massumi, 1995; Stewart, 2007; Thrift, 2008; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Sitas and Pieterse, 2013; Fregonese, 2017; Gandy, 2017; Anderson, 2021). While we cannot do justice to the conceptual multiplicities and debates that make up this body of work, we (both as a group and individually in our own undisciplined trajectories) follow its paths toward the sensed, the embodied, the emotional aspects of urban living. We also owe an analytical debt to black studies (e.g. Glissant, 1997; Weheliye, 2014; Sharpe, 2016; Hartman, 2019;

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Hirsch *et al*., 2021), which have pushed for attention to be paid to the sensuous, sonorous, imaginative and sometimes ineffable textures of life as part of a broader 'commitment to possibility' (McKittrick, 2020: 71), and a wayward curiosity unbounded by the descriptive categories of colonial science. Together, these varied theorizations point to the sense-able life of arrangements in and through which the city is lived, if not always readily livable. They also guide the composition of this essay as a compilation of out-of-focus story-pictures that make sensible, through their haze, a depiction of the elusive potentialities of sensory and atmospheric engagements with the urban.

We start our explorations by signaling how racialized arrangements of space are sensed and felt in Birmingham, Brussels and Cape Town. Here, we evoke how subjects 'feel out' and interpret atmospheres and sensoria—with an emphasis on sound—to locate themselves within urban (re)arrangements impacted by race relations. We suggest that focusing on atmospheres, affects and sensoria points both to the techniques that city dwellers use to navigate 'official', 'institutionalized' or 'settled' urban formations with(in) bodies inscribed as other, and to the ways they reclaim arrangements, revealing these to be atmospheric terrains that are unsettled, amorphous, open to contestation and insusceptible to full capture.

These techniques come into sharper focus as we head to Karachi and Abidjan, where we consider how urbanites who contend with fractured landscapes of opportunity seek to influence the sense-able dimensions of the arrangements they live with and through. We first highlight the aspirations through which residents orient and navigate (see Movement 3) the arrangement of everyday life toward potentially stable futures in a way that unhinges both the known (the material realities of precarity and predation) and the unknown (the uncertainty of life and livelihood). Aspirations, in turn, are closely linked to what we call 'atmotechnics' (following Wall, 2019), which are the practices through which urban dwellers attempt to influence and mold atmospheres in order to precipitate change in the arrangements they inhabit.

A feel for the arrangement: atmospheres of blackness, sensoria of white space

Birmingham, Cape Town and Brussels, each in its contextually specific way, manifest what might be called the black city. By this we do not (only) mean territorial configurations forged at the intersection of desires for purity and control that have structured these cities historically—or the 'hallucinations of whiteness' (Simone, 2019) in which the triage of racialized bodies operates seamlessly along with the extraction of value. These enduring histories of racialized dispossession and containment, at various scales, have indeed shaped each of the cities we work in. Yet, within and against the territorial and biopolitical work of racialization, there is a blackness at play in the form of 'obdurate city-making sensibilities' (Simone, 2016a: 187). For the sense-able subject, blackness is experienced as a condition of simultaneous dispossession *and* generativity, which wields specific imaginaries and techniques of futurity and overcoming (Simone, 2016a; 2016b). The black city, then, is at once a contextually and historically specific articulation of identities, and a 'generic' potentiality (Simone, 2016a) that inheres in all areas where precarity and expendability are normalized as conditions of urban life.

We locate blackness in ways of inhabiting and sharing the city that are not reducible to either subjection or resistance, though they may of course involve both.[1] Always more and less than a single identity or practice, blackness exists in the

1 Our choice not to capitalize the terms 'black' and 'blackness' are inspired by La Marr Jurelle Bruce, who prefers the lowercase b to emphasize what he calls 'an improper blackness: a blackness that is a "critique of the proper"; a blackness that is collectivist rather than individualistic; a blackness that is "never closed and always under contestation"; a blackness that is ever-unfurling rather than rigidly fixed; a blackness that is neither capitalized nor propertized via the protocols of Western grammar; a blackness that centers those who are typically regarded as lesser and lower cases, as it were; a blackness that amplifies those who are treated as "minor figures" in Western modernity' (Jurelle Bruce, 2021: 6).

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fundamental incompleteness of the urbanization process itself (Simone, 2018; Harney and Moten, 2021; Movement 2, this issue); it materializes in the multiple (re) arrangements that link everyday life to the synthesized failures of urban infrastructures, and to forms of institutional capture, exclusion or expulsion—without everyday life ever being confined to these catastrophes. Attentive to these parameters, we attempt to sketch what living the black city might mean for the sense-able subject and outline how urbanites traverse and trouble the sensory, affective and atmospheric thresholds of racialized arrangements. We highlight for whom and how crossing urban thresholds takes the form of a secure treading over, and when instead it becomes a tentative trespassing, a silent tiptoeing around.

– Atmospheric blackness, beyond multiculture

In Birmingham, according to the 2011 census, 49% of the city's 1.1 million population identified as non-white, and within this multicultural *mélange*, those identifying as Muslims comprised around a third of the city's overall population—the largest number for any UK municipality. The (re)introduction of the religion question into the census a decade earlier had coincided with the fading of race and/or ethnicity as markers of identification that might have enabled Muslims representation within multiculturalism—the prevailing framework for apprehending difference based on cultural distinction. Despite a destabilizing of classificatory regimes for knowing and managing difference, the tropes that historically fused representations of people and places with danger and crisis still endure and pervade urban 'race relations'. This disposition produced what Stuart Hall called the 'black colony' (Hall *et al*., 1978), a stigmatized territorial formation in which deviant tendencies could be grafted onto the body of the already dark stranger. For Muslim inhabitants of Birmingham who dwell in the contemporary black city, this is defined through regimes of population management encoded in race relations, multiculturalism and (more recently) the war on terror, and bolstered through increasingly militarized and clandestine policing techniques that employ (for example) gunshot detection technology nested in street furniture and rings of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras in neighborhoods of dense Muslim habitation (Hussain, 2014).

In this context, atmosphere offers a way to sense blackness and Muslimness as a partially entangled arrangement, because blackness—as a metonym for otherness—is open to contingency (Hall, 1987) and contains within it propensities to act (Simone, 2016a; 2018). As such, it offers Muslims particular sensibilities for living through the strictures of the current moment and creates an ontological atmosphere for the realization of a re-arranged form of being. This new way of being in the city takes shape in part through atmospheric negotiations of the black city that ignore the stifling territorialization of raciality. Atmospheres bleed, and they have an enveloping quality. They embrace places in the same way as fog, thickening and dissipating as one moves through the urban landscape. In their mistiness, they are apprehend-able through the senses, given to be felt, guessed. Through the routine repetitions of gestures, encounters, ambient sounds, smells and sights—for example, on one's daily commute through the city from dwelling to workplace—a process of atmospheric enfolding occurs. Atmospheres, then, carry within them the monotonous and ordinary rhythms that help orient life, as well as the coordinates that enable sensing subjects to locate themselves within an urban pattern and negotiate it.

Muslimness, at once tied to the black city yet always also exceeding it, manifests atmospherically in the sounds of community radio, which is out there on FM for all to encounter. It takes further audio-visual substance through the makeshift mosque that—similar to a pop-up appearing under the archway of a railway bridge—skirts the edges of the city center, encroaching on the frames of permissible public difference in the city. The cues which signal Muslimness in and beyond the black city are ever-shifting. Streets

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that were formerly celebrated as part of the city's multicultural offer, then neglected by the disbanding of traders' associations and the denial of status as 'business improvement districts', are resuscitated and animated anew with neon 'halal' signs and heightened public visibility of Muslims as a new aesthetic of multiculture. Further, buildings, organizations and obligations that held together a precarious sense of community identity are re-mapped through diffuse, networked, overlapping and temporary—yet eventful—social enactments of togetherness. These processes compose an atmospheric negotiation that makes the city habitable beyond a citizenship that is commodified (through the consumption of black and 'urban' culture) and managed (through the regimes of recognition and security flagged above).

This atmospheric negotiation challenges the confinement of Muslims to private life, and brushes against secular expectations of the nation-state (Mahmood, 2016). It participates in a new aesthetic of difference, one that eschews both the public, often commodified narratives of 'multicultural identity', and the bounded, respectable and homogenizing performances of the 'ethnic enclave'. The sonorous and visual practices described above enable Muslims to extend beyond blackness-as-racialization, whilst still drawing on the resources of generic blackness to facilitate the consolidation of an identity under which to cohere, even if only to constitute political responses to conditions that otherwise impede upon the routine public expression of religious faith. They signal the ways Muslim residents work to belong not in any ethnic enclave managed by race relations, but within blackness as an unfinished, ever-incomplete project, one whose operationalization as a collective is yet to come. And it is through atmospheres that we can sense such re-arrangements, as they catalyze new, sometimes evanescent, senses of social promiscuity and piety that evade capture within the established politics of difference.

– Sense-able thresholds of the white city

Blackness, as an atmosphere and a 'sense of place' (McKittrick, 2011) holds and extends beyond dated multicultural tropes of the city and erodes racialized containment. Yet it must still contend with the ambiences and sensoria of the white city. Whiteness as an arrangement or set of arrangements is particularly deceptive, as it occupies an imagined position of neutrality, offering the illusion of whiteness as the background to experience; at once a conditioning force of life in the post-colony and the habitus of raciality. The arrangements of whiteness, assumed to be un-prepossessed, gain currency by being unnoticed. They operate as an affective gauge that marks some modes of emotional countenance and comportment as being out of place, different (Muñoz, 2006).[2] In her phenomenology of whiteness, Sara Ahmed (2007) explores the orientations of bodies and spaces that co-construct white spaces as a fantasized norm. She shows how racialized subjects standing 'out of place' in these spaces are specifically attuned to the affects of discomfort, to sticking out as non-white bodies. Recognizing the phantasmagorical dimensions of the white city, then, becomes an embodied practice for the racialized, sense-able urbanite.

This embodied sounding of space plays out at various spatial and territorialized planes, with the micro-locale of the white institution acting as a synecdoche for the white city. In Brussels, the buildings of the Commission of the European Union (EU) are the site from which #Brusselssowhite emanated, asserted against the city's brand of diversity and in spite of the Commission's function as the bureaucratic center of a multicultural Union. If whiteness is reflected in institutions shaped by the people they house, the EU Commission has 'acquire(d) the "skin" of the bodies that inhabit it' (Ahmed, 2007: 157). Mark, an employee of the European Commission, drawn into the collective affects of blackness by his brown skin, describes his workplace and its

2 As Muñoz notes, some 'modes of whiteness'—for example, working-class whiteness, white womanhood or queerness—are othered within the majoritarian public sphere and do not match what Muñoz terms the 'affective ruler' that naturalizes white feelings as the norm.

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atmosphere as: 'very… white. Very formal. Most of the time I fit in. But sometimes, just a small thing, you know', Mark's hands stop mid-air, he winces, 'and I'm reminded'.

As we know, raciality is not solely about (anxious) ocular perceptions—or (by extension) audible, olfactory or haptic signs of otherness. It has to do with the resonances of certain bodies with specific spaces and materialities, and with the sensibilities such resonances elicit. Whiteness is also picked up in the sensoria and atmospheres of place, felt beyond (or alongside) the discomfort of not conforming. Mark says he recognizes whiteness in the rustling of fine cotton suits, the muffled sounds of hard-soled shoes on matting. He finds it stamped in the look and feel of specific fabrics and materials. For him, whiteness rests in the taupe carpeted entrance, the static fluff of the deep-blue and worn-down chair fabric, the hushed conversations held in hallways, the muted greetings and white-knuckled handshakes. That is to say, Mark has learnt to 'make sense of his senses' (Howes, 2009; 2015) in a manner that allows him to know when he has entered a space which he identifies as atmospherically white.

The aesthetic markers and attending 'sensory regimes' (Osbourne, 2021)—or ordering combinations of sights, smells and touch—that Mark notices and attempts to grapple with also signal a tacit code of conduct and operate as a sensuous reminder of how to conform and move in synch with an arrangement, without friction. This is exemplified in Mark's movements and actions and his attempts to 'keep a low profile', to literally 'tone it down', as he says. The ordinary sensory details and rhythms of working in the EU's buildings impose an audible quality onto his speech, transform pitch and tone as declarations ricochet off the walls of the 'Berlaymont' building's large lobby. While Mark's accent doesn't tag him in the Commission's hallways, he expresses anxiety about the volume of his laughter, the hip hop beats that might escape from the headphones he wears during his commute. 'I tuck the headphones back in before crossing the door. Imagine if I start kissing teeth, or let out a full-belly laugh?!'. In the politics of his voice, Mark understands that allowing himself to express the complete range of his sonic presence in the workplace would entail a blurring of thresholds. Part of the potentiality of blackness—as that which threatens to evade containment—lies in its power to agitate sensory orders: a belly laugh that might upset the margins of pernicious arrangements.

– Contested atmospheres, affective thresholds

In Cape Town, although the vast majority of the city's residents are black (80%), the city is still stubbornly carved up along colonial and apartheid lines, where infrastructure (such as highways) and green spaces (such as nature conservation areas) fulfil the function of reinforcing unhelpful binaries. A golf course on one side, a slum settlement on the other. Many people joke about Cape Town, asking whether someone has obtained their passport to leave the African continent to head to little Europe. In many ways, the City Bowl (the inner city in the shadow of Table Mountain that is home to 1% of the population) is a very palatable postcard. And, as elsewhere, people know very well where they are not welcome and when they are operating on the edge: people are so used to the discomposure and discomfort of everyday city life it is no longer remarkable.

By-laws are used to regulate the complex arrangements of space and race in a way that blurs distinctions between the legal, the aesthetic and the atmospheric. Cape Town's graffiti by-law, for example, permits approved murals at the edgy-edge of creative neighborhoods, but it bans tagging and the visual voice of hip-hop, essentially criminalizing black youth and expression in the city with prohibitively expensive fines and jail sentences (Sitas, 2020). At an auditory level, affects and atmospheres of blackness have long been the target of public nuisance legislation, which seeks to regulate the movement and behavior of people under the guise of noise control in a problematic, deeply racialized politics of sound. The elite on auditory alert can be commonly found on neighborhood WhatsApp groups, phoning in to radio shows, sending sternly worded emails, complaining

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about urban life being 'too loud!'. The complaints are rarely about traffic, or the blasting of the noon gun.[3] Instead, the muezzin's call to prayer becomes one of many spatial and sensory skirmishes about sound. Yet, just as Muslims assert atmospheric re-conceptions of urban citizenship and belonging in Birmingham, or racialized bodies are attuned to the sensoria and atmospheres of whiteness in Brussels, Capetonians are endlessly reclaiming black majority-ness as a sense-able urban fact. Like the 'halal' signs in Birmingham, the spaza,[4] salon, barber, braid, butchery and bottle store act as visual signs that intensify both the aliveness of the black city and the enclaved nature of whiteness.

Resistance to (and refusal of) the taming of Cape Town—often couched in World Class Cities rhetoric—comes in multiple affective, atmospheric and sensory forms. For example, many Capetonian youth travel by skateboard, and in the 2010 Public Nuisance by-law, skating was viewed as noise pollution, resulting in the policing of black youth mobility. Marco Morgan, a skating activist and provincial planner turned municipal official in cultural planning, embodies a threshold of activism and officialdom—mobilizing civil society from without, experimenting with artful tactics and techniques, with skating just one entry point through which to challenge by-laws steeped in racist and classist sensory orderings. *Infecting the City* is an annual public performance festival committed to taking art practice from theaters and studios into the streets. Typically, the artworks are more traditional, but in 2013 Morgan and other skaters organized a performative art piece involving skaters taking over the streets in an ad hoc choreography of occupation within Cape Town's central business district (CBD). Hundreds of skaters (predominantly black youth) skated through the city where they are ordinarily seen as troublesome trespassers, ending in an impromptu park jam at Thibault Square—a square where security and surveillance are usually active keeping auditory undesirables out, but an excellent place to skate.

Re-orienting the priorities of cities is happening daily, and the aesthetic, the sensible and the atmospheric are fundamental terrains of contest. Embodied presences and sonorous ways of being and moving enact the multiple (sometimes fractious) arrangements of blackness in the city, in and against institutional capture or containment. Consequently—as we will elaborate further through the stories that follow—these bodies, sounds and flows maintain blackness as a sense-able site of potentiality, open to new re-arrangements.

Invoking and provoking re-arrangements: aspirations and atmotechnics

So far, we have chronicled affective, atmospheric and sensory dimensions of the arrangements that configure and extend (or seek to curb) blackness in the city. We have highlighted sensibilities as a modality through which blackness can be opened beyond the strictures of race relations management, even as it continuously rubs up against thresholds that seem to make racialized persons out of place. In this section, we turn to two stories that dwell in more detail on the dispositions and labor that residents deploy not just to probe arrangements, but also to spur (or attempt to spur) their re-arrangement.

Contending with the affective life of arrangements requires a certain orientation toward potential futures. It means longing for, and acting toward, a more profitable, manageable and comfortable re-arrangement. This yearning is at once fueled by economies of desire and powered by necessity. It calls for a form of agency that does not necessarily proceed in a tactical, calculated fashion, but rather entails a form of praxis propelled by sensibilities that are dependent on where and when within a given arrangement subjects find themselves. Different actors seek to make steadier (re) arrangements happen—or give them motion—through rituals, ad hoc procedures and

3 The noon gun is shot every day at midday, in a bizarre performance of colonial time-keeping dating back to 1806.
4 'Spazas', or 'tuck shops', are informal convenience stores and businesses.

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improvisation; this not only involves aspirations, but also intervention in and through atmosphere: *acts of invocation and provocation*.

We explore these techniques of purposeful invocation and undetermined provocation in Karachi and Abidjan. As residents deal with intensifying precarity in these cities, we bear witness to how sensibilities can be operationalized to shake up pernicious arrangements through aspirations and 'atmotechnics' (see below). Aspiration, in academic discourse, oscillates between false consciousness, desire and calling. Yet, thinking with arrangements may help us cast aspirations differently. In the darker corners of capitalism, aspirations may serve as fuel for the emergent, less discursive and supplemental practices that maintain arrangements because they are born of a response to emergency (Simone, 2008). Furthermore, because urban atmospheres and affects are so loaded with dissonant, more or less dominant public moods, it is rarely clear what one's intervention will yield (see Gandy, 2016). Provoking the arrangement with and through sensibilities might then be oriented less by a want than by the active production of a generative form of indeterminacy, in a practice we call *atmotechnics* (following Wall, 2019).

– Aspiration and the arrangement of public health in Karachi

Aspirations arise in an agonistic relationship with arrangements. They become legible in situated contexts delivering avenues of agency, imbibing what the senses present and conjuring up an imaginary response as a future that may or may not be realized. Such is the case in the neighborhood of Lyari in Karachi, Pakistan, where the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) is a 750-million-dollar arrangement fueled by the labors and aspirations of sensible working-class subjects. The GPEI organizes powerful ambitions originating in Geneva that are aimed at eradicating the polio virus.

By 2010 the virus had been cornered into certain neighborhoods in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Lyari being one such. Infrastructural to these 'historic' ambitions of eradicating diseases are the usually unrecorded aspirations and hopes of young Lyariites who labor to distribute the vaccines (Suhail, 2020). In a time of violent turbulence and economic instability these workers' ability to forge an aspirational future for themselves and the city became key to an imaginative mode of working through and with contemporary arrangements. The success of the GPEI was therefore tied to these imagined futures, exerting their force in the present in the form of desires and dreams. The struggle to lead a decent life hinges on the 'capacity to conceive beyond reality, to desire beyond adequacy, to create beyond need' (Deren, 1953, cited in Martinez, 2007: 157).

Eighteen-year-old Shugufta sensed a radical shift in the arrangement of possibilities for herself as well as a need to aspire toward something other than what had gone before, when one day rising inflation and her husband's meager wages were encapsulated in a shortage of sugar in the household. Sensing this lack of sweetness as metonymic of larger stressors, Shugufta began aspiring for a new self, outside the sphere of domestic labor. This future her would restore sweetness to life. The next day, she and a coterie of cousins signed up to be trained as public health workers in the GPEI. What began as a timorous venture into public labor became an engine of desires. Her dreams fueled the campaign, but also foreshadowed a possible re-arrangement of its inequitable labor conditions.

Two streets up, Amir's posse of unemployed college-educated friends had also signed up to become vaccinators. Amir's boys had kept their heads down, worked hard, earned their degrees in business administration, but they graduated into a highly exclusivist, shrinking economy that disowned the young Afro-Baloch and Pashtun men from Lyari. Nevertheless, this was an 'entrepreneurially minded', resourceful cohort that understood how lucrative non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the developmental field can be. They joined the GPEI to subvert its exclusionary bureaucracies, turning this point of entry into the world of NGOs into a diving-board for better futures.

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Over months of ethnographic fieldwork, one could chart how the intersection of these two cohorts of sensible subjects and their humble aspirations sustained the arrangement of global health. Shugufta quickly became a leader amongst the community health workers and developed a closeness with Amir. The affinity between these workers did not only make the GPEI possible; it fueled other dreams, of thinking about love beyond a marriage, and a life of sweetness. Shugufta contemplated going to nursing school, even as Amir aspired to found a public health NGO that would supplant the inefficient local state bureaucracy and become a private contractor to the World Health Organization (WHO), thereby reducing overheads and ensuring better pay for his comrades. They began working toward this new shared goal.

These aspirations propelled the GPEI campaign toward success and opened up the possibility of transforming this highly extractive arrangement into something more equitable. The act of aspiring thus became a situated cultural practice embedded in rapid transitions while also maintaining contemporary arrangements. Just because a tendency presents itself to the sensible subject, that does not mean its realization is a *fait accompli*. That these aspirations were never realized as such—that they neither decisively propelled the life trajectories of Amir and Shugufta nor suspended the precarity that characterized life in Lyari or evaded the exploitative labor relations on which global health initiatives too often depend—does not make them less potent as animating forces.

While it is easy to point to the vacuums into which aspirations are routinely sucked for impoverished urban majorities, this misses the fact that aspirations do move things around, do act upon and through arrangements, even if only momentarily. Within enduring structures of family, household, inequality and political violence, aspirations oriented Amir and Shugufta's active search for livable futures while supporting the campaign toward success—until it collapsed in 2016 after the Pakistani state's 'anti-gang' intervention upset the fragile geometries of power and economies of opportunity in Lyari. In this way, aspirations push us to understand (re)arrangements below the analytical thresholds of self- and social transformation, as we probe for the ever-elusive contours of the possible.

– Animating atmospheres of indeterminacy

What we refer to in this final story as 'atmotechnics' are the practices and technicities through which urban dwellers try to give texture, shape, momentum or direction to atmospheres (see Wall, 2019), and by extension to the arrangements in which they operate. In Abidjan, the Black Atlantic metropolis, the official end of armed conflict in 2011 spurred contested yet largely unspoken processes of re-arrangement in which relations between residents, former combatants, and both the nominal and informal governing bodies appeared undecided. Shaping urban atmospheres as a relational terrain became a vital practice, because doing so might precipitate more favorable arrangements; at the very least, most residents hoped, it would keep violence at bay.

Radio *animateurs* offer a revealing window into the complexities of atmotechnics, and into the thicket of (re)arrangements that characterized Abidjan's 'post-conflict' conjuncture. The animateurs' craft, which they rent out on air but also deploy in private and public events across the city, is to energize talk, to loosen movement, to make social connections happen. It is, quite literally, to enliven relational space so that interactions might occur. Animateurs will say they 'work the room' at live events and play the (invisible) crowd on the airwaves for straightforward purposes: to entertain, to draw in callers, to satisfy sponsors, to 'encourage' everyday life in Abidjan (residents' preferred word to describe affective sustenance in difficult times). As animateurs receive on-air calls on their personal mobiles, any sociable exchange on air is in part an occasion to connect with strangers in ways that might extend into romance, friendship, religious conversion, *gombos* and *bizness* of all kinds.

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Yet the post-conflict re-arrangements that animation is caught in infuse it with contradictory aspirations. Shows sponsored by foreign NGOs demand radio interactions that are simultaneously spontaneous and scripted to build peace, raise awareness or demonstrate social cohesion. Further, pervasive listening by the state and municipal bodies means that animation is always, more or less willingly, an exposure to censorship, co-optation or patronage. In the face of these competing demands, animateurs have to scramble the certainties. They cannot perform for a single audience—the state, NGOs, ordinary urban publics—lest they constrain their own chances of survival. Yet perform they must: even if it is unclear what the atmosphere is charged with or what the sociable energies are being channeled toward, stasis and boredom must be avoided at all costs.

Abidjan's sprawling western district of Yopougon offers an example of the mismatched tasks animateurs are required to accomplish, and of the ways this mismatch opens up atmospheres to the potentiality of unforeseen change. During the rainy months of 2015, a group of five animateurs was hired by a large international funder to host live peace-building shows in super-diverse neighborhoods. Challenge 1: 'sensitize' (*sensibiliser*) attendants to the need for 'peaceful electoral behavior'. New presidential elections were coming up after the post-electoral war that had settled the previous contest. Challenge 2: generate local voices that reflect on past violence, provide collective catharsis and lessons for the future. Challenge 3: select these local voices from amongst an intricate, partly illegible thicket of micro-local geopolitics, power struggles (along lines of generation, partisanship, gender, ethnicity and more) and fluctuating individual alignments. Challenge 4: script these voices so that 'only the right words will come out'. This involved outright censorship of taboo words like 'war' (Cante, 2020). Challenge 5: deflect micro-local hostilities. Yopougon's local radio station is municipally owned, controlled by the (then) ruling party: any message of 'peaceful elections' would be heard against a backdrop of political domination, with opposition militants either in jail or in exile. Challenge 6: energize the crowds!

Six challenges that were impossible to meet simultaneously. Animation, then, is about conjuring and provoking re-arrangements—not settlements—through an atmosphere of raucous determined indeterminacy. Animateurs cannot seem to be overly invested in any specific message, but must be totally invested in the stoking of energies. And of course, no animateur can shape atmospheres on their own. As an atmotechnical practice, animation must operate through affective relationalities, thereby relinquishing authorship. Sometimes, during the peace-building shows, the atmosphere thickens and crackles with the friction of bodies; at other times it echoes in the emptiness created by the audience. But neighborhood residents cannot make clear statements either. Even in defiance, they must show up, lest their non-participation become too legible as non-alignment. If they want to dance, they should simultaneously try to avoid appearing complicit, as if they endorse the self-serving, governmental appeals to peace. And so, atmospheres become charged with a collective investment in deferring meaning and certainty—ideally, as loudly and as sensuously as possible.

Conclusion

Across five cities, we have narrated the interactions between sensible and sense-able subjects and the (re)arrangements they work in, with and through. In doing so, we have highlighted sensibilities as a terrain of diffuse yet reciprocal influence. Urban atmospheres provide cover and sometimes pressurize residents even as the latter infuse atmospheres with discrepant, emergent meanings and materialities. Sensoria enact the thresholds of racialized spaces even as they indicate these thresholds' elusiveness and vulnerability to contestation. Aspirations and atmotechnics point to how residents continuously create affective and imaginative openings within global or local power asymmetries, giving situated arrangements life in a way that is never pre-ordained.

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Sensibilities, in their elusive multiplicity, allow us to grasp both what arrangements do to variously embodied subjects and the ways subjects conjure or remake arrangements through more or less purposeful interventions. The relationship between sensibilities and contemporary (re)arrangements, then, alludes to questions of emplacement/embodiment (i.e. being in the world) and ability/agency (i.e. doing in the world). Given that arrangements are in flux and these movements impose propulsion and force, they exist in dynamic relational articulations with the subjects that dwell in, move across, aspire, devise, plan and react to them. The agency of the arrangement is contingent on the agency of the subjects within it—and hence reliant on things, people and forces 'feeling' each other out.

Ultimately, a focus on sensibilities reveals the ways agency is not just distributed, but manifests in intangible, ephemeral and spectral ways, at once non-linear and extra-corporeal. Contending with such sensible/sense-able forms of agency means letting go of the 'bird's-eye' view, recognizing that the (re)arrangements in and through which people act constantly shift out of focus, become blurred at the edges, slip out of comprehension and often are only sensed. These considerations help render the agentic legible in a collective politics of possibility whilst always gesturing to the opaque, the unknowable and the poetry of life.

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