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# The City Meditations

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THE CITY MEDITATIONS  
*ON URBAN SPACES & PUBLIC SPHERES*

BY

NICHOLAS GROSSO

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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This portrait develops a new understanding of how and why cities function and their importance to humanity. Past attempts at understanding cities have focused on their economic roles or cultural centers but have overlooked their great ability to engage conversation and spark new ideas. Drawing upon ideas and theories of architectural layout such as Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, city planning (Lewis Mumford's *What is a City?* and Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*), and social landscape (Jürgen Habermas), this project will develop a theory that considers how the city functions as a communicator. To further illustrate and illuminate the fine points of the proposed theory, this portrait will draw on portrayals of cities in literature, specifically Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, selected poems from Federico Garcia Lorca and Frank O'Hara, and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. The exploration will highlight the important role cities have established for themselves, as more than centers of business and scenes for artists, stockpiling resources and cultural touchstones, but as the heart of discourse and the catalyst of invention.

## Acknowledgements and a Note

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The following is the center piece of a larger project, a love story between the Sun and the City. Here, the Sun attempts to better understand the holder of its heart and constructs a portrait.

## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND A NOTE.....	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VI
I. ....	1
II. ....	15
III. ....	37
IV. ....	63
WORK CITED.....	83

## I.

The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity. The city fosters art and is art; the city creates theater and is theater. It is in the city, the city as theater, that man's more purposive activities are focused, and work out, through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations.

– Lewis Mumford

I don't remember if it happened all at once or slowly but soon enough I was smitten, overwhelmed by feelings that threatened insatiable. I saw her and wanted her.

You see, when you at last lay your eyes upon her, there is a moment, a split-second really, when your thoughts of beauty and your lust-filled urges are lost, forgotten. The body of sounds and gleam of towers, glass, steel, and concrete take hold but more still it is her presence, movement, syncopated pulses and strange orbits that bowl you over. Millions of little gods and goddesses roaming her body, institutions and individuals, tugging and leading her to their own ends; alive around you.

Oh yes, around you, me. The City's body is taken, tailored, shrunk, cut-and-sewn, pressed, stretched and she draws you in. And I wanted to know more. Allowing herself to be raised higher in the sky, challenging imaginations and expectations, to fall to pieces, to rot, to fill the earth beneath our feet with vibrating life, to be derided and sneered at, to be castigated for her hoity-toity, her dirt, her thirst – no, no rather it is her bottomless fascination, her curiosity of pink dye graffiti, polytheistic lip rings, leather subway trains, swinging dime bags, three-in-the-morning punk cafés, queer grunge sex, fair trade veganism, which is to say ... oh, what exactly? In a phrase, something like a quixotic vigor. For more. She wants to understand more, to test the limits, to understand better. And it is this that implicates and incriminates her. Still, she perseveres. She is huge, full, bulging and wants more, won't settle for the pastures.



And I ask around. Who is this that has me so bewitched? Could her reality hold up to all she projects? I hear stories and circle closer.

She is the City. She is the public spheres and the public spaces, and she shaves. One foot resting along the edge of the tub, she lathers on the shaving cream and drags the razor up her leg in short, neat strokes. Stroke and rinse, stroke and rinse, rinsing the blade of hair, scurf, suds, and the rest. She works her way up from her ankles, calves, thighs. Then she shaves her chest, pits, and face, saving waxing for the more sensitive areas, spaces less sympathetic to the head of a razor.

Around her face she moves delicately, with an exacting precision; to nick, to cut the skin could disrupt her aura. She powders, applies make-up, pulls up her panties and tucks back her junk. Then stockings rise up her legs, a bra around her chest, she shimmies into a dress and tosses a shawl over her shoulders, nurturing and perpetuating the image, the dream.

I feel the pull, enticed, mesmerized, drawn to her, this persona she so carefully perpetuates.

And I take a breath, *not so romantic*. I dig my feet in a bit deeper, saved from the impulses of the wind, her lights seductive, pace that surges and seethes with scenes that threaten to drown out the uninitiated. She decorates her face so today but tomorrow she might do it differently – she, the City, my conqueror with a thousand faces or a scoundrel hiding behind a thousand masks. I dream, near her, close enough to touch, with a hot cloth to wipe past the guise, to embrace and feel her grow hard against me, hot and cold.

There are stories of conquistadors who have tried to mount, to build empires of glass & steel & stocks & time across her body and called it love or understanding: running for mayor is not equal to empathy (though neither is lying in the gutter, piss-drunk, spouting feelings).

It all feels a bit hopeless. How am I to get passed all of the chatter and get her to see me and me her? I listen to the bloodstream pulse, watch them talk about the glittering movements of money-culture-techno-food-people-worlds and search for what lies beneath. Questions about her genitals are beside the point. From afar, I look at her public spaces, trying not to ogle. Her public spaces where so much happens & moves and her public spheres where it is exchanged & refashioned and try to understand why Lewis Mumford said, “that [in the City] man’s more purposive activities are focused, and work out, through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, groups into more significant culminations.”

I don’t understand.

What is this magic she possesses?

How does she wield this power? Hips like battleships?

Even now, so far away, it is her that has me.

Then, suddenly, something clicks, the right synapses fire and connect, a new way in. I remember Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and I feel a bit closer to her. In this new light, I approach her public sphere(s) and understand her better. Maybe it is something in her eyes, something she won’t or can’t communicate in words.

Habermas’s study is not about the government or business or even about the art scene but rather about contact & connections, the way things are communicated, how ideas are exchanged across people. Circling, I follow these ideas, filters to those stories, rumors, reports and move in with a new base from which to reach, more than her body, her spirit and all that she embodies.

“First, [the public sphere] preserved a kind of social intercourse that far from presupposed the equality of status, disregarded status altogether” (Habermas 36). One’s status, one’s socio-ethno-economic labels are secondary to one’s thoughts and arguments in the public

sphere. It is easy to get lost in the consolidation of money, power, and influence that adorns the City but she also acts as a forum for communication and exchange, fostering and transforming ideas, not re-enforcing pedestals and trenches. Mark Warren's discursive democracy, in *The Self in Discursive Democracy*, function(s) in much the same way that Habermas understands and approaches the public sphere. He says,

[Democrats] ... hold that more participation will produce individuals with more democratic dispositions – individuals who are tolerant of difference, more sensitive to reciprocity, better able to engage in moral discourse and judgment, and more prone to examine their own preferences – all qualities conducive to the success of democracy as a way of making decisions. (Warren 167)

It is a result of discussion and debate of the public that the institutions are maintained and society is able to progress. When each citizen is able to participate and discuss freely within their society, without fear of repercussions from the towering institutions, without intimidation, unperturbed by background or status, a more engaged, tolerant, successful community will evolve. In part II, we find such a discussion. Salman Rushdie has an idea for a novel, a novel that would become *Midnight's Children*, but he is broke. This is where the butting-of-heads begins, these negotiations between Rushdie and the City, the City as London, his institutional landlord; the City houses him, offering him accommodations while Rushdie explores and builds his story.

And Rushdie desires a space, a sphere from which to tell his story, while the City wants compensation, perpetuity. Here, with a pebble in her stream, a bit of friction, the City's veneer slips just enough. It is not all gloss but a deeper being functioning about her public sphere. She is not simply a soapbox one uses to spout their ideas and drops when they are done but a back-and-forth, a listening to, engaging with, and managing around the ideas and directives of others. She

won't be used. By emphasizing participation, playing by a set-list of rules, understanding, and discussion, individuals become more introspective and aware of alternative possibilities, compromise. They are not absorbed, imprisoned within their own worlds but instead see the expanse, the variety, the conflict, the unimagined lay before them in the City, the collective that supplies and maintains a level, if not balanced, field for so many.

What matters most across the public sphere are interactions and the quality of analysis it provokes. This all comes with its inherent tensions as we will come to see. The institution seeks order and regularity while the individual desires freedom, unrestrained. But without the individual utilizing the order of the institution, it falls into disrepair, and without the institution facilitating engagement, the individual is isolated, limited to their own ideas, each person forced to re-build the world from scratch in order to reach beyond their immediate circle.

One cannot simply open oneself up to the public and expect smooth sailing the rest of the way. A free public, filled with individuals, will voice their particular opinions reflecting their worldviews.

Secondly, discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned ... The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another), verbalize it, and thus state explicitly in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority. (Habermas 36-7)

See, when one opens the door to the voices of the other there is a risk of being questioned, second-guessed, doubted. Look at the intricacy of the City's routine, in front of the bathroom mirror carefully inspecting face and body, bristling at attempts to have this face undone. Public

engagement opens the door to critique but, scarier still, such criticism can strike at fault lines, exposing deep-seated insecurities, shaking foundations, and offering potentially superior, more efficient, economical, meets-the-needs-of-more than what was before. But this does not drive her away, avoiding mirrors. Putting her faith and fate in the hands of her gods and goddesses, the City is in search of her greatest self. She opens herself to failure and criticism, challenging what has been accepted, shaking foundations, trying what may be disparaged, reviled, or feared. Through the eyes of the City, limits are for the intimidated and terror-stricken. She pokes her moles and questions joints. (Does the hip bone really connect to the thigh bone?) To reach new heights, she lets herself be shaken to the roots, no axiom unturned. She slips into new skin to prove herself flexible, up to the next challenge, before it, too, is shed for something more versatile, resilient.

But who is her rock? Where or with whom does she find comfort? Where does she turn when her resolve is shaken? I know even the mighty need their sanctuaries. Or does she suppress her fears, her anxiety, tensions teeming with life? In part III, I try to find these answers through Jane Jacobs' experiments and construction of the City. Built from remnants, odds, and ends, while following blueprints laid out in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs directly tackles the fears of change and overhauling systems of thought and action in cities. And for our city, Jacobs wants to resurrect her power and standing. Challenging preconceived notions of what is and isn't possible in urban environments, what should and shouldn't be done, Jacob fortifies the City with Federico Garcia Lorca and Frank O'Hara's city poems. Jacobs believes that when the City is healthy, filled with open forums, its path to progress is not through destruction but rather a re-imagining of what stands, what is already there, essential and vital within the core of the City. It is led by empathy and respect for others with a desire not to impose

the singular on the whole but rather to offer peace of mind and space to the individual to explore and express the intimate on one's own terms.

When the field is left open, willingness to involve oneself in the open-ended discussion and challenge some accepted notions, conversation does not become stilted or one-sided but continues to maintain a relevancy, engaging with the fluctuations and movement of the public.

[Self-organized groups] are based on common interests and identities, most will lack internal imperatives for critique and discourse. The voluntary character of these groups ... will mean that they will be relatively homogeneous, self-selecting for values and life-styles. In these cases, dogmatic ideological or religious identities may reinforce one another, and attempts at critique and discourse may be regarded as unwelcome challenges to the solidarity of the group. (Warren 189)

Warren describes the importance of a heterogeneous mix, something that is synonymous with the City. Where more tradition-based societies might discourage criticism because of the threat it poses to the established order, the City welcomes and feeds off the diverse backgrounds and life perspectives. It is this back and forth in the public sphere between individual and institution that maintains this society. Where a varied set of opinions are considered, the City makes herself responsive to a larger set of people, requiring a higher degree of effectiveness and efficiency or risks being phased out (as certain roles lose relevance in the lives of the public). If the City cannot keep up with the needs of her population, she risks alienating a part of herself or limiting her ability to function in certain spheres.

Losing all feeling in his right foot, the leper drags it. It bumps into the unseen, stubbed on uneven surfaces, knocks into corners. The injuries mount and soon the foot is lost. The City's leg is no less a part of her than her veins, knee cap, liver, heart, or thumb.

Her sex boutiques serve as much a role as her delicatessens and electronic shops, her parks as well as her assortment of bars intermingled; all of them creating necessary webs, opening herself up to contact, chance encounters, criticism, disintegration, and innovation. For an effective public sphere, there can be no limits to what is okay to talk about. Individuals, regardless of position, can and should question, analyze, criticize all that is relevant to their lives. Jane Jacobs affirms the power of populations to rejuvenate their corners and neighborhoods. Neither state nor church can exempt or limit the discourse or the ways one may examine their life. In place of traditional power structures, one's exploration and critical review focuses the public debate, sways opinions, and provokes action.

Untold, untapped potential in her hands, the City cannot escape imperfection. I don't know if she is aware of this, if she knows there is no such thing as perfection in this universe. There is no single state of being. Conflict, fury, and frustration are not exclusively negative or regressive. They are an airing of one's desires, agitation to reshape what is present. In much the same way that peace and cooperation, where there are no challenges to the status quo, are not solely indicative of positive, progressive states. No planet is a perfect sphere. Right angles only exist in geometry books. Even words, *these very words*, are just labored inventions, placeholders of thoughts and feelings; rattled, hammered, and assembled to try to make sense of all that is happening, all that is out of one's control.

The universe did not create the imperfect or the perfect. And my search for the City continued. Hanging out in alleyways, interstitial spaces, listening in doorways, reading walls, asking questions, I amassed information then sought the truth in it all.

Through the efforts of “conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, [and] groups,” there is potential for greater, longer-lasting development. It is not the isolated individual or the old power players imposing themselves but the collective, together, scrutinizing and challenging one another to something greater.

Thirdly, the same process that converted culture into a commodity (and in this fashion constituted it as culture that could become an object of discussion to begin with) established the public as in principle inclusive. However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique: for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private persons, persons who—insofar as they were propertied and educated—as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of objects that were subject to discussion.

(Habermas 37)

It is true that biases still exist, the City is a collection of so many opinions, feelings, thoughts, memories, and arguments held within her. And it is precisely this inclusive nature that frightens, that can shake the core; to be aware of all of the possibilities conflicting and cooperating. In part IV, I follow the trail of Phaswane Mpe through post-Apartheid South Africa where HIV runs rampant. Not only does inclusivity threaten the status quo here but it also welcomes new people, ideas, couplings, living situations, and disease. And Mpe turns to the City for support, for guidance, for a path forward in this transformed/transforming land. Unable to make out the



intentions of the stranger and the ends they seek, Mpe, dying and lost, wants to open the eyes of his neighbor, serve mankind while he is still able. He told the City about the lives that filled his novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, stories of fear and pain. And the City told him about Samuel Delaney and *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* and New York of the 1980s and '90s, a city filled with similar fears and confusion of change and disease. The City reminded Mpe that with so many different people and groups coming together, compromise is the only mode to maintain any sort of functionality. Unknown or differing beliefs of a neighbor cannot derail the whole train at every bend, one must learn to prioritize. One cannot perpetually fight off what is different, pushing them out, forcing them to the fringes of society. When everything is strange and different is seen as dangerous, nothing is resolved and tensions only build.

In *The Mass Public and the Mass Subject*, Michael Warner argues that Habermas's theoretical public sphere risks such biases.

The bourgeois public sphere claimed to have no relation to the body image at all. Public issues were depersonalized so that, in theory, any person would have the ability to offer an opinion about them and submit that opinion to the impersonal test of public debate without personal hazard. Yet the bourgeois public sphere continued to rely on features of certain bodies. Access to the public came in the whiteness and maleness that were then denied as forms of positivity, since the while male qua public person was only abstract rather than white and male.

(Warner 382-3)

While Habermas assumes that the reasonableness of an argument was enough to compensate for one's social position or background, he does not consider the deep-seated biases and fears held within the City. Warner argues that it is unfair to assume that the majority of voices that fill the

public sphere are white and male because of an idealized meritocratic notion, because they rightfully earned such a position through their superior ability and not as the result of the racisms, sexism, and other biases so ingrained within society. Just because people are free to openly debate, it does not wipe clean their memories. There is still a majority of particular people (specifically white men) who maintain control and vocal authority. “Neither in gender nor in race nor in class nor in sexualities is it possible to treat different particulars as having a merely paratactic or serial difference. Differences in such realms already come coded as the difference between the unmarked and the marked, the universalizable and the particular” (383). Warner may see and encourage the importance and value of the public sphere but believes certain assumed principles (such as fairness) are much harder to find when looking beyond the theoretical. In the same way we find the City scrambling to help Mpe, reconsidering herself, taking a mirror to her body and the gods and goddesses who tug. And my sketch becomes fuller, with the image of one who looks into the eyes of their reflection.

The prejudices of the City are the prejudices of the individuals and institutions that make her up. They are alive and for them to get their fair shake they must be actively pursued. To ignore a set of opinions, opposing or strange voices, does not simply silence them or force them to disappear but instead threatens the stability, the balance, the functionality of the whole. Retaining water or with a metastasizing lump, she becomes lopsided. Swollen and uneven, she lumbers heavy, edging towards death. To ignore the problem just gives it time to spread and then surgery is useless. The problem becomes too far gone.

She works to prevent such outcomes, such imbalance. I read about the care, the delicate hand, open ears and eyes to the whole. Is she really so tender, so attentive with such large,

diverse populations? Who is her publicist? I don't want to idolize her. I don't want to forget about her humanity.

I wish I could touch her now, press my hand against her chest, kiss her fingertips.

The City, where one's thoughts can find a listener. Mumford does not just describe complementing thoughts and ideas but conflicting and cooperating ones. Here, Nancy Fraser, too, in *Rethinking the Public Sphere* considers the openness of the public sphere. "Here the republican drew from the classical traditions that cast femininity and publicity as oxymorons; the depth of such traditions can be gauged in the etymological connection between 'public' and 'pubic,' a graphic trace of the fact that in the ancient world possession of a penis was a requirement for speaking in public" (Fraser 114). Deeply rooted within society and even within language are certain dividing, discriminating notions. While one may be interested to hear and consider all equally, one's education or history might help to perpetuate certain beliefs and come to take particular opinions less seriously than others. Still, biases and all, I know the public sphere brings me in close to the heart of the City. In fact, in Fraser's expansion or re-imagining of what the public sphere was or could be, the City feels closer. She is so close. I breathe in slowly with eyes closed. "The problem is not only that Habermas idealizes the liberal public sphere but also that he fails to examine other, nonliberal, non bourgeois, competing public spheres. Or rather, it is precisely because he fails to examine these other public spheres that he ends up idealizing the liberal public sphere" (115). Because Habermas does not see the potential shortcomings and biases that exist within his proposed understanding of the public sphere, he cannot properly envision the web of spheres that I then, too, would overlook, missing out on the complex, intricate being that the City truly is.

Fraser saw the public sphere in the plural, spheres as innovators and enhancers of public pursuits and challengers to authority; like women-only groups, who may have used structures established by white men to create domains, their spheres made use of the tools that were part of their daily lives, “us[ing] the heretofore quintessentially ‘private’ idioms of domesticity and motherhood precisely as springboards for public activity” (115). Various public spheres existed that used unconventional resources, re-envisioning their functions and capabilities to further develop their ideas and opinions and push their voices out beyond the local to create something new. Regardless of an individual citizen’s personal biases, fears, and partialities, the spirited, healthy relationship between the public spheres in all their pluralistic glory is what is essential to the sustaining and understanding the beat and thump of the City.

And I feel a twinge of pain thinking of the infinity that reaches within the City’s body as she bounds forward. How could I ever catch her. Her scars can so easily go unnoticed in her perpetual motion, but they are there in her transitions. On occasion her cheeks ball, clarifying constellations rendered in freckles. She speaks and gestures with fingers, each digit punctuating and reflecting on the words escaping her mouth. Those carefully guarded words that I cling to, trying to ascribe meaning. She has not been weighed or measured. One cannot hold her down long enough. Someone suggested floating her, if we could find the volume... But that is beside the point. It is, along her skin, her spheres and spaces. It is in her eyes. I’ve forgotten, it is not about penetrating her soul or shackling up her body, I am not trying to constrict her but rather get closer, accompany her forward. This is my sifting through and stitching together images, flavors, stories, whispers, scents, legends to understand the interactions of gods and goddesses, not omnipotent deities of lore, neither saints nor demons but bodied creators who breathe life or

change direction and welcome death. It is my collage, my synthesis of the one who fills my letters. This is my portrait of the City in triptych.

## II.

A SERIES OF SIT DOWNS BETWEEN SALMAN RUSHDIE AND THE CITY, INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTION, WERE CUT-UP, ARRANGED, AND PASTED IN THE FORM OF A LIST FROM A VARIETY OF ANGLES, TO EMPHASIZE FEATURES BEYOND THE PHYSICAL, AND TO EPITOMIZE A PUBLIC SPHERE IN ACTION.

This is how Salman Rushdie remembers the birth of *Midnight's Children*:

In 1975 I published my first novel, *Grimus*, and decided to use the £700 advance to travel to India as cheaply as possible for as long as I could make the money last, and on that journey of fifteen-hour bus rides and humble hostleries *Midnight's Children* was born. It was the year that Margaret Thatcher was elected leader of the Conservative Party and Sheikh Mujib, the founder of Bangladesh, was murdered; when the Baader-Meinhof gang was on trial in Stuttgart and Bill Clinton married Hillary Rodham and the last Americans evacuated from Saigon and Generalissimo Franco died. In Cambodia it was the Khmer Rouge's bloody Year Zero ... And just after I returned from India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi was convicted of election fraud, and one week after my twenty-eighth birthday she declared a state of emergency and assumed tyrannical powers. It was the beginning of a long period of darkness that would not end until 1977. (Rushdie ix)

Yes, it was his travels to India that would inspire much of *Midnight's Children*. And the political strife and upheaval, not just in India but the world over, would help to shape it, too. This is all quite true but inspiration does not put words on the page. On inspiration alone, your word processor's cursor blinks in place, marking the passage of time and not your advancement through the document. Form and inspiration foregone, Rushdie found himself burdened by more pressing, practical matters.

“When we returned to England from India I was broke. The novel in my head was clearly going to be long and strange and take quite awhile to write, and in the meanwhile I had no money,” he recalled (x). Upon his return, it was money and time that were pushed to the forefront of his mind. If he wanted to continue to live in London, he would need to find a balance between the demands for money with his desire to be heard, the desire to put his experiences down into words and share this tale he had welling up inside.

And so over tea and Michael Warner’s *Publics and Counterpublics*, the two, Salman Rushdie, the writer, the individual, and London, the City, Rushdie’s landlord, the institution, sat down and negotiated terms. A series of discussions between an individual and an institution, not a death match though they both sought their own self-serving ends and hoped to come out of these talks with an advantage, ahead of the game.

“We are all aware that landlords and tenants exist in a fundamentally antagonistic relationship. Generally speaking, throughout most of what we might call the middle classes of our society, landlords tend to be somewhat better off financially than their tenants” (Delany 112). Before words are even exchanged there was this underlying tension: expectations to preserve versus independent desires, demands for services rendered, and stipulations that principles are upheld.

Given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understood, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of goodwill.

The class war raging constantly and often silently in the comparatively stabilized societies of the developed world perpetually works for the erosion of

the social practices through which interclass communication takes place and of the institutions holding those practices stable, so that new institutions must always be conceived and set in place to take over the jobs of those that are battered again and again till they are destroyed. (Delany 121)

*Battered again and again*, the words echoed in London's mind. Such a constant barrage of needs, wants, demands from the population, did any of them take some time to think about him? To think about how he was doing? How he slept?

Sure, institutions were established to serve individuals but equally they were created to maintain stability, a set playing field that would bring a level of ease into everyone's lives. *Oh, but no one thought about moving forward, about tomorrow*, thought London, *only about what you've done for me lately*. For the landlord, London, to bend over backwards for the needy Rushdie, the whole stability he had fought so hard to sustain would be threatened. To start making exceptions for individuals now would open his body to delinquency, sanctuaries for dreamers, the struggling, the occasionally employed, and soon enough to the law-breakers. London was not motivated by legacies and landmarks. Life was long enough and he was happy to get by, comfortably, perhaps even with a bit of luxury. Remaining conscientious and open to the needs of his constituency, London ultimately was after self-preservation. He wanted to stick around, to see people build their dreams, to be that solid foundation from which others could create, grow, and prosper without having to worry about the basics, responsive to repairs, heat in the winter, and air conditioning in the summer.

Meanwhile, you see, Rushdie, with his novel growing inside, wanted a living situation that enabled him to explore and express his art fully. There were opportunities for work, to earn enough money to scrape by but he would need to fortify himself and his story against the



detrimental effects of the basics-only City with his fast pace and business-first orientation. Rushdie's budding story was fragile and he didn't want to see it destroyed by the daily hustle, hours and hours spent week-in-week-out for a paycheck that amounted to just enough, just enough to put some food on the table and a roof overhead. *But shouldn't the City be more generous with his populations, people who poured their money, time, lives into his longevity?* Rushdie wondered. *I'll give him the ol' razzle dazzle, I'll make him see how much better things could be.*

They sat down and Rushdie shared the stories he had building then made his claim. He was not out for destruction; not interested in cutting corners, he just wanted to tell his story with some flexibility, unfettered by the rat race to simply get by. He laid out his story of a boy named Saleem Sinai and his twin, the newly independent country, India. Rushdie hoped his landlord might catch some parallel and realize maybe they, too, institution and individual, were not so different.

Saleem was born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the instant that India, too, became an independent nation, forever tying their lives and destinies. But their lives would not be so simple or straightforward: see, Saleem was no ordinary child. Much like the extraordinary events that would transpire throughout India's volatile, early days, he was endowed with telepathic powers with which he would be able to communicate across India and would directly affect both his and India's futures.

Salman Rushdie recited Lewis Mumford's little adage of cities, "...The city fosters art and is art; the city creates theater and is theater. It is in the city, the city as theater, that man's more purposive actions are focused..." and he hoped he would be able to open his landlord's eyes to the crucial position he held.

1. *A public is self-organized*

A public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists by virtue of being addressed. (Warner 67)

To show his openness to this whole process between him and London, Rushdie found work at an ad agency, to support himself while he composed his novel. He found this to be a fine concession on his part. Sacrificing his days, he played by the rules London imposed, hoping for flexibility and that his voice might be heard. Years later he would remember the struggle of these days,

On Friday nights I would come home to Kentish Town from the agency's offices near Waterloo Bridge, take a long hot bath, wash the week's commerce away, and emerge—or so I told myself—as a novelist. As I look back, I feel a touch of pride at my younger self's dedication to literature, which gave him the strength of mind to resist the blandishments of the enemies of promise. The sirens of the ad-land sang sweetly and seductively, but I thought of Odysseus lashing himself to the mast of his ship, and somehow stayed on course. (Rushdie x-xi)

In this atmosphere, it could have been easy to sacrifice this novel, the path of least resistance, so much less friction from the City this way. How easy it would be to surrender his voice when watching the fluidity and sleekness of London, alive and moving. How easy to have gotten swept up in his movements. When the week's work was done, Rushdie could return home and relax or go out or simply not worry about going back to work, this time on his novel. But his story nagged at him. Ultimately, losing his voice was a price too large for the young Rushdie. It wanted to be heard, it sought its place in reality. And so more and more, while initially inspired

by India, *Midnight's Children* began to reflect Rushdie's current struggle for sustenance and expression.

Returning to the negotiating table, he waved his weekly paycheck and encouraged London to understand the importance not just of the arts but the ability for individuals to follow their most passionate paths. Rushdie pushed London not to be so plotted and restrictive, to open himself up a bit and allow people to explore paths more closely to their aspirations and abilities. To promote talk and a public where ideas and concepts were questioned and investigated, conversations could develop and create new possibilities, not in vain but to further tunnel into the needs and desires of those who populated the public. With no endpoints, a public was centered around the airing of thoughts, talking and being heard, building an ongoing relationship. It was in this way that Saleem in *Midnight's Children* found his telepathic voice,

... I'm bound to say that if you think of me purely as a radio, you'll only be grasping half the truth. Thought is as often pictorial or purely problematic as verbal; and anyway, in order to communicate with, and understand, my colleagues in the Midnight's Children's Conference, it was necessary for me to quickly advance beyond the verbal stage. (Rushdie 250)

If Rushdie's trip to India was to remain a memory, these little anecdotes and bits of thought would lounge in the gaps between his teeth, festering in the back of his mind with no outlet. They would be locked away within, stagnate, with no possibility of development or growth, and then they'd begin to rot away at their host. The frustrations of the unheard, forced to remain in the shadows, never given the opportunity to be understood. What life are you leading if you simply follow the crowd, never attempting to express your own personal thoughts? The individual cannot be replicated.

Before realizing he was able to both hear and communicate telepathically, Saleem Sinai felt trapped and utterly isolated, much in the same way Rushdie might have felt with so few outlets of expression.

...I was plunged into a green, glass-cloudy world filled with cutting edges, a world in which I could no longer tell the people who matter most about the goings-on inside my head; green shards lacerated my hands as I entered that swirling universe in which I was doomed, until it was too late, to be plagued by constant doubts about what I was for. (Rushdie 187)

Without the ability to share himself, Saleem was divided from his family, alienated from the world. There was no outlet, only torment. The doubt and uncertainty threatened to overwhelm him and that is exactly what Rushdie wanted London to understand. If you force people into too narrow a role, where they don't feel like they are able to communicate, to express themselves, they will either begin to crumble from the inside or fester and seek an alternative method, different grounds, new grounds that more closely reflect or suit their personal paths.

*2. A public is a relation among strangers.*

The orientation of strangers is in one sense implied by a public's self-organization through discourse. A public sets its boundaries and its organization by its own discourse rather by external frameworks only if it openly addresses people who are identified primarily through their participation in the discourse and who therefore cannot be known in advance.

A public might almost be said to be stranger-relationality in a pure form, because other ways of organizing strangers—nations, religions, races, guilds—have manifest positive content. They select strangers by criteria of territory or identity

or belief or some other test of membership. One can address strangers by criteria in such contexts because a common identity has been established through independent means or institutions (creeds, armies, parties, and the like). A public, however, unites strangers through participation alone, at least in theory. Strangers come into relationships by its means, though the resulting social relationships might be peculiarly indirect and unspecifiable. (Warner 74-5)

Rushdie tightened his belt and made cuts where he could, adding water to juice, stretching it a few more days. *They added too much sugar to those bottles anyway ... though maybe water was really the better route all around. Where was wine cheaper than a bottle of water?* Rushdie considered his living situation and kept moving.

What makes a public different from a club, religion, or nationality is that there are no direct benefits of joining a public. Whereas in a club, religion, or nationality, you are granted some advantages to joining, in the form of discounts at the local market, eternal salvation, or civil rights; to be a part of a public simply offers you the possibility of joining the larger discussion. There are no vows, exams, pledges, commitments, or guarantees and the only requirement to take part is participation. The simple act. To become engaged in the dialogue, as a listener or speaker. One's past, parents, beliefs, or bank account serve no role in deciding whether a person is worthy of inclusion, the only requirement is to jump in and speak one's mind across the platform. And in this way, tucked in the night, Rushdie continued work on his novel; slowly building this world, he hoped his dedication would lead somewhere, a chance encounter, a lucky break, to be heard and given a chance to advance and project his voice. And he told London that he should work towards creating more platforms that would recognize hard-working people and the diversity of their passions. Such steps would not only make for a happier population but a

better functioning, more efficient institution, where people would be encouraged to take chances, making for a more innovative, forward-thinking society, no longer wasting time and energy forcing people to fit a limited selection of roles.

Tongue-in-cheek is how it seemed Rushdie portrays Saleem's path to realization, the ability to do more than listen but to communicate, he too could be heard. Chance is how Saleem is made aware of the other Midnight's Children (The Midnight's Children being, of course, "no less than one thousand and one children ... born within the frontiers of the infant sovereign state of India ... every one of whom was ... endowed with features, talents or faculties which can only be described as miraculous" (Rushdie 224) (i.e. Saleem's telepathy).) It was the "result of a jolt received in a bicycle-accident" that opened Saleem's eyes to the other Midnight's Children, pure chance. The telepathic powers that brought together Midnight's Children was not then a discriminating authority but based instead on happenstance, emerging needs and encounters.

These two, Rushdie and Saleem, took advantage of a lucky roll of the dice and squeezed every nugget of possibility out of it. They longed for a channel to release their perspectives and persuasions and grabbed hold tight when one came their way. While, of course, one cannot institutionalize chance, Rushdie believed there were ways of encouraging such contact and meetings of possibilities. A more moderate living wage and more accessible paths to education were ones that popped into mind as he threw a bone into a big pot, added some water, chopped vegetables, and had himself a stew.

### *3. The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal.*

Public speech can have great urgency and intimate import. Yet we know that it was addressed not exactly to us but to the stranger we were until the moment we happened to be addressed by it. (I am thinking here of any genre

addressed to a public, including novels and lyrics as well as criticism, other nonfictional prose, and almost all genres of radio, television, film, and Web discourse.) To inhabit public discourse is to perform this transition continually, and to some extent it remains present to consciousness. Public speech must be taken in two ways: as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers. The benefit in this practice is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought and life. Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so. But this is only true to the extent that the trace of our strangerhood remains present in our understanding of ourselves to the addressee. (Warner 76-7)

In *Midnight's Children*, the stakes rose, and tremors of possibility peaked as Saleem learned to hone his telepathic abilities. No longer was he simply a child lost and overpowered in a world of adults, isolated by youth into conformity, with little to no influence over anything—now he had made contact. Not just listening to the thoughts of others but actually engaging and communicating. He wasn't whispering to the wind but interacting with hundreds of other children, each with their own power, together creating a force that demanded attention.

"To inhabit public discourse is to perform this transition [between personal and impersonal] continually, and to some extent it remains present to consciousness" (Warner 76). Saleem's mind was this habitation, creating a place of discourse, opening up the possibility for an exchange of ideas, much like the discussions between Rushdie and London. The thoughts, fears, hopes, and ambitions of *Midnight's Children* were given a forum, a place to explore ideas amongst people who were otherwise strangers. Brought together across geographic boundaries and linguistic barriers by Saleem's telepathy, their subjectivities were made aware of the larger debate, their lives filled in against the web of stories and perspectives from across India.

We were as motley, as raucous, as undisciplined as any bunch of five hundred and eighty-one ten-year-olds; and on top of our natural exuberance there was the excitement of our discovery of each other. After one hour of top-volume yelling jabbering arguing giggling, I would fall exhausted into a sleep too deep for nightmares, and still wake up with a headache; but I didn't mind. Awake I was obliged to face the multiple miseries of maternal perfidy and paternal decline, of the fickleness of friendship and the varied tyrannies of school; asleep, I was the center of the most exciting world any child had ever discovered. (Rushdie 259-60)

"The benefit in this practice is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought and life" (Warner 76). An outlet to their private thoughts. Amongst these strangers, the *Midnight's Children* were able to voice their daily frustrations, explore parts of themselves and the world that remained untapped by their daily routines. Their ideas were projected on to a much larger worldview. They were taken out of their bedrooms, out of their homes, beyond their neighborhoods, and given a view of the country's full spectrum, forcing each to fine tune and focus their methods, their actions, their beliefs, if they hoped to achieve something across a larger base of people, something more significant.

It was in this way that Rushdie hoped to capture London's imagination. Reciting new passages as they developed, Rushdie thought that when dialogue was opened up and societal paths were made less rigid everyone would stand to reap the benefits.

Thoughts of the landlord: He wondered if ultimately Rushdie would just use his book to make fun of him, or topple the infrastructure of his being. He wondered if he was too old-fashioned, too set in his ways. Was he getting too old to keep up? Was he oblivious to the changes and the needs of society? He wondered about the right balance, about the possibility of



destroying all that he had helped to establish; a situation where he could crumble which would then crumble the lives of the many who had come to rely on him. And he wondered if he was tall enough, if he could use bigger buildings, and how his prestige and standing reflected off the Thames.

4. *A public is constituted through mere attention.*

...Public discourse craves attention like a child. Texts clamour at us. Images solicit our gaze. Look here! Listen! Hey! In doing so, they by no means render us passive. Quite the contrary. The modern system of publics creates a demanding social phenomenology. Our willingness to process a passing appeal determines which publics we belong to and performs their extension. The experience of social reality in modernity feels quite unlike that in societies organized by kinship, hereditary, status, local affiliation, mediated political access, parochial nativity, or ritual. In those settings, one's place in the common order is what it is regardless of one's inner thoughts, however intense their affective charge might sometimes be. The appellative energy of publics puts a different burden on us: it makes us believe our consciousness to be decisive. The direction of our glance can constitute our social world. (Warner 89)

As Rushdie progressed through *Midnight's Children*, slowly and slowly, he grew increasingly wary of the role of his landlord. He owed him a debt of gratitude (certainly, between his day job and home). It was a debt, he understood, something one could easily take for granted but the costs of that gratitude began to play in his mind. Surely, he could not sacrifice *Midnight's Children* for this debt; it would defeat the whole purpose. All this talk would be for naught. He

tried to weigh the possibilities London offered with the compromises it required of him, the people it allowed him to meet with the restrictions it demanded of his time.

What a see-saw! Maybe he wasn't meant to be a writer after all. Doubts of the creator. Maybe telling stories was pure vanity and, anyway, even if he managed to finish this novel, who would read it? His first novel was barely received, passing nearly unnoticed, although where it found the slightest bit of attention it was met with near "universal derision" (Kemp). Maybe it was a sign that he should fold to the life London promoted. Why struggle night after night when London's street sparkled outside, alive with the dancing and drinking crowds, crowds lost or freed in the mechanics and institutionalization of the City?

Through the gears and pulleys, traffic lights and the high life's siren song, a grumble repeated. The memories and stories were a constant refrain in Rushdie's head, nagging, pushing, and pulling at him. Turning into a chronic condition, a decision against *Midnight's Children* was a decision to carry their weight, a weight that would put a hunch in his back to the point that when standing on a street corner he would begin to tilt forward, off balance. His debt, appreciation, London, memories, stories, authors, tradition, childhood, and India weighed on him.

And then something else takes over, because I realize I don't have to ask her, I can just get inside the freckled mouth-metalled head and find out, for once I can really get to know what's going on ... and in I go, still bicycling, but the front of her mind is all full up with Marathi language-marchers, there are American pop songs stuck in the corners of her thoughts, but nothing I'm interested in; and now, only now, now for the very first time, now driven on by tears of unrequited love, I begin to probe ... I find myself pushing, diving, forcing my way behind her defenses ... into the secret place where there's a picture of her mother who wears

a pink smock and holds up a tiny fish by the tail, and I'm ferreting deeperdeeperdeeper, where is it, what makes her tick, when she gives a sort of jerk and swings round to stare at me as I bicycle roundaroundaroundaroundand...

“Get out!” screams Evie Burns. Hands lifted to forehead. (Rushdie 218)

Saleem, too, learned he was in sole control of the direction of his gaze and the weight and responsibility it put upon his shoulders. Through the force of his will, his decisiveness would make the call for actions taken or not. As he decided to use his telepathic powers to read the mind of a girl he was in love with, a girl who did not share his feelings, a girl who was not one of *Midnight's Children*, a fact that did not hurt or help the pain of his unrequited love. He plunged deep and deeper still into her mind to try to make sense of things, to re-enact the pieces of his spurned love, maybe even to find the path to her heart or a way to change the mind of his would-be lover, Evie Burns. But there is a flipside to this coin, this coin of worldviews, where the individual has the power to structure and arrange things through the processes of their conscious mind; one's decisions do not stand alone. Our decisions come into contact with a field of others and the decisions they make and the actions they affect. Bouncing on and off each other, *conflicting and cooperating*, one cannot simply ignore the social world because while we are in control of our personal decisions and the direction of our gaze, the decisions of others are constantly changing and amending the world before us. Saleem is taught that discourse is a two-way street with all the rage Evie Burns has in her being. Regardless of the seemingly infinite abilities of our telepathic Saleem, capable of bringing together minds from the farthest corners of India, there must be a willingness to participate. There is a limit. No one is a world unto themselves. A balance must be reached for discourse to proceed.

5. *A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.*

This dimension is easy to forget if we think only about a speech event involving a speaker and addressee. In that localized exchange, circulation may seem irrelevant, extraneous. That is one reason why sender/receiver or author/reader models of public communication are so misleading. No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. It is not text themselves that create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated can a text address a public. (Warner 90)

As a mind reader, there is no potential for change, there is no exchange. Reading the meanderings of a person's mind is a one-way process. Where Saleem's powers gain relevance as more than just some novelty is when he is able to connect and interact.

I should explain that as my mental facility increased, I found that it was possible not only to pick up the children's transmissions; not only to broadcast my own messages; but also (since I seem to be stuck with this radio metaphor) to act as a sort of national network, so that by opening my transformed mind to all the children I could turn into a kind of forum in which they could talk to one another, through me. (Rushdie 259)

It was an essential part of Rushdie's story that Saleem did not act solely as a reader of thoughts but someone who was able to communicate and allow others to communicate. This was more than a sideshow act. Once able to broadcast his own thoughts and connect the minds of others,

the essential takes place, thoughts were released from the vacuum. The thoughts, feelings, ideas of these people were no longer isolated but part of something larger, capable of interacting and making waves. The arguments that once seemed distant or foreign were now calling for one's attentions, asking to be considered, and such considerations forced one to reconsider their former positions.

The negotiations grew into anxiety and foreboding for London. If word got 'round that he allowed someone to make a case, trying to incite change, where would it end? Yes, yes, institutions were meant to serve their constituencies but should he then start welcoming people to voice every whim? The bureaucracy of it would drown them all. Suggestion boxes would overflow and before anyone had time to address one need, ten more would pop up.

But like a flash, an alternative filled him with despair. If he decided to ignore Rushdie, to follow his gut and make decisions unswayed by the opinions of the many, would he find himself condemned? Ignoring the voices, he risked them uniting against him, even with all of their petty differences, uniting to take him down or to leave him in droves.

Damned either way, done in either by kindness or indifference. London's feelings of helplessness. What, should he start dancing now? Paint a smile on his face, tuck a flower in his lapel and hope that this act of receptiveness would not signal weakness?

No! He was no dancing monkey! He would not beg. Here, he was in the position of power. *I am not a god*, London thought, *though neither am I a monster. Don't I deserve understanding and consideration like any other?*

London struggled. He looked in the mirror, staring into his own eyes and repeated his name over and over to reinforce his being, his reality. He listened, considered, and reconsidered, and felt himself sliding into neverness. The ground felt unstable.

6. *Publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation.*

... Publics have an ongoing life: one doesn't publish them once and for all (as one does, say, to a scholarly archive). It's the way texts circulate, and become the basis for further representations, that convinces us that publics have activity and duration. A text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time, and because this can only be confirmed through an intertextual environment of citation and implication, all publics are intertextual, even intergeneric. This is often missed from view because the activity and duration of publics are commonly stylized as conversation or decision making. I have already suggested that these are misleading ideologizations. Now we can see why they are durable illusions: because they confer agency on publics. There is no moment at which the conversation stops and a decision ensues, outside of elections, and those are given only by legal frameworks, not by publics themselves. Yet the ideologization is crucial to the sense that publics act in secular time. To sustain this sense, public discourse indexes itself temporally with respect to moments of publication and a common calendar of circulation. (Warner 97)

*Passion is punishment*, Rushdie thought.

He did not live where he did to make loads of money. He did not yearn to pad his bank account. London was a means to other ends. More than buying things, having things, satisfying every urge, Rushdie sought to explore. Not to blind himself with so much, but to make voyages and delve into himself and his world. His novel, too, reflected this aspiration, being more than a novel about children with special powers, *Midnight's Children* was about children struggling and

communicating, it was about individuals trying to come to terms with themselves and better understand the chaos of their country and the world.

As the novel approaches its end, the focus is not on the individual powers of the *Midnight's Children* (it does not turn into a tale of superheroes), but instead we find the children (now adults) imprisoned by the prime minister, Indira Gandhi. Seemingly at the end of their line, jailed, they are not helpless, no. Instead they find solidarity, a willingness to stand together in the face of the corrupt Indira Gandhi, to stand for their strange collection of quirks and peccadilloes, to reflect and speak the needs and wishes of the people that populate their worlds.

“The people of India,” [Indira Gandhi’s bodyguard] explained, “worship our Lady like a god. Indians are capable of worshipping one God.”

But I was brought up in Bombay, where Shiva Vishnu Ganesh Ahuramazda Allah and countless others had their flocks ... “What about the pantheon,” I argued, “the three hundred and thirty million gods of Hinduism alone? And Islam, and Bodhisattvas ...?” And now the answer: “Oh yes! My God, *millions* of gods, you are right! But all manifestations of the same OM. You are Muslim: you know what is OM? Very well. For the masses, our Lady is a manifestation of the OM.” There are four hundred and twenty of us; a mere 0.00007 per cent of the six-hundred-million strong population of India. Statistically insignificant; even if we were considered a percentage of the arrested thirty (or two hundred and fifty) thousand, we formed a mere 1.4 (or 0.168) per cent! But what I learned from [Gandhi’s bodyguard] is that those who would be gods fear no one so much as other potential deities; and that, that and that only, is why we, the magical children of midnight, were hated feared destroyed by [Indira

Gandhi], who was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods, a multi-limbed divinity with a center parting and schizophrenic hair ... And that was how I learned my meaning in the crumbling palace of the bruised-breasted women.

“Who am I? Who are we? We were are shall be the gods you never had.”

(Rushdie 503-4)

This was the rallying cry. Through Saleem’s telepathic powers, Rushdie created a self-organized gathering, a setting for dialogue and reflection, “a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity.” He created a public that openly discussed and criticized their leader, a woman drunk on power believing herself a god, the God, the manifestation of OM. When confronted by the Prime Minister, their powers do not save them from being victimized, captured, tortured, or from death; where there once stood one thousand and one, only four hundred and twenty remained as the novel edges towards its conclusion. But this did not leave them powerless. Something happened, was happening that could not be reined in by the powers-that-be. Their thoughts, discussions, words filled the walls of their prison, a public realized. The numbers, their size became secondary to their mere existence, their struggle to persist, maintaining a personal identity, independent of the imposed, of the established, sanctioned, institutionalized. Here, there was freedom but, more precisely, vitality, a will to do more than just survive. Ideas were not restrained but set afire to be considered and reconsidered, changed, and developed to become the best version of themselves.



*7. A public is poetic world making.*

There is no speech or performance addressed to a public that does not try to specify in advance, in countless highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation: not just through its discursive claims – of the kind that can be said to be oriented to understanding – but through the pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address, temporality, *mise-en-scène*, citational field, interlocutory protocols, lexicon, and so on. Its circulatory fate is the realization of that world. Public discourse says not only “Let a public exist” but “Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.” It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success – success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes. Put on a show and see who shows up. (Warner 114)

Ambition gave way to reality and something was lost... but it was the dream that was left to the shadows, that idealistic image disconnected from reality, something that could only exist in one’s imagination.

True public spheres only exist in a world of discourse and interconnectivity. One cannot force a public in to existence, spontaneous combustion or bust. A public must circulate amongst the living, the opinionated, the thinkers, and the questioners, where there is an exchange of views amongst speakers and listeners, readers and writers, not trapped in the mind of the isolated individual or idealized beyond reproach. “It cannot work by frankly declaring its subjunctive-creative project” (Warner 114). If there is no forum to interact across, to bridge understanding,

nor a medium to draw attention, deliberation, and appeal, the public cannot withstand the changes of its population over time; it simply cannot survive.

By the end of *Midnight's Children*, the standing of these magical children was revealed as a reflection of Rushdie's ongoing talks with London. He actualized this public, clear and concrete, where it was once just memories and emotions now stood a novel, mirroring Saleem's web that challenged the Prime Minister, where once was just a boy overhearing the thoughts of strangers. With the children locked up together by the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in the state of emergency, brought to life the abstraction, the theoretical public sphere. The recognition garnered by the Prime Minister further developed and solidified its character, the position of this public and the world they attempted to articulate. "Incredible, children: we, who could not talk for five minutes without disagreeing: we, who as children quarreled fought divided distrusted broke apart are suddenly together, united, as one! O wondrous irony: [the Prime Minister], by bringing us here, to break us, has in fact brought us together!" (Rushdie 501). In their detention, *Midnight Children* uncovered their strength. It was not about forcing a single view, blind to the diversity of sentiments, doubts, and needs of its various participants but instead allowed for that open-ended debate, the questioning and developing of ideas and purpose. A public does not need the powers-that-be to validate their being but, in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie illustrates the potential power of just such a public.

Face of the City. It was not one of the beaten nor did it reflect fury, but rather shock. Yes, shock was a better word. Rushdie had him nailed from the very beginning. Simply by sitting down to the table, opening up the topic for discussion, listening, considering, and agonizing over the variety of arguments, he had given Rushdie his time and attention. He had given Rushdie an audience, which is to say he gave him power. O the power of the gaze.

His arms lay swaying at his sides, fingers dangling, separate almost. And as the numbing shock faded, London, the City, the landlord, smiled. He had been bested. *But by quite a commendable man – worthy, certainly worthy*, the City thought straightening up. And then he remembered something he had overheard Rushdie reciting ... “a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity ... through conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations” and thought he had some good years in him yet. A city was not— he was not one thing stuck in time but moving, changing, growing, and adapting.

## III.

ON AN OTHERWISE BLANK WHITE CANVAS, EMBROIDERED, JANE JACOBS STITCHES THE CITY ANEW, EACH THREAD REINFORCING AND ILLUMINATING FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA AND FRANK O'HARA'S WORDS THAT BIND AND REFLECT THE CITY'S RELIANCE ON AND DEMAND FOR RESPECT AND IMAGINATION.

Groans and whispers around her signature frames and charismatic smirk. Windows blacked out with determination. Jane Jacobs paced her laboratory, wall-papered with schematics and diagrams, charts, studies, polls, surveys charting the movement of people, where the money goes, and how it is spent. She wanted to create something, a being more perfect. She pored over the details, running the numbers and extrapolating, beakers and burners. She sought life in all its intricacies. Cities were geographic plexuses and symbols of collective unity, sure, but they were also respect and imagination, respect for neighbors, strangers, and imagination to build, reimagining the city and its possibilities again and again, two crucial, often overlooked features to the long-term health and flourishings of a city. Head down, she tinkered on.

The natural phenomena that take place every day before our eyes did not escape my examination ... I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed.

The catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme; and I eagerly inquired of my father the nature and origin of thunder and lightning. He replied, "Electricity;" describing at the same time the various effects of that power.

She summoned Mary Shelley, voiced Doctor Frankenstein, his story but tip-toed its excesses, its ego, and the blind obsession. Her work was delicate and there was no room for extra risks, not interested in serving her own vanity but something more. She had composed a toolkit, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and her goal was clear: "The book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding ... My attack is not based on quibbles about rebuilding methods or hair-splitting about fashions in design. It is an attack, rather, on the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding" (Jacobs 3). She wanted to shake the notion that there was one formula to building and running a successful city. Cities were filled with different sorts of people, with differing ambitions and their needs should be respected and reflected by their city; to force blanket terms onto a city and its habitants was and is a losing battle. And by, instead, appealing to the unique qualities of a particular city, she believed one would be far more successful in sparking their inhabitants' imaginations to innovate and instill a more flexible, open, resilient character.

Jacobs flexed in the bathroom mirror.

Cities were being mistreated, raised wrong by both those who hated what cities were and well-intentioned fools who did not understand how cities functioned. Cities were complex beings. They were no less domesticated, no less multifaceted than the human beings who created and inhabited them. They were not machines, solely requiring the occasional tune-up and some oil when they creaked or croaked but instead reflected the histories, customs, and developments of their constituents.

The simple needs of automobiles were easily understood and satisfied than the complex needs of cities, and a growing number of planners and designers have come to believe that if they can only solve the problem of traffic, they will have solved the major problem of cities. Cities have much more intricate economic and social concerns than automobile traffic. How can you know what to try with traffic until you know how the city itself works, and what else it needs to do with its streets? You can't. (Jacobs 7)

No single area could account for all of the failures or all of the successes of cities. There was no be-all-end-all solution, woven together were its grand avenues meet side streets, its parks and alleyways, its residences and shops, neon lights and billboards. One cannot take a scalpel to the body – not without affecting its neighbor, all of it overlapping. It is an intricate web of interconnected parts that lean upon one another, for better or worse.

Building off one another, something holistic; Jacobs set to work, to create an example, a being to stand, righting wrongs of so many past assumptions and misconceptions. She would assemble hers to be stronger, more resilient. Her, the City's body-physical vivified would be, brought to life, stitched and fortified around the words of Jacob's poets.

First, Federico Garcia Lorca, who had come to New York City after living in a society steeped in tradition and discovered something wholly unexpected from this big brash city.

[I]n June 1929 bringing with him, on his first trip away from his native country, the vivid images and sounds of Andalusia and of the folk and gypsy culture, the beat of flamenco and dancing that become part of his own pulse. [Lorca] came to New York in the last, unhappy stages of a searing love affair with a younger man, a sculptor, who had not returned Lorca's passion but had made

use of him for his own ambitions. The crisis was compounded by the fact that Spanish culture rejected and condemned homosexuality outright, and his orientation was no secret. His nascent fame had spread the talk about it. (Merwin xiv-v)

With the weight or weightlessness of the broken hearted, Lorca set west, set his sights on the New World, new – yes, new. Something different, change, spark, a shock to the system. Away from the plains of Spain, from his own, from the acquainted with, from the familiar, from tradition.

He spent the weeks before his departure avoiding eye contact. He did not want to meet the eyes of another, feel that instant of recognition, reminders of his unrequited love, of being used, of being gay, the knowing whispers, rumors, stories divulged, personality unraveled. It was too much to bear.

He was thirty-one and trapped. Trapped by the eyes of the familiar, murmurs echoing off neighborhood buildings that shut him in. He wanted the freedom of the unknown, of the new, to meet the eyes of another and be no closer, histories hidden, locked away, buried, where each passing face was the face of a stranger.

And Andalusia asked, “What’s so good about new?” and pleaded, “do you really want something uncharted?” and reminded Lorca of the Andalusian lilt, of the folk and swing.

“But that’s not new—”

“Oh, I know ... still, though, it is rather nice.”

As is liable to happen in such situations, New York did not provide the clean break Lorca so desired. Instead of a new foundation, he was swept up and nearly drowned. “[A]ll of his native Granada could fit into three skyscrapers. He felt ‘murdered by the sky.’ He was stunned

by the vastness and scale of the city, which was for him a place where during the day people mired in mindless games, fruitless labors, and at dusk poured into the streets in a human flood” (Hirsch xi). New York offered him a whole new set of problems to confront. It was death, exposed. The murder of animals, the crime, racism, and filth, but, worse still, the perceived apathy of its citizens. In their unending cadence and indulgence, life was disconnected from the world, from nature, playing like a march to or of death. Heartache in decline—no, not in decline ... rather it’s like what Lekman sang, “you don’t get over a broken heart, you just learn to carry it more gracefully.” But grace, what did New York have to teach him of grace, this being of machines, gaudy and discordant?

“First we feel. Then we fall,” Joyce wrote. In Spain, he felt and fell. In New York, over again, this time in a perpetual spiral. “Lorca was extremely energized deeply appalled by the city he discovered—its ‘extrahuman architecture and furious rhythm,’ its ‘geometry and anguish’—and the work he left behind still carries a sense of shock and surprise...” (Hirsch xi). New York revealed something, something that wasn’t any less true beyond the city’s limits but was rarely so flaunted. Unabashedly on display, red lights, neon lights, and all of the lights, life and death were tied, fused in wondrous disarray. The logic of this city seemed beyond human as he had come to know it; its drama, theater, art, conflicting and cooperating, seemingly unaffected by the strict set of principles, codes, and morals he was raised to closely observe.

While Lorca could have admitted defeat and returned home soon after his arrival in 1929, instead he confronted the city and in so doing he faced the sources of his grief and the repositories of his fears, a New York transformed into Lorca, a Lorca transformed into New York. As he himself wrote, “I have said a poet in New York and I should have said, ‘New York in a poet.’” (Medina xvi-ii)



O New York! You — you siren of a city, sidewalks paved with gold but too with splatterings of suicide, rot, cracked greed, excess towers, vomiting crowds, and blind stomping parading feet. No, all that glitters is not gold. And on and on, so it goes.

Lorca arrived in New York months before Black Tuesday and saw the unraveling of Wall Street. He saw the depression hit and hit hard. “Canyons of lime imprisoned an empty sky/ where the voices of those dying under guano sounded” (Lorca 41). It was death wrapped in the desolate, abandoned skies, the caustic, the shit. And still it persisted. There was reason, some strange rationale. All around him, it vibrated (even at such depths, even amongst the desperation and gloom). He worked and wrote and created the collection *Poet in New York*. In this city, Lorca did not just see the world anew but also himself.

Here, in New York, he was not forced to assume the culture, conventions, and attitudes of those around him. It was that touch of respect for one’s neighbors that allowed the whole city to get on and keep moving. With so many avenues and such a wide variety of potential paths, the distance of strangers was not malice but rather individuals busy trying out their own set of distinct roles and styles. Breathing softer, deeply, he saw not around or over but through. It was not the New York of myth and dreams. Lorca did not idolize the city or lose himself in the machinery and pace, or in the excesses and grandeur of legend but instead found the desire for privacy in crowds and a yearning for connection with an individual in his isolation, the pull of seemingly contradictory forces, of sadness and hope, which amounted to its humanity.

Alan Jacobs (unrelated to Jane) wrote about finding and understanding one’s place, relaying a story of Adam Levine, a doctor working for an organization that brought “high-quality medical care to people throughout the world who desperately need[ed] it” (Alan Jacobs). Levine told a story of saving the life of a five-year-old but it was tempered by the loss of a patient who

died as a result of a lack of equipment, a fluke in scheduling, chance. “I can’t take credit for saving the girl’s life today without taking responsibility for the man’s death last week, so I choose to do neither. Instead, I prefer to simply keep working to improve the system as a whole: training more nurses and doctors, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of care through improved triage and other basic structures...” (Alan Jacobs). To incorporate everything, all of his failings and successes, would overwhelm his body, instead Adam Levine found a course that better suited his personality, his temperament. And Lorca,

Agony, agony, dream, ferment, and dream.  
 This is the world, friend, agony.  
 The dead decompose below the clocks of the cities,  
 war passes weeping with a million gray rats,  
     the rich give their lovers  
     small illuminated deaths,  
 and life is not noble, or good, or sacred. (Lorca 153)

Life is the battle to discover how to live, the long walk to defeat. But it is not the case where one should just roll over, throw in the towel, and die—no. Death is inescapable but that does not make life any less worth living, in fact its rarity makes it all the more valuable. Dream, continue to dream, hope and fail better, getting closer to your ideal. Lorca saw the contradictions of New York, its grandeur and demise, death that even it could not escape or hide from and still it persevered.

In Lorca, Jane Jacobs found a poet aware, aware of himself and of the life he wanted to live, desiring neither to tread on another nor to be treaded on. She saw him continue to engage even in the face of failure, communicating, building even when it meant taking a leap of faith. He took a risk then imagined and created the world fresh.

To understand such problems—to understand why drinking pop on the  
 stoop differs from drinking pop in the game room, and why getting advice from

the grocer or the bartender differs from getting advice from either your next-door neighbor or from an institutional lady who may be hand-in-glove with an institutional landlord—we must look into the matter of city privacy.

Privacy is precious in cities. It is indispensable. Perhaps it is precious and indispensable everywhere, but most places you cannot get it. In small settlements everyone knows your affairs. In the city everyone does not—only those you choose to tell will know much about you. This is one of the attributes of cities that is precious to most city people, whether their incomes are high or their incomes are low, whether they are white or colored, whether they are old inhabitants or new, and it is a gift of great-city life deeply cherished and jealously guarded.

(Jane Jacobs 59)

She was speaking of privacy which is tied around respect for another's personal space. Threading this around the muscles and veins of her being, of the City, Jacobs knew for her creation to persist, to endure these basic features of privacy must be found; they had to find a way to manifest themselves in reality. And this was what made respect indispensable, privacy was the freedom to explore one's person, ideals, and interests unencumbered by social norms, expectations, and popular culture while at the same time giving each individual the power to share one's personal, private life at their own discretion. Privacy afforded a person time, quality time to investigate, recognize, travel the intricate web of their mind and understand themselves not solely as a part of a tradition, a hierarchy passed down from grandparent to parent to themselves to child to grandchild, or as a worker to an employer, a tenant to landlord, infinitely onwards, forwards and backwards. Such a life took away one's personal choice, their personality.

It stole away a self for them to unravel and interpret on their own terms, as they saw fit, and to then proceed accordingly.

When forced into a role, passed down by convention or through institutionalization, the individual turns into a shadow of themselves, never given the opportunity to explore or express who they are or who they want to be. In such environments, movements that deviate from the prescribed stick out sourly, making it easy to pick them out of a crowd and shame them back into form or push them to the fringes of society. One dons a mask to save himself from being outcast or pummeled into conformity. Personal information in the wrong hands has not only the power to affect them then just as an individual, separate and singular, but can also affect their social, cultural, and economic standing, too. The web grows too tight and a person does not pursue new avenues because the risks are too high and opts for the comfort of the disguise, where nothing is at stake. Cities need privacy, they need their citizens to feel respected, comfortable to try new things and take chances.

With this in mind, Jacobs laced the words of Lorca into the City's bloodstream.

By the East River and the Queensboro  
 the young men wrestled with industry  
 and the Jews sold the rose of circumcision  
 to the faun of the river  
 and the sky spilled over bridges and rooftops  
 herds of buffalo pushed by the wind.

But none stopped,  
 none wished to be a cloud,  
 none looked for ferns  
 or the yellow wheel of the drum...

New York of filth,  
 New York of wires and death.  
 What angel do you carry hidden in your cheek? (Lorca 149)

Lorca's New York poems are flooded with bodies but bodies like archetypes, cold physicality and distant. He saw and described their actions but something was beyond him. He could not pin down their natures. Their inner worlds were out of reach. He did not know their brothers or cousins or co-workers. He saw the marketers hustling on the street and the sweat of the laborers but what did they believe in, what did they yearn for? Lorca does not denounce the individual's insensitivities, a trap one could easily slip into given his brutal impression of New York, but instead sees through to their private souls. He does not condemn them to infernos, to the filth, death, and wires. They are not lost to the cold emptiness of machines but instead carry about their souls, tucked away, carefully guarded from the passing stranger. And in *Ode to Walt Whitman*, Lorca respects this distance and wonders, "What angel do you carry in your cheek?"

One did not lose their soul in the city, in New York, but guarded it cautiously, vigilantly, to be explored and shared on one's own terms. Whereas in traditional Andalusia, everything felt so ingrained. One could hardly tell where the public ended and the private began. New York offered stark, gaudy contrasts. The home, office, street, subway car, grocery: each offered their own form of privacy, their own kind of public. One belonged to these places in varying degrees, in the amount they allowed themselves to be incorporated or identified with such locations. Whether they traveled on the 8:15 train every morning, or visited the grocery every Sunday afternoon, seeing the same people, sharing this part of their day, this part of their lives, even if not directly or purposely; they were in control.

Familiar faces greet each other at the market once a week but they do not know where the other calls home. They do not know how they spend the other six days of the week. The sheer number of options and alternatives make it highly unlikely to bump into these habitual strangers beyond one's weekly errands, whereas in small towns, the opposite is true. There are fewer

options, maybe just a handful of restaurants, markets, and shops, so people see one another again and again, and then project images and expectations onto one another. And in a small town there is little privacy, when one is exposed it is to the town. These projections are then expected to be fulfilled and reflected in all other daily activities because if this stranger, with whom one shares so many daily habits, can be different, even strikingly abnormal, what does it say about them? What does it say about one's relationship with their parents, lovers, children, friends, and most disconcertingly, one's relationship with their inner self? To know people can share such similar lives and yet have such differing hearts is frightening. It forces a person to open themselves up to not only consider the minds and desires of those around them but also to explore and voice that which seems most eccentric or bizarre about their own personality and their own life.

A city offers the respectful distance. In a city, a person is free to involve themselves at their own volition, to initiate contact, to let this part of their private life slip here, to expose a particular bit of themselves to this set of strangers. For even in the hard lines of New York, connections bled over, strings still kept the whole big picture tied together, looser here, tighter there.

...That primitive drive dances with the mechanical drive,  
 ignorant in the frenzy of original light.  
 Because if the wheel forgets the formula  
 it still can sing nude with herds of horses:  
 and if a flame burns the frozen plans,  
 the sky will have to flee before the tumult of the windows. (Lorca 43)

No matter how fragmented or chaotic, overwhelming and absurd the role cities may have taken on, they were built, exist, and will continue to exist around people, human beings, individuals. For Lorca, writing in *Dance of Death*, the towers of steel and glass are still imagined, designed, and constructed by human beings, who will then work in them, clean them, maintain them, and eventually knock them down to build something new or otherwise to forget them.

Amongst all this mechanization, humanity persists. Even in ignorance, even when there seems to be a vast disconnect between man and nature, under coarse cloth is still flesh and still deeper bone and blood and collective memory, too. Lost in the push of Wall Street and the mad dash for money that seems to drive New York and cities in general, where skies are threatened by windows,

[t]his place isn't foreign to the dance, I say it.  
The mask will dance between columns of blood and numbers,  
between hurricanes of gold and moans of idled workers,  
who will howl, dark night, for your time without lights. (Lorca 43)

When Lorca talks about the dance, he is describing basic human desires beneath all of those outer layers, beneath the public faces we put on outside of our homes, beneath the quest for wealth and status. It's those primitive shapes and the carnal humanity that, he believes, is within every person and will outlast the "columns of blood and numbers." The dance is the attempt to find a form for what goes on inside. It is this sought after form that will outlive buildings and currencies, passed on, right under our noses, from generation to generation, and in cities it will be fought for and guarded passionately.

Jane Jacobs' eyes grew puffy as she squinted, trying to thread another needle. Surrounded by spools and spools, she wanted that high-thread-count quality. Respect in cities was multi-faceted, not only did it allow individuals to explore themselves at their own pace but, also, through its varied and numerous collections of publics, the individual could reveal themselves to one without fear of being condemned by them all.

Reformers have long observed city people loitering on busy corners,  
hanging around in candy stores and bars and drinking soda pop on stoops, and  
have passed judgment, the gist of which is: "This is deplorable! If these people

had decent homes and a more private or bosky outdoor place, they wouldn't be on the street!"

This judgment represents a profound misunderstanding of cities, It makes no more sense than to drop in at a testimonial banquet in a hotel and conclude that if these people had wives who could cook, they would give their parties at home.

The point of both the testimonial banquet and the social life of city sidewalks is precisely that they are public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion.

Nobody can keep open house in a great city. Nobody wants to. And yet if interesting, useful and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified. Cities are full of people whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either.

In speaking about city sidewalk safety, I mentioned how necessary it is that there should be, in the brains behind the eyes on the street, an almost unconscious assumption of general street support when the chips are down—when a citizen has to choose, for instance, whether he will take responsibility, or abdicate it, in combating barbarism or protecting strangers. There is a short word for this assumption of support: trust. The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts...



Most of it is ostensibly utterly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all. The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level—most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone—is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need. (Jacobs 54-5)

Sidled right alongside the need for privacy is contact: the need for or rather the possibility of contact. One is not human alone but as part of a collective. On the street, on sidewalks a person does not hang around in place of being home, it does not act as a replacement. Leaving one's intimate sphere, we put who we think we are up against reality, challenging preconceived notions of ourselves up against a variety of independent variables. The street offers a different set of possibilities and provocations. Away from personal exchanges, one is free to sit back and observe or jump in at one's discretion. To not greet a passing stranger in a city is not atypical and far from rude but should you have a guest in your home, well then there are certain expectations, expectations of the host and expectations of the guest.

On the street, choice reigns: who will you associate with, whose calls for attention will you cede to, and whose will you ignore? Expectations of formal etiquette are thrown to the wind, the preeminent rule of the street, of public city life is respect. With so many people from such a diversity of traditions, cultures, upbringings, one cannot expect all others, or even most others, to follow their personal code. There are simply too many people. The odds are not in your favor and so a mutual respect for place and neighbor is built. In this way things may run smoothly. One cannot go about trying to evangelize, pushing one's opinions, codes, morals, ethics on every passing stranger. Cities are too large, strangers too many. It would be impossible to keep up with

them all and still maintain a life. By accepting differences of opinion, one can get on with their life and begin to explore the diversity and differences of their surroundings at their convenience and interest.

Jacobs hovered over the body of the City checking for loose threads, botched patterns, across joints and the wrap of muscle around bone. The establishment of privacy for citizens and respect for their public selves would breed trust, strengthening the bonds of the City. There would be no need for everyone to have such intimate relationships for the City to function. Not everyone would have to follow a single way of life for things to work out. And with the constant possibility of contact with the new, drama and excitement were alive. A constant renewal of cells, chance encounters, a multiplicity of cultures banging into one another that does not allow people to rely on the tried-and-true ways of the past but forces innovation, new ways of thought, of living as populations change, growing and shrinking in different spheres. And so Jacobs tethered these words from Lorca's *Ode to Walt Whitman* across the quiet rhythm of the City's heart:

By the East River and the Bronx  
 the young men sang, baring their waists  
 with the wheel, the oil, the hide, and the hammer.  
 Ninety thousand miners mined silver from the rocks  
 and the children drew stairwells and perspectives. (Lorca 149)

All of the people, moving, hustle and cuss, conflicting and cooperating, checking and balancing, in dialogue, in contact briefly and then passing onwards. Today the workers are young, strapping, but time moves, "a breeze that walks sleeping through the branches" and we are reminded that everything is so fleeting (Lorca 153).

No single person, sphere, or belief system dominates cities. They play off one another, ricocheting, seeking some leverage but always slightly beyond one's control, by the very nature of cities, just beyond one's reach. And when a city is functioning openly and freely, any

authority and power gained is constantly being reassessed and called into question. Mark Warren said, “[self-organized groups] are based on common interests and identities, most will lack internal imperatives for critique and discourse” (Warren 189). Such forms do not encourage dialogue or challenges to what is accustomed; any provocations can then quickly become labelled as a threat, dangerously rocking their foundations.

Respecting the diversity around you, one then is called to explore and then assert their individualities. “The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own” (Habermas 36). In order to determine its value, its power, its standing, it had to be analyzed, discussed, turned-inside-out, taken at awkward angles and reflected upon. And such tasks were not for the yes-men and yes-women, willing to simply go with the flow, accepting everything at face value, but rather for those who, sparked by their personal visions and passions, were unwilling to conform, were not interested in imposing their beliefs on others and instead shared their unique insights and pushed to build their own spheres, big and small alike. A city founded on respect might be nice but it was only half the battle as far as Jane Jacobs was concerned. Respect would be turned into a useless trait if everyone shared the same beliefs and nothing was ever challenged. Jacobs eyed her creation, then touched the City’s skin, feeling the sinewy muscles react to her touch, goosebumps and so on. She followed the veins, spreading out, reaching the limits of the City’s body, limbs, extremities. The curve created as they wrapped around fingers, returning blood back to the heart to repeat the process again. The toes in the same way. She leaned in and whispered Mary Oliver’s words, “Listen—are you breathing just a little, and calling it a life?”

And then Neil Gaiman’s, “Look around you: I mean it. Pause, for a moment and look around the room that you are in. I’m going to point out something so obvious that it tends to be

forgotten. It's this: that everything you can see, including the walls, was, at some point, imagined. Someone decided it was easier to sit on a chair than on the ground and imagined a chair. Someone had to imagine a way that I could talk to you in London right now without us all getting rained on. This room and the things in it, and all the other things in this building, this city, exist because, over and over and over, people imagined things.”

Jacobs loved cities and wanted hers to be more than just a robot, money-machine, or display case for artists. Respect was good and all but when interwoven with imagination, she saw her being, the City coming to life, interacting with its citizens, on the forefront of the future. “The city fosters art and is art; the city creates theater and is theater. It is in the city, the city as theater, that man's more purposive activities are focused ... into more significant culminations.” Once given the space to explore, to succeed and endure, cities need to then push forth their innovations. Jacobs' City would not be about simply getting by and accepting things as they were, a learned helplessness, but rather about trying to uncover new ways, dreaming, striving to articulate something new and distinct.

To temper and complement Lorca's verse, Jacobs tapped the words of Frank O'Hara to complete the City. She sought poems that were filled with conversations, one trying to communicate their intimate thoughts, the angels tucked away in cheeks.

It was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born ... It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person,

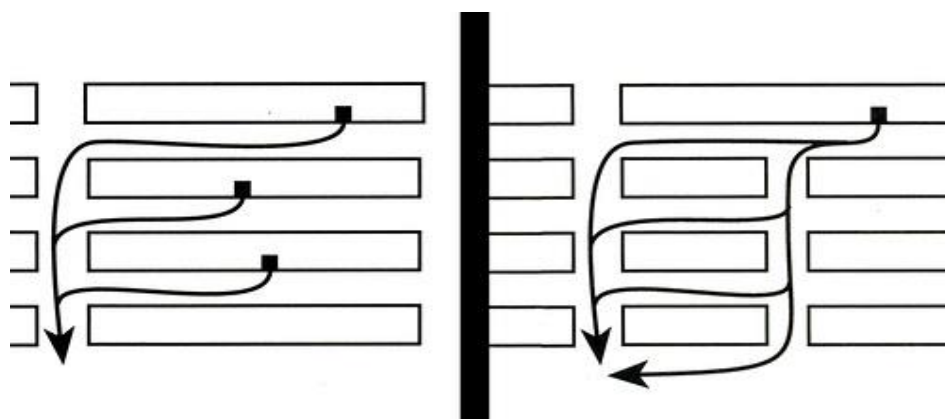
Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. (O'Hara 248)

O'Hara's poems were not meant to live behind glass, locked in ivory towers, not bronzed vestiges of life unable to breathe, evolve, or stumble. In the same ways Jacobs envisioned cities, O'Hara approached his poems; they were facilitators, catalysts to communication, bringing people together and engaging them, unveiling what they might not so readily wear on their sleeves. It was not beauty-art for its own sake but a conversation, words exchanged across a coffee table or couch imparting something, a thought, an idea, a feeling, to be heard, collected, shared, and explored.

One does not want to be fenced in, forced to retrace the same lines over and over. Thoughts become monotonous, and life is not lived but an automated process taking one from birth to death. With the possibility of transformation, life is more intimate, personal, subject to our whims, fancies, and passions.

This stringent physical segregation of the regular users of one street from the regular users of the next holds, of course, for visitors too. For instance, I have been going to the dentist on West Eighty-sixth Street just off Columbus Avenue for more than fifteen years. In all the time, although I have ranged north and south of Columbus, and north and south of Central Park West, I have never used West Eighty-fifth Street or West Eighty-seventh Street. It would be both inconvenient and pointless to do so. If I take children, after the dentist, to the planetarium on West Eighty-first Street between Columbus and Central Park West, there is only one possible route: down Columbus and then into Eighty-first.

Let us consider, instead, the situation if these long east-west blocks had an extra street cut across them—not a sterile “promenade” of the kind in which super-block projects abound, but a street containing buildings where things could start up and grow at spots economically viable: places for buying, eating, seeing things, getting a drink. With the extra street, the Eighty-eighth Street man would no longer need to walk a monotonous, always-the-same path to a given point. He would have various alternative routes to choose. The neighborhood would literally have opened up to him.



The same would be true of people living on other streets, and for those nearer Columbus heading toward a point in the park, or toward the subway. Instead of mutual isolation of paths, these paths would now be mixed and mingled with one another. The supply of feasible spots for commerce would increase considerably, and so could the distribution and convenience of their placement. If among the people on West Eighty-eighth there are a third enough people to support a newspaper and neighborhood oddment place somewhat like Bernie’s around the corner from us, and the same might be said of Eighty-seventh and Eighty-ninth, now there would be a possibility that they might do so

around one of their additional corners. As long as these people can never pool their support nearby except in one stream only, such distribution of services, economic opportunity and public life is an impossibility. (Jacobs 180-1)

Across long super blocks, like tradition-based societies where one follows what has come before, options are limited. Possibilities are reined in. To create an alternative means going out of one's way and, usually, at the cost of something else. When so many boundaries exist, it is only possible to support a limited number of shops, restaurants, and avenues of exploration and innovation. It becomes only the desire and will of the majority that survives, that can survive when living on long isolating blocks, in a traditional setting where one cannot find a specialized outlet or platform to voice their opinions. Across such avenues as there is simply no room for what is niche, what will only attract smaller groups, everything is packaged to appeal to the widest possible audience, gliding over all. But when blocks are cut down, shorter, the number of potential storefronts rises, and each store must compete to offer an experience, a product, a service, something unique, personal, different from the next.

Being continuously exposed to such limited options, physically or conceptually, one's thinking becomes stale, unwelcoming to what is new because it is harder to consider the possibility of something unlike what is. Having become accustomed to seeing, hearing, and thinking about the same things day-in-and-day-out, the mind becomes less attentive. It has seen it all before. It knows the block like the back of its hand, there is nothing new to see here. It is all one big stifling routine.

On a single track, there are no diversions, there are no alternative ends, and the same conclusions are always reached. But when shortened, fraying edges, offering a greater diversity of options, new opportunities present themselves. "Why don't I go east and west/ instead of

north and south?/ It's the architect's fault" (O'Hara 86). O'Hara, too, shared his frustrations with long blocks. They push along the pedestrian. Uninterested in getting trapped on a long block, O'Hara traveled New York City north and south across the far shorter street blocks. The long avenues were inhospitable to his wanderings. One simply does not walk east and west the way one might walk across New York north and south.

By its nature, the metropolis provides what otherwise could be given only by traveling; namely the strange. Since the strange leads to questions and undermines familiar tradition, it serves to elevate reason to ultimate significance ... There is no better proof of this fact than the attempts of all totalitarian authorities to keep the strange from their subjects ... The big city is sliced into pieces, each which is observed, purged and equalized. The mystery of the strange and the critical rationality of men are both removed from the city.

(Jacobs 238)

Thoughtful consideration and imagining the impossible. Jacobs furthers her point in her citation of Harvard professor Paul J. Tillich. Cities thrive off the peculiar, the few, the possibilities of something new, the mixtures and blends, all intermingling. Cities introduce the formally unacquainted, making spheres available should one decide to act upon such impulses. Not in the fabricated, sanctioned off, institutional but in the spontaneous chance encounters that make a life.

The totalitarian try to establish an official culture, to control one's encounters, creating an environment that serves particular ends, but cities expose people to a far greater cross section of things, many people from many, many places. And that is just the way Frank O'Hara lived his life and composed his poems. "Initially, he intended a career in music, as a pianist or reviewer or composer" but along the way poetry took hold. This change in direction though did not mean



he abandoned music, instead his poems are filled with it, it and his countless other inspirations and numerous friends (O'Hara xii). "It was Pablo Picasso who made him tough and quick ... and further tributes are paid to Gertrude Stein, Max Ernst, Paul Klee, the Fathers of Dada, Auden, Rimbaud, Pasternak, and Apollinaire ... O'Hara set about celebrating the exchange of inspiration and innovation, of art and love and rumor, among the painters, poets, novelists, dancers, filmmakers, composers, and musicians who made up his ever expanding circle and his first readership" (O'Hara xiii-iv).

O'Hara was uninterested in living up to or creating expectations for himself. He sought to live his life as only he could.

we don't want to be in the poets' walk in  
San Francisco even we just want to be rich  
and walk on girders in our silver hats

I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is  
thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi  
and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go  
back to work happy at the thought possibly so (O'Hara 168-9)

He had no interest in following the beat poets out west, re-treading trails blazed by Jack Kerouac, immortalized in *On the Road*, though he did not condemn them either. Life simply led him somewhere else. Conclusions and ends were not the things that motivated O'Hara. He sought doorways, bridges, and paths to the next thing. He wondered about who thought about him and what his city had in store for him. It was the possibility of contact that sent him back to work content.

As Jane Jacobs delicately moved about the brain of the City, she sought to push the buttons of the driven. Given the time and space to explore their personalities and desires, the City would not stop there but would chase down those budding aspirations. O'Hara was interested in talking about new loves but more still he had a passion for all of the things that made up his

world and it was reflected in his poetry. He wanted to share his life with friends and lovers, new and old.

For centuries, probably everyone who has thought about cities at all has noticed that there seems to be some connection between the concentration of people and the specialties they can support. Samuel Johnson, for one, remarked on this relationship back in 1785. ‘Men, thinly scattered,’ he said to Boswell, ‘make a shift, but a bad shift, without many things ... It is being concentrated which produces convenience.’

Observers are forever rediscovering this relationship in new times and places. Thus in 1959, John H. Denton, a professor of business at the University of Arizona, after studying American suburbs and British ‘new towns’ came to the conclusions that such places must rely on ready access to a city for protection of their cultural opportunities. ‘He based his finding,’ reported the New York Times, ‘on the lack of a sufficient density of population to support cultural facilities. Mr. Denton ... said that decentralization produced such a thin population spread that the only effective economic demand that could exist in suburbs was that of the majority. The only goods and cultural activities available will be those that the majority requires, he observed,’ and so on. (Jacobs 200-1)

Not only do cities build environments that can support and provide for more than just the needs of the majority, they can also produce better quality. In the suburban, rural, traditional, it is the needs of the majority that are the focus, that are all that can be provided for given the structure, inclinations, and the economic potential (which are all so closely connected). But in cities, because of the high concentration and large populations, competition is greater. To earn a living

in a city, one cannot simply produce any good or sell a service lackluster, too many alternatives exist. It is easier to get away with shoddy work elsewhere because there are fewer options, one cannot simply go out for a replacement. In cities, it is abundance, a competition to provide the best in one's field, to offer something few else could.

If cities were limited to just high-quality goods and services, one might get further in pointing out their excesses and shortcomings. But these great big beings were not only capable of and produced so much more, they are also where it is possible/acceptable/encouraged to dream up the next big thing, prodding the status quo, pressing for variety or something more personalized. It is in the exchange of ideas, creating new paths, pursuing one's own ends, pushing one's self further and not settling in, accepting face value.

... I have never clogged myself with the praises of pastoral life, nor with nostalgia for an innocent past of perverted acts in pastures. No. One need never leave the confines of New York to get all the greenery one wishes—I can't even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there's a subway handy, or a record store or some other sign that people do not totally *regret* life. It is more important to affirm the least sincere; the clouds get enough attention as it is and even they continue to pass. Do they know what they're missing? Uh huh. (O'Hara 67)

Jacobs was not out to trash the countryside or nature. She believed there was a place, value, and a purpose to such particular varieties of living but this did not nor should it mean that it was the ideal or that it should serve as the basis for other types of communities. And like O'Hara suggests, it was hard to argue against the many things cities offered; not to see people simply whiling away their lives in pastoral scenes but actively pursuing it, wherever their passions may lead.

Nature passes and passes and we *should* share the earth symbiotically, thoughtfully, living side-by-side but that does not mean our neighbors should then dictate our lives. The pastoral, the rural, the traditional should not squash our reveries or restrict, stop thought.

Vital cities have marvelous innate abilities for understanding, communicating, and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties... Cities were once the most helpless and devastated victims of disease, but they became great disease conquerors. All the apparatus of surgery, hygiene, microbiology, chemistry, telecommunications, public health measures, teaching and research hospitals, ambulances and the like, which people not only in cities but also outside them depend upon for the unending war against premature mortality, are fundamentally products of big cities and would be inconceivable without big cities. The surplus wealth, the productivity, the close-grained juxtaposition of talents that permit society to support advances such as these are themselves products of our organization into cities, and especially into big and dense cities. (Jacobs 447-8)

To enjoy city life is not to defame nature. Nearly all of mankind's settlements are impositions on the environment to whatever degree. Instead let us consider living harmonious with the countryside, taking advantage of all the other has to offer. Cities work to communicate and educate its citizens but even more they create environments conducive to progress. They find where they are weak, susceptible to infection, and make adjustments, fortifying where they are vulnerable to create more sustainable, suitable, habitable living conditions. Innovating not in isolation, with an economy that stops at the city limits but continues on out. Investing, sharing, contributing, and building both inside and out, for the benefit of all. The inventions and discoveries that occur within the city do not stop there but become an available resource for all

of mankind. In the magic of these tightly-packed living quarters, under those city lights, with people filling cafés and restaurants, out on boulevards, singing, drinking, fighting, fucking, crying, and chatting in homes, offices, parks, banks, on stoops, and in markets; a place alive because of a dream, personal or collective, and the perseverance to see it through to fruition.

Gaze endlessly at the stars but it will not bring you any closer to your neighbor. It will not make them any more respectful or open to the ideas, beliefs, or feelings of another. It is in the living side-by-side, close together, that creates individuals more tolerant to their differences and more considerate of alternatives.

With fear, with the burden of a mother, of a creator, of one who brings life into the world, Jane Jacobs circled her table. There was no turning back now. She believed in this tireless work, in her studies, in her analysis, and in her loving construction. Her city, the City, would be one of quiet courtesy and unbridled passions. This dynamic, these complementing qualities, would not allow the City to bend to expectations, restricted to try to fit within a certain image of herself—no, in its time the City would find her identity and pursue it with all of the enthusiasm of her being. And now all that was left was a final knot around the finely woven words of Jacobs' poets, respect and imagination, civility and passion. Then the power turned up, voltage maxed, soul-words fused electric, pulsations pounding of vitality, the City opened her eyes, life.

## IV.

AGAINST A HEAVILY SHADOWED BACKGROUND, THICK BRUSH STROKES AND CLUMPS OF OIL PAINT RISE AND FALL, REVEALING AND OBSCURING THE LIMITS OF INCLUSIVITY IN CITIES WHILE PHASWANE MPE RUBBED ELBOWS, SHARED STORIES, AND SPREAD HIS THOUGHTS AND FEARS WITH THE CITY.

Jane Jacobs' words twisted and slipped onto the next panel, and we were seen from a new angle. Shadows now crept across our face letting on something sinister. "Cities were once the most helpless and devastated victims of disease..." (Jacobs 447). Images come to mind of plagues spreading furiously, taking out whole chunks of emerging medieval cities and Pilgrims sailing across the Atlantic with diseases that would ravage the native populations of new lands. Living in tightly packed quarters with limited ways of preserving cleanliness and insufficient sanitation, cities were breeding grounds for disease and illness. People were living too close, infection spread too quickly, contagions passed from one onto the next, sweeping through and threatening whole cities. And while Jacobs was right when she called cities "great disease conquerors," as we improved our sanitation practices, amassed resources, and better educated our citizens, we still fell and fall victim to disease, exposing ever-growing populations, and making for startling statistics to the passing onlooker. Though to consider such numbers in isolation with the intent to limit access or the pathways to the many spheres in cities alters a key function of what cities are and why they thrive. Such narrow perspectives turn public spaces and spheres into private enclaves, steeped in confining rituals and customs. Cities, when free from the dictums and decrees of totalitarian institutions and individuals, are inclusive.

When Phaswane Mpe came to us, he already knew he was going to die. He didn't come to be saved. He didn't expect us to conquer his disease nor was he afraid of contracting something new. He was a student, novelist, and gave lectures in African literature before he died; before he left to go on to the next place down the line.

He was told his illness was a message and he came to us. We, the City, still are not sure what led him to us, whether desperation, hope, resignation, or some cocktail of the lot. He didn't ask us to cure him, to use our "apparatus of surgery, hygiene, microbiology, chemistry," to rid his body of the mysterious disease that would soon kill him. No, instead he told stories, stories that he had told before, stories that were memories, memories that were folklore. He told us of his novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, filled with stories of South Africa after apartheid, of the search for new, better fitting identities across the towns and cities of the newly liberated land, of the heavy shadows of the past, of society's problems, injustices and the fight to find balance between these new freedoms and the angst of the past that threatened them.

This made us think about our own history, our racisms, sexism, biases, and how towards and from exclusivity we have moved. And he told us about life in Hillbrow where he lived, in Johannesburg where he studied and worked, about the racism, the xenophobia, the AIDS epidemic that heightened and exacerbated already high tensions, and the uneasy mix of peoples. He told us all of these old stories without asking for anything in return. He spoke to us as if he were in a confessional except he did not seek forgiveness either. Though if he did, we would not have been able to grant it to him. We could not forgive in the same way we could not judge or condemn.

We wondered if he realized a city, "[h]owever exclusive [it] might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private persons" (Habermas 37). Free, open cities, cities like us, were places of inclusivity. Even when cities seemed welcoming only to a certain gender, race, or lifestyle, they were still filled with individuals, viewers, readers, and listeners who pushed up against/toward/from the dominant

narrative to better communicate something regardless of their status. Where fear and tyranny did not overwhelm or threaten such practices, allowing citizens to openly debate, challenge, and engage in conversation. Cities embraced variety. And then we wondered if Mpe just wanted to be heard.

He abandoned his doctorate and was about to apprentice himself to a healer (in Sepedi, Ngaka) to learn about herbal medicines. He saw his new career path as a continuation of the old one: healers understand physical malaise as an expression of spiritual and emotional dysfunction. Cure means constructing a narrative of the patient's life to pinpoint the problem. He hoped that listening to his patients' stories might help dislodge the block that frustrated his creative writing. (McGregor)

He talked and talked, relating story after story. Maybe to jostle new stories from his body or from the ground around, below him. Maybe he wanted to construct cities out of words and stories. We wondered if he had found a new purpose for cities, reinventing our brothers and sisters, new life. The stories, memories, folklore, histories filled up past our eyes and made us dizzy. We listened and wondered how we would be able to shake free his creative block and if it would ease his pain at all.

Even when under the swoon of illness (or so we assumed) and he crumbled before us, nothing revealed itself. What direction was there to follow? How could we help this suffering man? "He was small and intense, with large dark eyes that dominated a gaunt face" (McGregor). Amidst the spell, lying on the ground, his face remained open, clear, focused on ours and his lips continued forming words, now like spells or prayers. We remained silent for a time, holding our body near his, pressing his hand in ours, and listened.



The movement of his lips became indecipherable and passed into silence. Then nothing changed and there was stillness.

Mpe's eyes drifted into moments, brief bouts of sleep or unconsciousness only to be shaken back by dreams, thoughts, nightmares and his eyes burned fresh.

To break the silence, to save Mpe from this, if only momentarily, we began to tell him about the ways of dying where one does not simply fold into the tall grass, swallowed into the earth, but instead dying as a process of life, an opportunity to explore the body, to experience oneself, seeking the full expression of your person.

We held his hand and told him some of Samuel Delany's stories of New York City. We told him about Delany's frustrations with his own city and how it too struggled to keep up with the needs of its citizens. We related the reports from *Times Square red*, *Times Square blue* and brought a slice of life from New York's Forty-second Street with its hustlers, movie houses with their x-rated films, the rise of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and how Delany understood their relationships with the greater city. "Tolerance—not assimilation—is the democratic litmus test for social equality" (Delany 194). Delany wrote about the changes going on in and around Times Square between the 1970s and the 1990s, how the sex industry was moved to the periphery of the city both in idea and practice, how the lines between sex and crime were blurred beyond recognition and how the public was actually being done a great disservice.

With knowledge of HIV still in its early stages, fears, rumors, and fabrications took the place of education and inextricably linked homosexuality and the virus. Incited by the panic and fears of the unknown, looking desperately for a simple answer and resolution to this devastating virus, the tie between the two grew stronger. And once a link between virus and supposed cause or perpetuator was found, the sex industry along with all homosexual and perceived-homosexual

(which is to say non-normative) activity was forced out of Times Square and “safe,” familiar chain stores filled the vacancies. And as the financial benefits were too good to turn down, these links were maintained in spite of medical findings, taking advantage of people’s fears. Rents were raised and the dynamics of neighborhoods, relationships between area workers, visitors, residents, landlords, and employers, drastically changed. And this is not to say that change in and of itself is bad but that by pushing out these small businesses, businesses that reflected the needs and interests of the area, city officials were not just forcing changes to the sex industry and to the area’s related businesses but to all of the businesses that built themselves around the needs of a certain clientele.

We weren’t sure if Mpe would find solace in these comparisons, in these tales from the other side of the world or if they would further his grievances with cities and people ... but with no better ideas, we pressed on. We had always believed in the power of putting something into words, to express something abstract in a specific way was a decent consolation prize, alleviating some frustrations to be able to name one’s antagonist. And we followed through and relayed Delany’s logic. Whether out of fear, control and power, and/or economic gains, the prevailing notion that was pushed onto people stated:

that pleasure must be socially doled out in minuscule amounts, tied by rigorous contracts to responsibility. Good people were people who accepted this contractual system. Anyone who rebelled *was* a prostitute or a pervert, or both. Anyone who actively pursued prostitution or perversion was working, whether knowingly or not, to unleash precisely those red Edenic forces of desire that could only topple society, destroy all responsibility, and produce a nation without families, without soldiers, without workers—indeed, a chaos that was itself no

state, for clearly no such space of social turbulence could maintain any but the most feudal state apparatus. (Delany 186)

The systematic overhaul of Times Square emphasized pleasure and responsibility as opposites on the good/bad citizen spectrum. And the supposedly pleasure-obsessed homosexuals continued to pursue sex above consideration with ne'er a care, plotting them firmly on the pleasure/bad citizen side of the spectrum. Following this logic, if such behavior were allowed to continue unchecked it would certainly lead to the collapse of the city and society.

Jane Jacobs understood these societal pressures, too. It was just this type of logic that prompted *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Wanting to maintain order should not force the citizens of a city to compromise who they were. Cities should open things up for people, encouraging individuals to expand their horizons. She wanted cities to attempt to equal the complexity of people that inhabited them.

Le Corbusier was planning not only a physical environment. He was planning a social Utopia too. Le Corbusier's Utopia was a condition of what he called maximum individual liberty, by which he seems to have meant not liberty to do anything much, but liberty from ordinary responsibility. In his Radiant City nobody, presumably, was going to have to be his brother's keeper anymore. Nobody was going to have to struggle with plans of his own. Nobody was going to be tied down. (Jacobs 22)

This seemed to be the other side of the same coin that Delany was dealing with. Le Corbusier planned these simplified environments that tried to control the people within them. By only creating spaces and establishing businesses that reinforced certain ideologies, a variety of ideas (opposing and more still) were not given a voice or were otherwise subverted. There was only

space for citizens to act in just such a way with no spare room for personal goals that differed from others, no room for growth, change, or for peccadilloes that could get in the way.

These cities preferred the docile because it made city planning easier, understandable, and straightforward. One could build a city and not worry about having to change or restructure as populations grew and changed. But Jane Jacobs recognized that it was through the conflict of personalities, through unplanned encounters, through an inclusivity of diverse populations and publics that cities did not stunt or attempt to limit growth but stimulated and supported the fullest expression of humankind and it would be in cities that the *more significant culminations* of humanity would be attained.

Back in Times Square these businesses were not replaced with an equally diverse collection of storefronts but rather chain stores, national and international brands, whose cookie-cutter personas were indistinguishable from locations in California, Virginia, Minnesota, or Texas. Delany tried to explain that it wasn't the uniformization or homogenization of things that brought on social harmony but instead it was open-mindedness, patience, and a willingness to try to understand how individuals with their quirks, theaters, shops, restaurants, bars, and their specific clientele functioned as part of the whole and not in spite of it.

What a notion, as if we could enforce a single outlook, a single way of being, as if cities were a thing of the past. The dangers in the connectedness of cities does not outweigh their benefits. It was Roland Barthes who said,

[O]ne touch of difference leads to racism. But a great deal of difference leads away from it, irremediably. To equalize, democratize, homogenize—all such efforts will never manage to expel “the tiniest difference,” the seed of racial intolerance. For that one must pluralize, refine, continuously. (69)

Here he might have been talking about racism but the same holds true for sexism, homophobia, any and all other biases as well as the fears of change, difference, and contamination they may bring on. Such singular, insular views are extremely fragile, prone to the slightest of nudges and waves of the kaleidoscope. When things become standardized even the smallest of differences, the seemingly insignificant is highlighted and subject to the attention of the group at large. It seems ludicrous to stand behind one distinct view and to ignore or deny others when considering the large array of possibilities and circumstances that compose life. Nothing is a sure thing. It seems almost dangerous, or if nothing else quite irresponsible, to put all of your money on a single outcome. This raises the stakes and it is all or nothing. Plagues might have severely affected large cities but a plague could wipe out a small town. Its numbers and variety of people are limited. Such communities simply do not have the resources and resiliency to confront and manage around the troubles and hardships brought on by an epidemic, economic downturn, natural disaster, or warfare.

It follows the misguided logic that a single superior distinguished quality will make up for all other shortcomings. What hubris! Charles Darwin's *survival of the fittest* was not based on superior intelligence or strength but rather a species's ability to adapt to shifting environments. Adaptation is the name of the game. One can make assumptions based on prior knowledge and accumulated information, extrapolating onwards but there is always a gap. While computers, machines, robots may be able to survive and even thrive in controlled circumstances—like a chess-playing computer, within a set number of rows and columns, with clearly defined rules, it can dominate, able to calculate all of the limited number of potential moves—but when we throw in the unpredictable, unknown variables, a machine cannot function. There are no clear ends, no defined rules, no solid ground to base one's decisions on, to progress, evolve.

We, the City, long for and rely on inclusivity, a variety of options and perspectives to consider, to choose or refuse, to challenge, to serve, and to sustain us as we move forward. Such variety prepares us for all of life's unknowns. It makes us flexible, durable, able to withstand the hard corners and sharp edges of life. Then when faced with life's accidents, unexpected encounters, chance, and the like, we do not just have to scrape by tooth and nail but are in position to thrive, to take advantage of unanticipated developments, unforeseeable discoveries.

In a recent essay on the MOOC [Massive open online course] phenomenon and its alternatives, Scott Newstok makes an interesting and important point:

The corporate world recognizes the virtues of proximity in its own human resource management. Witness, for example, Yahoo's recent decision to eliminate telecommuting and require employees to be present in the office. CEO Marissa Mayer's memo reads as a mini-manifesto for close learning:

“To become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working side-by-side. That is why it is critical that we are all present in our offices. Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallways and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people, and impromptu team meetings. Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home. We need to be one Yahoo!, and that starts with physically being together.”

Why do boards of directors still go through the effort of convening in person? Why, in spite of all the fantasies about “working from anywhere,” are “creative classes” still concentrating in proximity to one another: the entertainment industry in LA, information technology in the Bay Area, financial capital in New York City? The powerful and the wealthy are well aware that computers can accelerate the exchange of information, facilitate low-level “training.” But not the development of knowledge, much less wisdom.

Mayer’s edict has been controversial, to say the least, but it’s worth emphasizing that other Silicon Valley giants share her belief that employees work better when they have regular face-to-face contact. The famous amenities of Google’s campus are there so employees will want to be at work as much as possible. Pixar’s building is designed to promote connection and collaboration among employees—as, indeed is its whole corporate culture. And when things get serious at Facebook, the whole company goes into lockdown mode:

After word leaked that Google was starting work on a “Facebook killer” in summer 2010, Zuckerberg called on engineers to work nights and weekends for 60 days to revamp key social features like photos, groups, and events. Just as it did then, the cafeteria opened up on evenings and weekends that summer, and children dropped in for dinners and good-night hugs before their parents logged back on for late nights.

...They clearly believe that not just their personal well-being but all their intellectual sharpness depend on regular face-to-face encounters with others like them. Yet they proclaim that for *hoi polloi* none of that matters. (Alan Jacobs)

Yes, you see, something happens when people are present. We have been made aware of the potential negatives; diseases that spread ever quickly through tight-packed metropolises but to forsake all in-person encounters ignores the big picture and the great value of what happens when people are face-to-face. Often disease and other such pestilence can be avoided (or at the very least minimized) with some knowledge, education, and improved hygiene, sexual, and/or sanitary practices. And this is not said lightly, because the fact remains, regardless of where one prefers to live, diseases do not discriminate. They do not choose to infect people in cities over suburbs or the countryside. All are potentially susceptible, and exponentially more so without the resources, studies, and dissemination of knowledge of how to treat the problem or the steps required to avoid its potential causes.

Aware of how to minimize negative repercussions, there doesn't seem to be a way to replicate the positive side of such contact. Some of the world's most powerful businesses, leaders in interactive technologies that connect people from opposite ends of the globe, have opted to keep their employees in offices because they have not been able to reproduce the same atmosphere, the same potential any other way. When people are flesh before you and not a window on a screen that can be opened and minimized around one's schedule, convenience, or mood, something extra is demanded. When people share the same space, schedules are thrown out. Individual selves are no longer simply workers, recognized by name, position, and e-mail attachments, but a complex collection of off-hand comments, small talk, work production, and a



vast compilation of shared and revealed details; details that will go unnoticed or not, then acted on and interacted with in any number of unimaginable ways.

Plans, plans—they are no match for all that transpires outside of a person's head. In shared spaces, things happen, unplanned for, unexpected things. In an environment filled with *conflicting and cooperating* personalities, personalities beyond a single individual's control, one cannot account for what will happen. In such scenarios where people are able to send in work from isolated locations, separate from their being, separate from the uniqueness of their personalities, all that is taken away is some marginalized representation (of a person, of their effort) that cannot be interacted with and can only be taken as is. When a person is present, unknown parts of themselves are combined, blended, and merged into a collective whole. When people are present in the same office, in the same building, on the same train car, on the same block, potential interactions abound. The possibilities grow, the power of the gaze is apparent. Who will we choose to confront? What will we engage with? Work is as much of a priority as co-existence. With such direct contact, people must then choose when to compromise and concede points and when to push and fight for them. Present, in person, decisions must be made and individuals are active participants, actively occupying and engaging within a shared space. To remain separate, isolated, takes away from one's decision-making process. One's options are limited, confined, creating boundaries around what a person can be.

We, this urban collective, the City, then in careful, fine strokes revealed a gradient that might expose Mpe to shared angles, links that bonded: In his story of Refentše, who had come from the small town of Tiragalong to the bustling city-world of Johannesburg to study and work for the university, finding a home in one of its inner-city neighborhoods, Hillbrow, filled with immigrants, poor, prostitutes, students, drug dealers, long-time residents, and people from all

walks of life jammed together in this microcosm of the bigger city; with Delany's tales from Times Square and the changing tides that worked against the homosexual community and the interdependent sex industry, turning the area into a sterilized zone; and Alan Jacobs, who found, in this age of technology and digitalization that seems to encourage de-centralization and quite possibly de-urbanization, a preference for face-to-face interactions. Cities, and quite possibly humanity, depend on inclusivity, contact amongst densely packed populations to maintain its rich set of diverse qualities and capabilities.

Were porn theaters romantic? Not at all. But because of the people who used them, they were humane and functional, fulfilling needs that most of our society does not yet know how to acknowledge.

The easy argument already in place to catch up these anecdotes is that social institutions such as the porn movies take up, then, a certain social excess—are even, perhaps, socially beneficial to some small part of it (a margin outside the margin). But that is the same argument that allows them to be dismissed—and physically smashed and flattened: They are relevant only to that margin. No one else cares.

Well, in a democracy, that is not an acceptable argument. People are not excess. It is the same argument that dismisses the needs of blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, women, gays, the homeless, the poor, the worker—and all other margins that, taken together (people like you, people like me), are the country's overwhelming majority: those who, socioeconomically, are simply less powerful. (Delany 90)

Through these theaters, we wanted to remind Mpe of all cities could do even when one felt impoverished, unwelcome, or otherwise marginalized. It is easy to be discouraged by the sweeping gestures of institutions but one must never forget they were built by and for people. Institutions were meant to create structure but also to facilitate connection and engagement amongst the citizens it served. No matter how exclusive or particular an institution tried to make its appeals, it was still part of a larger inclusive city, a city filled with people who were free to utilize the institution as it was established or re-shape it to better serve them and their community. Delany's theaters were symbols of the complex systems built within vibrant cities, symbols for the way cities served their citizens, providing for them, encouraged, and pushed them. They were symbols of contact, spaces where a diverse set of people could meet and kindle engagement, discourse, change, growth.

It was these strange combinations of people and pursuits that inspired human activity to *more significant culminations*. It was in these unplanned, unexpected, awkward, unusual compositions in the office, sidewalk, subway car, grocery, university, park that tripped us up, knocking us off the well-trodden paths to see something different, to understand the world fresh. When Delany wrote about porn theaters and how they worked within cities (not in spite of but as a functional part of them), it was one of the ways we had negotiated and tried to provide a space for our citizens, a way for them to communicate a part of themselves. Cities were great emblems of democracy and could not survive for long when they settled for dismissive practices, ignoring the needs of whole portions of their constituency. "People are not excess" (Delany 90). How long can a being survive when it begins to ignore one part of its body or decides to chop off entire chunks?!

We sung Mpe's words back to him to free him of them, to show them not as boundaries and fences but bridges. One can manipulate facts, twist emotions, and whisper half truths but there is no mistaking the effects for the causes. HIV/AIDs did not generate because porn theaters existed and crime was not invented by the poor or immigrants.

Like most Hillbrowans, Cousin took his soccer seriously. You and he had disagreements on the subject of support for foreign teams—especially those from elsewhere in Africa. You often accused him of being a hypocrite, because of his vocal support for black non-South African teams, whenever they played against European Clubs, contrasted so glaringly with his prejudice towards black foreigners the rest of the time. Cousin would always take the opportunity during these arguments to complain about the crime and grime in Hillbrow, for which he had held foreigners responsible; not just the physical decay of the place, but the moral decay. His words were echoed by many others—among them, the white superintendent at your place in Van de Merwe Street, who told you when you moved in that Hillbrow had been just fine until those Nigerians came in here with all their drug dealing.

You, Refentše, child of Tiragalong (and, as you insisted in the days before your death, also of Hillbrow), had never shared such sentiments. It was your opinion that the moral decay of Hillbrow, so often talked about, was in fact no worse than that of Tiragalong.

Think about it, Cousin, you would challenge. How many people are here in Hillbrow? How many of them are criminals? If you consider that the concentration in Hillbrow is dense and work out the numbers of crime in relation

to the number of people, I tell you, you will find Tiragalong to be just as bad.

(Mpe 17-8)

One could find structural and/or institutional causes for such afflictions that plagued cities. The epidemic behind HIV/AIDs could be directly linked to the lack of understanding of the disease, the misinformation, and the fear surrounding it, rather than a scourge placed on individuals for having sex with a person of the same gender. Often crime was and is more closely connected to the lack of resources and funds a neighborhood receives than the people who populate it. Petty crime does not rise in impoverished areas because poor people are more prone to criminal activities but rather because such areas are limited in expendable revenue to address the full scope of their needs. It makes more financial sense to invest one's monies in areas that offer greater returns than areas that are just getting by, areas that call for greater attention. But remember people are not excess and no single neighborhood is less deserving of aid (regardless of profit potential).

We did not share and recall these details to offer Mpe some kind of vindication, proving or substantiating the claims of one of his characters. No, instead we hoped the juxtaposition of ideas might open new avenues for him. The connection and struggle between writers, cities, institutions, businesses, people marked something that was more than just about cities, or humans in cities but humanity, cities reflected in our humanity. We thought it said something about the needs of people across all spheres and spaces, about how it was easy to let some people fall through the cracks, as if they brought it upon themselves. But here is where we saw things coming together with just the slightest bit of contact—how even a modest touch can alter our eyes, open them anew. We could see the connections; the subtle blend of colors, that from afar seemed separate, were in fact one. It was so clear, our purpose obvious. We saw clearly now why

cities, our brethren were incessantly abuzz, changing, moving. It was the diversity of their people, citizens calling for attention, their needs sprouting, announcing themselves.

There are as many shades of difference among publics as there are in modes of address, style, and spaces of circulation. Many might be thought of as subpublics, or specialized publics, focused on particular interests, professions, or locales. The public of *Field & Stream*, for example, does not take itself to be the national people or humanity in general; the magazine addresses only those with interest in hunting and fishing, who in varying degrees participate in a (male) subculture of hunters and fishermen. Yet nothing in the mode of address or in the projected horizon of this subculture requires its participants to cease for a moment to think of themselves as members of the general public; indeed, they might well consider themselves its most representative members.

Other publics mark themselves off unmistakably from any general or dominant public. Their members are understood to be not merely a subject of the public but constituted through conflictual relation to the dominant public. In an influential 1992 article, Nancy Fraser observed that when public discourse is understood as only “a single, comprehensive, overarching public,” members of subordinated groups “have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies.” In fact, Fraser writes, “members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.” She calls these “subaltern counterpublics,” by which she means “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and

circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.” (Warner 117-8)

Looking at ourself in the mirror, we see the fields before us, the spheres and spaces that make up our body. We are not one thing but a dialogue alive. We are collaborations of individuals, people striving, creating, inventing their lives. Lives imagined and built not to satisfy the desired goals of the majority but their own particular ends, ends inspired by their own walks of life and not forced by our body, our histories. We are not a regulatory system but an environment, a tool to help bring out the fullness of a person, where for every desire, habit, custom, quirk there is a sphere, a space for them to explore it without fear. It is within the inclusive nature of cities that a person can find appealing counterpublics without feeling like an outcast, without feeling like they must then turn in their membership to the general public. It is then in these smaller spaces and spheres that we can again closely examine individual needs, interests, and identities. And we begin to better understand our publics through these discussions, in spaces where individuals do not feel compelled to conform but can instead explore and reassess.

Touching ourselves, we learn what feels right. What feels good along our necks need not be extrapolated across the length of our body. Across our back we enjoy certain sensations that might not translate to our thighs or to our feet. And we would not assume such sweeping gestures for the citizens we embody. “Counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely” (Warner 122). Our body is alive. We are not just a collection of limbs, but bones, tissue, muscle, veins, arteries, organs, and synapses, working together, connected, for better or worse. We do not stop listening after hearing a single voice because it is the loudest. No, we remain attentive to the exchange of voices, of spheres, spaces, and publics because they share with us their needs, telling us how to

better address them. When cities function and flourish, it is not because one group dominates. It does not require docile compliance in order to run. When cities function and flourish, it is because of the open exchange of ideas, the meeting of minds, clashings of the discordant, the spectrum of humanity's wide and varied desires revealed and focused with the hopes of manifesting themselves in reality; where it is not forced to march in step but can instead engage with others, connect, and find a place to call its own.

Mpe was worn; life had taken its toll. Sickened by the practiced myths of child rape to cure disease and other abuse, violence, and terror inflicted upon the innocent, it had stolen away some of his hope. We spoke Jane Jacobs' words, "Vital cities have marvelous innate abilities for understanding, communicating, contriving, and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties... Cities were once the most helpless and devastated victims of disease, but they became great disease conquerors" (Jacobs 447). We didn't make promises of miracle cures or secrets to social harmony but believed in the words we spoke and recited. We believed that cities were capable of meeting the needs of their citizens, *all their citizens*. Which is not to say that cities must or should be harmonious oases – people fill cities for chrissake! We can be no more harmonious, cacophonous, peaceful, congruous, or hostile than the people and things that fill our body. People with all of their idiosyncrasies, heaps of ideas, beliefs, emotions, pulsing about blood and bone, it's only a matter of time before heads butt; notions opinions, impressions communicated like the crack of a bat, dispersed, and given lives of their own.

"Across every street, every boulevard, look!" We grabbed Mpe, showing him our body. "Look at these collections, the curves, our flesh, the conflict and collaboration. The imagination at work. Each part is part of the whole. Inclusive, one. People, neither demons nor saints, bound by their pasts, their traditions, religions, expectations, passions, fetishes, their jobs, their



mornings, afternoons, and nights, their homes, buildings, constructions, their responsibilities, bills, and debts, their families, in-laws, and children, their pursuits and ambitions, their emotions, biases, and loves, creating still, all together, seeking expression!”

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