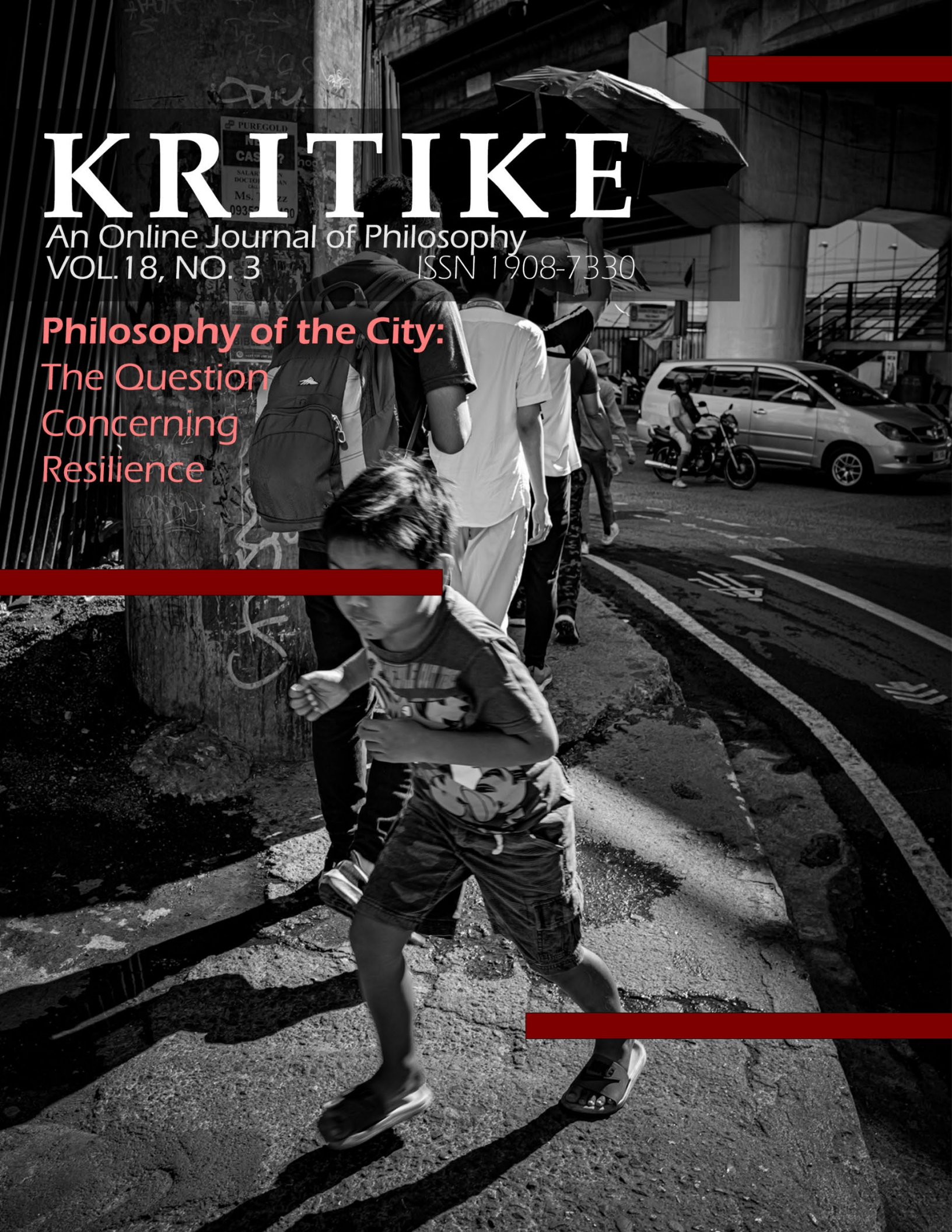


# KRITIKE



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**Philosophy of the City:**  
The Question  
Concerning  
Resilience

# K R I T I K E

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Remmon E. Barbaza

*Ateneo de Manila University*

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland

*University of Santo Tomas*



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## ABOUT THE COVER

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This photo was taken during one of the mobility forum activities held at the Ateneo de Manila University. This photo is a snippet of everyday life at the corner between Aurora Boulevard and Katipunan Avenue in Quezon City. With a perpetual construction site on the left and the road(s) to the right, the actual corner on which pedestrians are forced to traverse is so narrow that only one person can turn at it at a time. The experience of walking here is marred even with the odor of street life—the stench of urine, the smoke from idle engines, and the occasionally freshly cooked peanuts sold by peddlers.

In the edited photo used on cover, red lines are utilized to symbolize the child's suspended movement, reflecting the general condition of Metro Manila as a (mega)city when it comes to mobility.

*KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy*  
18:3 (January 2025)

Photograph by Remmon E. Barbaza, 2024  
Layout and caption by Kritike Editorial Board

# About the Journal

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**KRITIKE** is the official open access (OA) journal of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), Manila, Philippines. It is a Filipino peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary, and international journal of philosophy founded by a group of UST alumni. The journal seeks to publish articles and book reviews by local and international authors across the whole range of philosophical topics, but with special emphasis on the following subject strands:

- **Filipino Philosophy**
- **Oriental Thought and East-West Comparative Philosophy**
- **Continental European Philosophy**
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The journal primarily caters to works by professional philosophers and graduate students of philosophy, but welcomes contributions from other fields (literature, cultural studies, gender studies, political science, sociology, history, anthropology, economics, inter alia) with strong philosophical content.

The word "kritike" is Greek from the verb "krinein," which means to discern. Hence, kritike means the art of discerning or the art of critical analysis. Any form of philosophizing is, in one way or another, a "critique" of something. Being critical, therefore, is an attitude common to all philosophical traditions. Indeed, the meaning of philosophy is critique and to be philosophical is to be critical.

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## Introduction to the *Kritike* Special Issue on Philosophy of the City

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**Remmon E. Barbaza**

On July 1–3, 2024, the annual summer colloquium of the Philosophy of the City Research Group was held at the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City, Philippines. Sixteen participants, representing the US, Germany, South Korea, Kazakhstan, Paraguay, and the Philippines, gathered for three days of focused discussions surrounding the theme of resilience in the city. The following essays are fruits of these discussions.

In the opening essay, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Analysis of the Selective Permeability of Busan,” Matthew Crippen, Maria Almendra Sotelo, and Dana Jang (Pusan National University, South Korea) explore the concept of “selective permeability” in Busan, South Korea, analyzing how various cultural, social, and physical factors create different experiences for individuals based on their identity. Using James Gibson’s “affordance theory,” Crippen, Sotelo, and Jang show that urban environments are not equally accessible to all but present positive or negative affordances depending on gender, age, language, and culture. In doing so, the authors offer a nuanced examination of how Busan’s urban and social environment differentially affects residents and visitors, influencing whether they feel welcomed or marginalized in the city.

Do the conditions in the city enable one to experience the other as a neighbor? In “Necessary Visions: Richard Sennett’s Levinasian Neighbor in Pre- and Post-War Manila,” Philip Z. Peckson and Dean A. Mejos (University of Asia and Pacific, Philippines) examine how Manila’s pre-war elite engaged with public urban life in contrast to the enclave urbanism of contemporary Metro Manila. Using Richard Sennett’s concept of the Levinasian neighbor, the authors argue that the elite of pre-war Manila experienced the city with openness and intensity—interacting with a diverse range of people in public spaces, from structured encounters to the more spontaneous and carnival-like. By critically examining Metro Manila’s transformation into an

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archipelagic city of enclaves, where the wealthy interact without true exposure to public life, Peckson and Mejos point to the possibility of reconnecting with a lost urbanism that encourages interaction and responsibility toward strangers, one that might cultivate a more humane and dynamic urban environment.

In her essay, “The Lotus at Dawn: Rethinking Climate Resilience in an Archipelago,” Marie Franchesca Borrás Manalo (Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines) applies the Benjaminian concept of the *flâneur* to women and draws from key Heideggerian themes of dwelling and taking-measure as she explores climate resilience in the Philippines, particularly in the aftermath of Super Typhoon Rai (locally known as Odette), which devastated General Luna, a tourist hub in Surigao del Norte. Adopting an autoethnographic approach and employing the concept of *flâneuserie* (female wandering as a way of engaging with space), Manalo examines the ethical responsibility of city dwellers as tourists, their impact on island communities, and argues for a shift toward mindful tourism and an ethics of care to foster resilience in the face of climate crises. Furthermore, Manalo urges city dwellers to recognize their interconnectedness with island communities and to adopt responsible practices that promote climate resilience. By rethinking tourism, urban engagement, and care ethics, individuals can contribute to a more sustainable and compassionate world.

In “Looking at the Cracks and Broken Fragments: Ressentiment in the Narrative of Resilience,” Jasmin Advincula (Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines) critically examines how resilience is portrayed in disaster narratives, arguing that mainstream discourse often distorts resilience into a form of *ressentiment*, a term borrowed from Nietzsche and elaborated by Max Scheler. Advincula contends that resilience, when framed superficially as mere endurance, can suppress true suffering and justify governmental neglect and systemic failures. Using the Japanese art of *kintsugi* (golden joinery) as a metaphor, the author advocates for an *authentic resilience*—one that acknowledges loss, integrates suffering, and leads to genuine transformation. By rejecting *ressentiment* and embracing a more profound ethics of care, societies can move beyond mere endurance and build a future that truly learns from the past.

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland (University of Santo Tomas, Philippines) offers yet another critique of the idea of resilience, widely used and abused as it is. In “Immunology in the ‘City Interior’: Questioning Resiliency in Everyday Life,” Rennesland examines the prevailing understanding of resilience as shaped by neoliberal urban design, arguing that it functions as an *immunological mechanism* to maintain the status quo. Using Peter Sloterdijk’s concept of *immunological reason*, the author suggests that cities develop resilience not only against external threats (e.g., climate

disasters, migration, terrorism) but also against internal disruptions, shaping urban life around consumerism and exclusion. Rennesland calls for a shift in perspective from the city exterior—the formal, neoliberal urban landscape—to the city interior, where resilience is redefined through everyday encounters and marginal experiences. By shifting focus to the city interior, we avoid merely reinforcing existing power structures that adhere to neoliberal urban norms of resilience, thereby redefining resilience beyond economic recovery and toward embracing care, solidarity, and lived realities.

In “Existential Resilience in the City,” Shane Epting (Missouri University of Science and Technology, USA), who also delivered the keynote address at the summer colloquium, brings to the fore two aspects of the city that are often missing in studies mostly anchored in science and economics, namely, the complex ethical considerations and the concrete existential context that inhabitants of the city face on a daily basis. Resilience is not just a technological or business issue but, more fundamentally, an ethical one. Epting explores resilience in the face of climate change, not just as a structural or policy response but as an ethical and existential issue. He argues that efforts in developing resilience should go beyond infrastructure and disaster response by fostering meaningful engagement between city residents and municipal governments. Through co-planning—a participatory approach to urban planning—Epting highlights how communities can take responsibility for their cities, thereby finding meaning in their efforts toward resilience.

It is perhaps only fitting that this collection of essays ends with a view to hope. In “Spinoza and Urban Imagination: Resilience as the Persistence of Hope,” Jan Gabriel S. Boller (Polytechnic University of the Philippines) explores how Spinoza’s metaphysical and ethical philosophy can be applied to the concept of the city, arguing that urban resilience should be understood as a persistence of hope. Boller presents a Spinozist view of the city as a dynamic, relational entity shaped by individuals and their ethical relations. In doing so, he critiques static definitions of resilience, proposing instead that resilience emerges from the interplay of hope and fear—two key Spinozan affects that shape urban life and its transformations.

We are indebted to the following without whose support the colloquium could not have been possible: the Philosophy of the City Research Group; the Office of International Relations and the School of Humanities of the Ateneo de Manila University through the former and current deans, Dr. Jonathan Chua and Dr. Patricia Lambino; the Kwan Laurel Donation to the Humanities; Dr. Wilhelm Patrick Joseph Strebel, Chair of the Department of Philosophy; and Tony Papina, Jomel Santos, Gevans Jueco, Gyuri Cruz, Renee Macling, Nathan Zubaly, and Nico Salvador, who not only lent a helping hand to make the event successful but also always expressed interest in issues concerning the city we all live in. Last but not least, we would like

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to thank the editorial team of *Kritike* whose guidance and support helped us see this special issue through.

*Department of Philosophy  
Ateneo de Manila University, The Philippines*

Article

## Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Analysis of the Selective Permeability of Busan<sup>1</sup>

---

*Matthew Crippen*  
*Maria Almendra Sotelo*  
*Dana Jang*

**Abstract:** Our task in this article is to investigate selective permeability in the city of Busan in South Korea. Drawing on Gibson's tenet that perception organizes around "affordances" or action possibilities, the selective permeability model suggests that a single setting can be objectively supportive or hostile to different individuals. Embodied pragmatists and phenomenologists influenced Gibson, and we explore how factors like cultural habits, language, gender, age, geographical topography, and built form in Busan combine to alter bodily comportment so that action-closing "negative affordances" can manifest to one individual but not another. This, in turn, may make one stay in or retreat from Busan or places in it. For example, there is evidence that middle-aged Russian-speaking men experience greater safety—and thus freedom of movement—in some areas of Busan, as compared to younger Russian-speaking men, not to mention women. Throughout, we follow Dewey's lead in adopting what might be called "constructive realism," which holds that changes, once introduced to the world by human actors, are concretely there independently of any single observer—a position that weighs against dismissing

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<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by a New Faculty Research Grant of Pusan National University, 2024. We are grateful to the editors of this issue, Remmon Barbaza and Anton Heinrich Rennesland, as well as everybody involved in the Summer 2024 Philosophy of the City Colloquium held at Ateneo de Manila University. Additional credit goes to Liliya Kim for help in collecting data. We especially thank Mareike Joleen Timm for her theoretical contributions, her assistance with data collection, and for her help preparing Figure 3 and supplying three out of six photos in Figure 5. Various institutions supported this research, including Pusan National University, the Berlin School of Mind and Brain, and the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies. Above all, this project would not have happened without the many anonymous individuals who voluntarily availed themselves to supply data.

All images in this manuscript were generated/produced by the authors, and this paper received ethical approval from Pusan National University's Institutional Review Board.

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inconsistent impressions of an urban setting as mere psychological projections.

**Keywords:** affordances, cultural relativism, selective permeability, urban design

In this article, we examine selectively permeable aspects of the city of Busan in South Korea. Based on James Gibson's claim that people perceive in terms of action possibilities or "affordances,"<sup>2</sup> the selective permeability model holds that a single setting can be objectively supportive or hostile to different individuals. Examples of the phenomenon abound. A stairway may be a viable route for a healthy teen but not a person with mobility challenges. Compared to men, women may find a public transit system threatening because it is more dangerous to them. Some affluent residents have challenged subway expansion into their neighborhoods, with the aim of selectively obstructing marginalized populations from entering.<sup>3</sup> The central question in this article concerns how people from various cultures, ages, and genders encounter disparate opportunities or barriers in Busan and thus have reasons for wishing to leave or stay in the city or certain parts of it.

Obviously, the selective impacts of design tie to cultural matters. For this reason, a woman from a heretofore uncontacted tribe might not immediately register signs that a subway system is more dangerous to her than to men, due to the risk of sexual harassment. While past work has addressed matters like this in a general way, our intention is to offer a fine-grained analysis of how factors like culture and gender lead people to encounter objectively different possibilities of risk and safety, opening or closing action avenues. For this, we draw on qualitative observations of Busan as well as data from a multicultural cohort of respondents living there.

Our arguments begin with a review of the selective permeability model and its link to Gibson's affordance theory. Early portions of the article articulate how people from different regions may register and indeed encounter disparate affordances (action possibilities) in the same place. We go on to discuss how the built form in Korea—affected by things like the mountainous topography—leads inhabitants to see the world in ways not typical in the West and how this affects social interactions. We also look at

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<sup>2</sup> James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979) and James Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> See Sarah Schindler, "Architectural Exclusion: Discrimination and Segregation Through Physical Design of the Built Environment," in *The Yale Law Review*, 124 (April 2015), 1934–2024.

culturally based psychologies, philosophies, and attitudes that people carry with them and how these variations can make parts of Busan easier or more challenging to negotiate. In one area of Busan, for example, middle-aged Russian-speaking men are safer than their counterparts in their early 20s as well as women from a variety of cultures. The situation introduces action restricting negative affordances for some more than others, affecting freedom of motion.

Now, this article targets a special issue on philosophy of the city. So, leaving aside the aforementioned everyday cultural philosophies, how does our work fit the topic? First, though Gibson is remembered as a psychologist, his books address metaphysical and epistemological concerns, for instance, defending direct realism. His writings accordingly have philosophical content. This is more so if one adopts an older understanding of philosophy, which, until about the beginning of the 20th century, encompassed any intellectual pursuit. In line with this, affordances are widely discussed in top philosophy journals like *Mind* and *Synthese*. Something similar holds for selective permeability, which has so far been discussed exclusively in philosophical sources.<sup>4</sup>

Second, Gibson acknowledged debts to American pragmatists,<sup>5</sup> and he introduced the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to his students.<sup>6</sup> Though we reference pragmatism and phenomenology sparingly, our analysis empirically concretizes certain claims from these traditions

Third, Ludwig Wittgenstein advises that philosophers ought not to use words in unheard-of ways.<sup>7</sup> While we disagree with him in cases where one is attempting to move beyond an established universe of discourse, we take a cue from Aldrin Manalastas, who complains about philosophers

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<sup>4</sup> See Matthew Crippen, "Bodies Under the Weather: Selective Permeability, Political Affordances and Architectural Hostility," in *Somaesthetics and Design Culture*, ed. Bálint Veres and Richard Shusterman (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 154–182; Matthew Crippen, "Emotional Environments: Selective Permeability, Political Affordances and Normative Settings," in *Topoi*, 41 (2022), 917–929, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-022-09812-2>>; Matthew Crippen, "Selective Permeability and Situated Cognitive Harm in Multicultural Classrooms," in *Topoi*, published online first (2025), <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-024-10156-2>>; Matthew Crippen, "Selective Permeability, Social Media and Epistemic Fragmentation," in *Topoi*, 43 (2024), 1451–1465, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-024-10104-0>>; Matthew Crippen and Vladen Klement, "Architectural Values, Political Affordances and Selective Permeability," in *Open Philosophy*, 3 (2020), 462–477, <<https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0112>>; Matthew Crippen and Dag Munk Lindemann, "Selective Permeability, Multiculturalism and Affordances in Education," in *Philosophical Psychology*, 37:7 (2024), 1924–1947, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2023.2255612>>.

<sup>5</sup> See James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> See Shaun Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 49.

<sup>7</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §133.

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straying into abstract discussions about Hegel and suchlike at the expense of addressing serious social problems before them.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, we avoid arcane philosophical garb, for instance, opting to use “social pressures” instead of “social grammars,” which is more cryptic but usually deployed in the literature on selective permeability. We also conceptually clarify (in Wittgenstein’s sense) affordance terminology.

A last point, however, is that aspects of our position are metaphysically rooted. This is especially insofar as we follow John Dewey’s lead in adopting what might be called “constructive realism.”<sup>9</sup> This is an outlook that holds that changes, once introduced to the world by human actors, are really there independently of any single observer. Aside from us believing in the legitimacy of this perspective, the position has another advantage: it weighs against dismissing disparate impressions of an urban setting as mere psychological projections on the grounds that they arise inconsistently as a function of one’s cultural background, age, gender, and more, which is to say, because of how one is embodied in the world.

### Affordances, Normative Pressures, and Selective Permeability

Gibson locates affordances in the environment and says they are conveyed to organisms through energy and chemical arrays (light, sound, heat, food sugars, etc.), simultaneously suggesting that cultural habits and tools can alter the availability of affordances.<sup>10</sup> For example, Koreans and Westerners typically have different stride patterns,<sup>11</sup> which may affect walking efficiency and energy use, subtly altering the accessibility of distant locations. Likewise, proficiency or ineptitude with chopsticks can determine possibilities for handling food in a remote Chinese village, just as the Asian squat (see Figure 1) opens affordances for sitting and gathering that are less available to Westerners.<sup>12</sup> These cases stand as instances of culturally based,

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<sup>8</sup> See Aldrin Manalastas, “Is There Still a Place for Us? Beyond Resilience,” paper presented during the *Philosophy of the City Summer Colloquium*, Ateneo de Manila University, Manila, The Philippines (1 July 2024).

<sup>9</sup> See John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Chicago: Open Court), Chap. 9; and John Dewey, “The Practical Character of Reality,” in *Philosophy and Civilization*, ed. by John Dewey (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1931), 35–56.

<sup>10</sup> See Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Chaps. 4, 8, and 14.

<sup>11</sup> See Taebeum Ryu, Hwa Soon Choi, Hoonwoo Choi, and Min Chung, “A Comparison of Gait Characteristics Between Korean and Western People for Establishing Korean Gait Reference Data,” in *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, 36:12 (December 2006), 1023–1030, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2006.09.013>>.

<sup>12</sup> Crippen, “Selective Permeability, Social Media and Epistemic Fragmentation,” 1155; also see Matthew Crippen, “Enactive Pragmatism and Ecological Psychology,” in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11:538644 (October 2020), <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.538644>>.

selectively available affordances that Gibson would arguably acknowledge. That said, he does not say much about how culture introduces normative pressures that are functionally akin to affordances. This last idea is key to our account of selective permeability in Busan—and also to our defense of constructive realism. Accordingly, this section lays out links between affordances, normative pressures, and selective permeability, with attention to certain philosophical implications.



Figure 1: Westerner vs. East Asian

To review, Gibson suggests “affordances” as a non-subjective substitute for “values.”<sup>13</sup> His equating of affordances and values carries the recognition that action possibilities in an environment are not neutral but have potentialities of benefit and injury, which Gibson calls “positive and negative affordances.”<sup>14</sup> Here, an affordance is negative in two related senses: it is hazardous to an agent and therefore reduces freedom of action, at least as compared to a positive affordance. For example, a city sidewalk offers the benefit (a positive affordance) of being able to walk from point A to B. Yet the path does not allow us to travel in any direction. And if we see and avoid negative affordance, such as a ruffian prowling ahead, our directional liberty diminishes.<sup>15</sup>

Another point is that Gibson repeatedly calls his affordance theory radical on the grounds that it insists that “‘values’ and ‘meanings’ of things in the environment can be directly perceived.”<sup>16</sup> He adds that “all these benefits and injuries, these safeties and dangers, these positive and negative affordances are properties of things taken with reference to an observer but not properties of the experiences of the observer.”<sup>17</sup> As a realist, Gibson believes that affordances—though related to an individual’s capacities—

<sup>13</sup> Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, 285.

<sup>14</sup> Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 137.

<sup>15</sup> For a similar example with a cat and mouse, see Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, 146.

<sup>16</sup> Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

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remain in a setting regardless of whether anyone is there to use them. Seen thus, a sidewalk has properties that afford strolling, even with nobody there to exploit them.<sup>18</sup>

Gibson's views are consistent with a third point, which has been introduced already but is worth elaborating on. This is that variations in individual embodiment (e.g., health, tools, cultural habits) can alter susceptibility to environmental pressures, leading people to encounter disparate affordances, and making settings selectively permeable. Psychology experiments indicate that sadness, low blood sugar, illness, tiredness, indebtedness, heavy backpacks, and bad weather—in short, energy-depleting conditions—make hills and stairs look steeper or farther away.<sup>19</sup>

Certain architectural features exploit these effects. Designers, for instance, often install decorative curbs, low walls, elevation alterations, shrubs, and changing walkway tiling, which together demarcate space as private or semi-private (see Figure 2). Few are comfortable ignoring these features to have a picnic on a stranger's lawn, but research shows that the

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<sup>18</sup> See Harry Heft, "Ecological Psychology and Enaction Theory: Divergent Groundings," in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 (May 2020), 991, <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00991>>. Note that the above paragraph explores Gibson's metaphysical realism, not to be confused with his epistemological stance of direct realism. Regarding the latter, Gibson regularly states, for instance, that ambient light hits the eyes in spatial and temporal patterns that directly correspond to environmental layouts. However, in *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, he mentions the "affordance of prey" and "predator odor," which are not given in perceptually registerable patterns that match environmental features in a one-to-one way, with the same holding for many of our examples. (Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, 146) Though outside our scope, this does not refute direct realism altogether even while it undercuts Gibson's version of it, for someone like Merleau-Ponty could argue that there is a background horizon (e.g., background threats, a cultural situation) within which certain realities directly manifest to affected agents.

<sup>19</sup> See Mukul Bhalla and Dennis Proffitt, "Visual-Motor Recalibration in Geographical Slant Perception," in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 25:4 (August 1999), 1076, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-1523.25.4.1076>>; Fitriana Ekawati, Martin White, and Frank Eves, "Interrupting Pedestrians in Indonesia: Effect of Climate on Perceived Steepness and Stair Climbing Behaviour," in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20:1 (December 2022), 338 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010338>>; Hao-Zhi Liu, Sheng Li, and Li-Lin Rao, "Out of Debt, Out of Burden: The Physical Burdens of Debt," in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 76 (May 2018), 155–160, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.01.003>>; Cedar Riener, Jeanine Stefanucci, Dennis Proffitt, and Gerald Clore, "An Effect of Mood on the Perception of Geographical Slant," in *Cognition & Emotion*, 25:1 (2011), 174–182, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931003738026>>; and Simone Schnall, Jonathan Zadra, and Dennis Proffitt, "Direct Evidence for the Economy of Action: Glucose and the Perception of Geographical Slant," in *Perception*, 39:4 (2010), 464–482, <<https://doi.org/10.1068/p6445>>.

result can be stronger for the exhausted homeless than for the affluent, who are customarily more welcomed.<sup>20</sup>

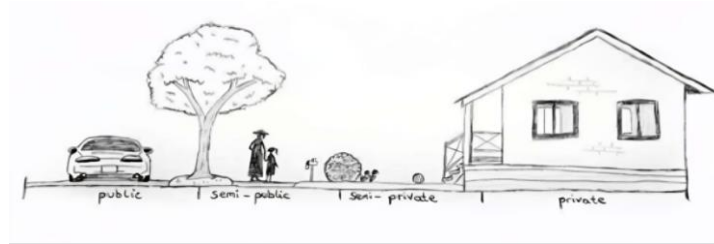


Figure 2: Tacit territory markers.

The same territory markers (decorative curbs, etc.) were introduced to Cairo's Tahrir Square in 2015 (see Figure 3), a few years after the military ousting of Mohammed Morsi, which followed Egypt's 2011 January Revolution. These symbolic barriers stood out more starkly and hostilely to politically and economically depleted locals than to tourists, who *really* were less likely to be harassed by police there.<sup>21</sup>

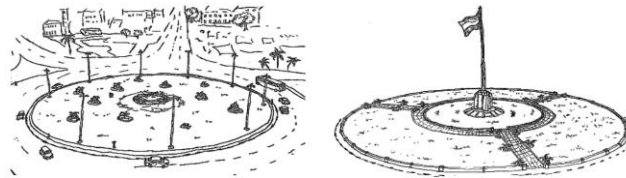


Figure 3: Tahrir Square c. 2011 (left) and c. 2015 (right).<sup>22</sup>

The upshot is that without physically preventing access, urban areas can exclude certain cohorts by imposing selectively antagonistic pressures that are functionally akin to or the same as action-limiting negative affordances. Such patterns are common, whether in past racist seating restrictions that Rosa Parks confronted on Montgomery busses or in everyday prohibitions against sipping from a stranger's cup in a café.<sup>23</sup> Violations of social prescriptions—whether these are embedded in Tahrir, Montgomery

<sup>20</sup> See Crippen, "Bodies Under the Weather," 154–182.

<sup>21</sup> See Matthew Crippen, "Contours of Cairo Revolt: Street Semiology, Values and Political Affordances," in *Topoi*, 40 (2021), 457–458, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-019-09650-9>>.

<sup>22</sup> Note that Tahrir was redesigned again in 2020.

<sup>23</sup> See Matthew Crippen, "Enactivism: A Newish Name for Mostly Old Ideas?" in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* (published online first, 2024), <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-024-10019-6>> and Jonathan McKinney, "Ecological Enactivism Through the Lens of Japanese Philosophy," in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 (July 2020), 4–5, <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01347>>.

## 12 SHOULD I

buses or a café—exist independently of any single human and can have *real* consequences like bodily harm, aligning with Gibson’s realist stance.

Of course, Gibson does not offer the final word. A more recent embodied view is enactivism. Usually presented as cognitive science but mainly developed and defended by philosophers, enactivism asserts that we do not have representations of a pre-existing world in our minds; rather, our actions bring forth or enact a world,<sup>24</sup> that is, an ecology with properties having “no non-experiential, physical counterparts.”<sup>25</sup> For example, in the case of Tahrir, an enactivist might say that a depressed mood brings out foreboding qualities that are not there for a cheerful tourist. Similarly, Egyptians may amplify the ominous atmosphere by virtue of their cautious behavior around the Square, much like how a depressed mood can emerge because somber individuals struggle to move forward.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the originators of enactivism favor constructivism over Gibson’s realism, explicitly criticizing the latter.<sup>27</sup>

However, enactivists and Gibsonians often deploy similar examples, such as describing how palpating a sponge brings out its softness. This is unsurprising since both emphasize action and that an environment’s perceptual aspects are products of relationships, with this following, for example, from the fact that a pond avails different behavioral options to humans and water striders. Dewey advances the same view, adding that even so-called primary properties—like length—depend on an object’s velocity relative to an observer.<sup>28</sup> His aesthetic work makes it clear he would similarly grasp the competing ways that ebullient tourists vs. depleted Egyptians would have registered Tahrir in 2015. His aesthetic work makes it clear he would similarly grasp the competing ways that ebullient tourists vs. depleted Egyptians would have registered Tahrir in 2015. He would not reduce the matter to subjectively varying impressions. He would instead regard the differences as total outcomes that follow from how people’s embodied conditions in the world relate them to things that affect them,<sup>29</sup> including the broader political situation, which exists independently of any single person. Furthermore, enacting a safe or ominous atmosphere through assertive vs.

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<sup>24</sup> See Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> See Matthew Crippen, “Anticipating and Enacting Worlds: Moods, Illness, and Psychobehavioral Adaptation,” in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* (October 2023), <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-023-09934-x>> and Matthew Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression: A Study in Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> See Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, Chap. 9.

<sup>28</sup> See John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1929), Chaps. 5–6.

<sup>29</sup> See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), 250.

hesitant behavior concretely alters realities, especially if one consequently stands out less or more to security.

Taking these points together and following what Dewey says about realist vs. constructivist disputes, we reach a startling conclusion: constructivism does not obviate realism because changes in the total configuration, once introduced, really are there in the world.<sup>30</sup> We will return to this claim in our discussion of Busan, to which we now turn.

## Normative Pressures and Spatial Governance

So far, we have seen that bodily comportment, architectural design, and social pressures enact spatial governance by imposing selectively present negative affordances. Whether it is Busan's infrastructure corralling residents into gender-typical roles or the city's buses imposing challenges on elderly residents, socially buttressed (constructed) pressures exist independently of any single agent as unforgiving realities with which people must contend. Indeed, confronting them, to requote Gibson, can mean encountering "safeties and dangers," and thus "positive and negative affordances."<sup>31</sup> This section explores how Busan's physical landscape interacts with the deeply intertwined cultural psychologies and philosophies that shape people's encounters with their surroundings.

As an opening illustration of how culture introduces selectively imposed action-closing constraints, let us consider Dewey's reflections on his multi-year visit to China and Japan in the early 20th century. He highlighted the dense population, and that people rarely left their communities. The consequent feeling of being under the nearly constant scrutiny of familiars contributed to a public sense of self.<sup>32</sup> Dewey noted the recent introduction of railroads,<sup>33</sup> which expanded mobility. However, cultural understandings of the self do not instantly adapt to such changes. Even today, Asian regions remain crowded and our data show that practices remain in place that accentuate public understandings of self. For example, one of our respondents mentioned that school pupils receive higher shoe boxes for better grades. Many others talked about linguistic etiquette. In Korea, this involves carefully aligning one's speech (e.g., verb conjugation) to publicly locate one's relative status within social hierarchies, a norm likely influenced

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<sup>30</sup> See Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Chap. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 137.

<sup>32</sup> See John Dewey, "Chinese Social Habits," in *Characters and Events*, ed. by Joseph Ratner (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), 111–21.

<sup>33</sup> See *Ibid.*, 221.

by the nation's Confucian heritage.<sup>34</sup> All this jointly contributes to a public concept of self, hence by a sense of being scrutinized by others, amplified by the heavy stress on propriety. Together, these factors supply a partial explanation for certain urban behaviors in Busan and other Korean cities—for instance, the fact that locals almost always obey crosswalk signals, even when roads are devoid of cars.

Interviews that we conducted with people living in Busan (mostly detailed later) supply additional examples of how normative pressures generate negative affordances or something akin to them. Many were studying in English in a country where that language is not the norm. Some observed that learning the local language not only opened action avenues but also closed them. One student fretted that becoming literate enough to read “no entry” signs on Busan's Mountain trails added obstacles functionally akin to fences. Others talked about how increased language proficiency amplified tacit demands that they follow difficult regional customs. Here, the greater pressure to conform made previously welcoming spheres selectively difficult to negotiate. Consider a Muslim interviewee living in Busan. After she became fluent in Korean, expectations rose for her to remove her hijab, eat pork, and drink alcohol. What might account for these changes?

Most obviously, the woman's facility with Korean allowed locals to comment directly to her. However, other interrelated factors are at play. First, the woman appears to have been treated as less of an outsider; and second, Koreans (and East Asians) are philosophically inclined to view choices and actions as situationally prescribed, in contradistinction to the idea that people behave according to internally held and relatively fixed principles.<sup>35</sup> This helps explain why the Muslim respondent recounted some Koreans saying, in a rather innocent and perplexed way, that she was not in her home country

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<sup>34</sup> See Tomasz Śleziak, “The Role of Confucianism in Contemporary South Korean Society,” in *Rocznik Orientalistyczny/Yearbook of Oriental Studies*, 66:1 (2013), 27–46, <<https://bibliotekanauki.pl/articles/707562.pdf>>.

<sup>35</sup> See Incheol Choi, Richard Nisbett, and Ara Norenzayan, “Causal Attribution Across Cultures: Variation and Universality,” in *Psychological Bulletin*, 125:1 (1999), 47–63, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.1.47>>; Li-Jun Ji, Yanjie Su, and Richard Nisbett, “Culture, Prediction, and Change,” in *Psychological Science*, 12:6 (November 2001), 450–456, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00384>>; Shinobu Kitayama, et al., “A Cultural Task Analysis of Implicit Independence: Comparing North America, Western Europe, and East Asia,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97:2 (August 2009), 236–255, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015999>>; Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, “Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation,” in *Psychological Review*, 98:2 (1991), 224–253, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224>>; Michael Morris and Kaiping Peng, “Culture and Cause: American and Chinese Attributions for Social and Physical Events,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67:6 (1994), 949–971, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.949>>; Harold Stevenson and James Stigler, *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education* (New York: Summit Books, 1992).

and therefore did not need to wear a hijab or avoid pork and alcohol (even though her home country does not force any of these matters). The upshot is that cultural and linguistic integration into Busan did not just increase the possibilities of actions but brought out normative pressures that made it more difficult for the woman to navigate city life.

Now, cultural philosophies and psychologies function not only as drivers of urban life but as products of it, effecting the selective manifestation of affordances. As a preparatory step in defending this proposition, we will first review what psychologists have said about East Asia.

One robust finding is that East Asians excel at registering overall contexts.<sup>36</sup> This is compared to Westerners, who focus on isolated foreground objects. Recent eye-tracking studies on infants and adults corroborate this, though within-cohort variation occurs as a function of the specific region of Europe or Asia.<sup>37</sup> A related result is that Easterners are better at drawing lines proportionally to different-sized shapes, compared to Americans who are more adept at reproducing absolute lengths<sup>38</sup> (see Figure 4). East Asians tend to tolerate contradictions more than Westerners, both in the world and themselves and they often expect circumstances, like personal fortunes, to reverse.<sup>39</sup> Chinese children learn verbs much faster and nouns slightly more quickly than English and French speakers.<sup>40</sup> During a certain developmental

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<sup>36</sup> See Aysecan Boduroglu, Richard Shah, and Michael Hove, "The Cultural Context of Attention: Holistic Versus Analytic Influences," in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 32 (2009), 94–101; Takahiko Masuda and Richard E Nisbett, "Culture and Change Blindness," in *Cognitive Science*, 30:2 (March–April 2006), 381–399, <[https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog0000\\_63](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog0000_63)>; and Takahiko Masuda and Richard Nisbett, "Attending Holistically Versus Analytically: Comparing the Context Sensitivity of Japanese and Americans," in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81:5 (November 2001), 922–934, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.5.922>>.

<sup>37</sup> See Solveig Jurkat, et al., "Cultural Similarities and Differences in Explaining Others' Behavior in 4- to 9-Year-Old Children from Three Cultural Contexts," in *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 53:6 (2023), 659–682, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221098423>> and Alžběta Šašínková, et al., "Exploring Cross-Cultural Variations in Visual Attention Patterns Inside and Outside National Borders Using Immersive Virtual Reality," in *Scientific Reports*, 13: 18852 (2023), <<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-46103-1>>.

<sup>38</sup> See Trey Hedden, et al., "Cultural Influences on Neural Substrates of Attentional Control," in *Psychological Science*, 19:1 (2008), 12–17, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02038.x>> and Shinobu Kitayama, Sean Duffy, Tadashi Kawamura, and Jeff Larsen, "Perceiving an Object and Its Context in Different Cultures: A Cultural Look at New Look," in *Psychological Science*, 14:3 (2003), 201–206, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.02432>>.

<sup>39</sup> See Julie Spencer-Rodgers, Melissa Williams, and Kaiping Peng, "Cultural Differences in Expectations of Change and Tolerance for Contradiction: A Decade of Empirical Research," in *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14:3 (August 2010), 296–312, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868310362982>>.

<sup>40</sup> See Shannon Yee, "Is Noun Bias Universal? Evidence from Chinese and Korean Compared with French and English," in *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences: Illinois Working Papers* (2020), 32–44.

window, Chinese infants focus more on actions, compared to object-oriented US infants.<sup>41</sup>

So, what do these results—which tie to relational emphases found in Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and other Asian philosophical outlooks—have to do with cities? One connection is laid out by Miyamoto and colleagues, who investigated whether differences in East Asian and Western affordance detection correspond to variations in local architecture. To explore this, they sampled photographs from US and East Asian cities. The researchers found that the latter were usually more visually complex, for example, with less clear distinction between foreground and background objects, linking this to studies reported above on the context orientation of East Asians.<sup>42</sup>

Now, these design choices may partly reflect the cultural psychologies and philosophies of decision-makers. But in Busan and many other East Asian cities, the mountainous topography and limited space relative to population necessitates certain urban features. It is largely because of these constraints that roads and buildings in Busan often sit on different levels, with the latter densely packed in non-aligned directions. This generates high visual complexity with relatively few focal points, reflecting the less object-oriented attentional styles of East Asians (see Figure 5). The complicated arrangements in Busan additionally create a sense of the city organically morphing around oneself, an effect amplified by winding street layouts that resemble unpredictable trails, along with the mist that frequently cascades down mountains. These perceptually dynamic aspects parallel another finding discussed earlier: East Asians are attuned to change and often anticipate sudden reversals in fortune.

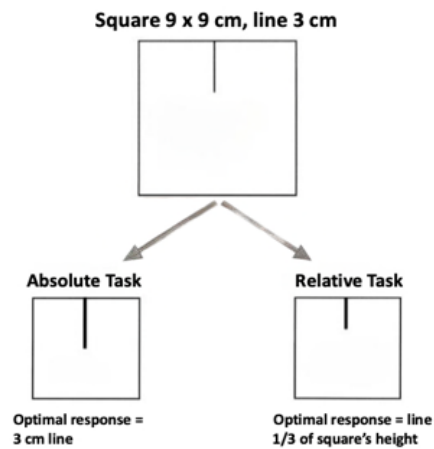


Figure 4: Absolute vs. relative task.

<sup>41</sup> See Sandra Waxman, et al., “How Early Is Infants’ Attention to Objects and Actions Shaped by Culture? New Evidence from 24-Month-Olds Raised in the US and China,” in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7 (2016), 97, <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00097>>.

<sup>42</sup> See Yuri Miyamoto, Richard E. Nisbett, and Takahiko Masuda, “Culture and the Physical Environment: Holistic versus Analytic Perceptual Affordances,” in *Psychological Science*, 17:2 (February 2006), 113–119, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01677>>.



Figure 5: Photos of Busan showing high visual complexity and buildings at different angles and heights.

Additionally, distances in Busan that can now be crossed in a 10-minute car ride were difficult to traverse before tunnels were built in the latter half of the 20th century. The past situation helps to explain comments from our interviewees, who mentioned distinct dialects and prejudices among neighboring provinces and cities, especially among older generations. Multiple respondents noted that K-dramas regularly have criminal groups using the Busan dialect, also portraying it as the language that the poor and uneducated use.<sup>43</sup> They elaborated on how factors like these can create selective barriers for people from Busan. Some interviewees observed that a Busan accent might make it difficult to interact in workplaces where many speak with Seoul accents; or how international students who have learned Korean with a purportedly educated Seoul accent can find it difficult to navigate Busan. Some said that a romantic partner from South Jeolla—the province adjacent to the one Busan is in, South Gyeongsang—might be rejected by grandparents. In addition to the mountainous topography, factionalism may have roots in ancient conflicts between jurisdictions. Recently, uneven economic development favored South Gyeongsang over South Jeolla. The former is not only where Busan is located but also the birthplace of military dictator Park Chung-hee, whom residents in South Jeolla’s capital city, Gwangju, revolted against in the early 1980s.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> A parallel in Western entertainment is the *Lord of the Rings* movie and TV franchise: orcs have a Cockney accent, whereas the heroes usually speak in what has historically been called the “Queen’s English” or BBC English.

<sup>44</sup> See Se-Woong Koo, “The Potent Force of S. Korea’s Regionalism,” *Korea Exposé* (27 April 2017), <<https://koreaexpose.com/potent-force-koreas-regionalism/>> and Won Bae Kim,

These considerations raise an obvious point: that a city cannot be adequately understood if it is examined in isolation. The workings of Busan relate to its mountains, the Korean language, and the population density of the country and the fact it is dominated by Seoul, including its dialect. Additional factors outside the scope of this paper are that Busan is a port city, that it is strategically important enough that the US has a naval headquarters there, that it is very close to Mainland China and Japan, that South Korea contends with saber-rattling from North Korea, and the list goes on. This highlights the messiness of philosophizing about cities. Speaking more generally, Dewey summarized the point thus: “There is never any... isolated singular object or event; an object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world—a situation.”<sup>45</sup>

### Cultural Permeability and Blindness

It is almost a truism to say that the social and physical structures of living arrangements are not separable and that they affect people’s psychologies and what they deem to be possible or permissible in each situation. Echoing Michel Foucault’s account of disciplinary power, one might say that certain affordances are delineated not only through brute force or laws but by habituating individuals to norms that internalize spatial constraints that become parts of their lived reality.<sup>46</sup> Yet what happens when a person’s norms conflict with those of a city space? In this section, we address this question and its bearing on the selective permeability of Busan.

Human interactions obviously shape identity, whether this is understood at an individual or collective level. Such interactions serve as media through which people acquire normative habits and learn to navigate societal structures. Together, this contributes to the existence of cultural affordances, that is, possibilities of action that people encounter in the niches they collectively enact,<sup>47</sup> which are almost invariably selectively restricting. Furthermore, people who are not affected by hostile barriers tend to be blind

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“Regionalism: Its Origins and Substance with Competition and Exclusion,” in *Korea Journal*, 43 (2003), 5–31, <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203084373-8>>.

<sup>45</sup> John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 68.

<sup>46</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Surveiller Et Punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975).

<sup>47</sup> For example, Maxwell Ramstead, Samuel Veissière, and Laurence Kirmayer, “Cultural Affordances: Scaffolding Local Worlds Through Shared Intentionality and Regimes of Attention,” in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7 (July 2016), 1090, <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01090>> and Tibor Solymosi, “Against Representation: A Brief Introduction to Cultural Affordances,” in *Human Affairs*, 23 (2013), 594–605, <<https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-013-0151-3>>.

to them. This is illustrated by men's lower sensitivity to the negative impact that certain urban settings have on women. A comparable case is older people's inability to hear the noxious effects of an ultrasonic buzz—known as the Mosquito—that businesses use to drive unwanted youths away.<sup>48</sup>

With the Mosquito, information is present but selectively available, and something similar typically holds in sociocultural milieus. What we here call “cultural permeability” allows different experiences, norms, meanings, and affordances to come forth depending on people's enculturated habits. Thus, as Manalastas asserts, what we register in social situations is conditioned by what our own culture lets us see.<sup>49</sup>

Cultural permeability manifests in a variety of ways. A gesture that is friendly in one country can provoke aggression elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> Coins look larger to the financially distressed than to the affluent classes.<sup>51</sup> An accent can be present in two populations but only heard in those identified as foreigners, which may relate to the fact that dominant groups can selectively identify marginalized individuals as threatening.<sup>52</sup> Relatedly, online communities sometimes deploy selectively decipherable terms—called “dog whistles”—that have been compared to the Mosquito.<sup>53</sup> For instance, “Skittles” and “Skype” are racist codes used in hateful posts.<sup>54</sup> More positively, one of our respondents talked about internet slang that is used in China to evade censorship algorithms.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Crippen and Klement, “Architectural Values, Political Affordances and Selective Permeability,” 471.

<sup>49</sup> See Manalastas, “Is There Still a Place for Us?”

<sup>50</sup> See Meijing Li, “Cultivation of Cross-Cultural Awareness in College English Teaching,” in *2015 International Conference on Social Science and Higher Education* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2015), 493–495.

<sup>51</sup> See Jerome Bruner and Cecil Goodman, “Value and Need as Organizing Factors in Perception,” in *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 42:1 (1947), 33–44, <<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0058484>> and

John Dawson, “Socioeconomic Differences in Size Judgments of Discs and Coins by Chinese Primary VI Children in Hong Kong,” in *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 41:1 (August 1975), 107–110, <<https://doi.org/10.2466/pms.1975.41.1.107>>.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Nancy Niedzielski, “The Effect of Social Information on the Perception of Sociolinguistic Variables,” in *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 18:1 (1999), 62–85, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X99018001005>> and Sophie Trawalter, et al., “Attending to Threat: Race-Based Patterns of Selective Attention,” in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44 (2008), 1322–1327, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.03.006>>.

<sup>53</sup> See Crippen, “Selective Permeability, Social Media and Epistemic Fragmentation,” §4.

<sup>54</sup> See Jenifer Saul, *Dogwhistles and Figleaves: How Manipulative Language Spreads Racism and Falsehood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), Chap. 2.

<sup>55</sup> For example, 河蟹 (river crab) replaced the similarly sounding word 和谐 (harmonious), which was formerly deployed to connote a topic that might be censored until the term itself led to that outcome. (The reason the 和谐 became a euphemism was that the need for social harmony was a commonly cited justification for censorship).

In Busan, one finds a comparable situation in that physical structures and slang both have selectively decipherable social significance. As an



Figure 6: Depiction of a typical DVD room in Busan.

example of the former, consider DVD방 (*bang*), which translates to DVD rooms. To many, the idea of going to a venue that has DVD movies may seem odd given the format is borderline obsolete. So, what purposes do DVD rooms serve? In a country where young people usually either live in compact flats with their parents or in gender-segregated dorms, these venues have features that afford sexual intimacy for younger couples. Each room has

a wide bed, suitable for two. Usually, there are toothbrushes, tissues, wipes, and other hygiene elements like mattresses with water-resistant surfaces that can be sponged down (see Figure 6). And the cost for several hours of use is roughly equivalent to an hour's pay at Korea's minimum wage. A complication, however, is that foreigners can be blind to the social meaning of DVD rooms. Indeed, both a Western woman and man on our research team found themselves in uncomfortable predicaments when, not knowing the social implications, they agreed to visit these places when invited by those who were familiar with the local normative customs surrounding DVD rooms.

Hookup culture in Busan (and other Korean urban centers) can similarly deploy codes that are opaque to visitors not familiar with the situated "language game," the term here used in Wittgenstein's sense.<sup>56</sup> The scenario parallels the selectively indecipherable social significance of the DVD rooms. For example, asking somebody up to a flat for instant ramen often implies more than just that. Koreans at least usually grasp this, but non-locals may not. Another example is that Korean men almost exclusively reserve the question—"Are you open-minded?"—for foreign women, who



Figure 7: Signage in Busan Restroom

<sup>56</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §21-28.

usually will not, unless already familiar with local conventions, grasp that the query is not about their interest in philosophical debate or novel experiences. Instead, it is an insinuating question about whether they are open to hooking up.

Other cases of selectively available information in Busan are more straightforward, as with the signage sometimes found in public toilets. Consider the signs in Figure 7, which almost anybody not versed in the Korean language would take as indicating that smoking is not permitted.

But in fact, the writing at the bottom indicates toilet paper should be put in trash bins and not flushed (because of narrow piping in many of Busan's buildings).

### Culture, Selective Permeability, and Mobility

Mobility-based selective permeability is obvious to nearly anybody who has witnessed someone in a leg cast struggling with stairs. While this section highlights comparable instances in Busan, the main goal is more focused: to demonstrate how physical design—inherently shaped by cultural influences—intersects with societal values to generate mobility-based selective permeability in Busan.

A preliminary point is that artifacts are inherently imbued with social norms.<sup>57</sup> For instance, the polished wood or marble of some banks signifies the values of reliability and wealth, inviting affluent people in more than those of modest means, who are usually less welcomed.<sup>58</sup> Given that Gibson expressly equates affordances to values, and given that an agent registers beneficial or hostile values depending on how she is embodied in the world, all of this fits nicely with the selective permeability model, which presupposes the same tenets.

Looking at Busan specifically, the streets often lack sidewalks. Also, due to the shortage of space, buildings can jut out unevenly, so that a sidewalk ends on one side of the street to continue on the other side (see Figure 8). When combined with the hilly terrain, Busan can be selectively difficult for those with limited mobility.

<sup>57</sup> See Batya Friedman, Peter Khan, and Alan Bornin, "Value Sensitive Design and Information Systems," in *The Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics*, ed. by Kenneth Einar Himma and Herman Tavani (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 69–101.

<sup>58</sup> See Rajiv Shah and Jay Kesan, "How Architecture Regulates," in *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 24:4 (Winter 2007), 351, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43030813>> and Crippen and Klement, "Architectural Values, Political Affordances and Selective Permeability," 463.



Figure 8: Sidewalk ending on one side of Busandaehak Street and beginning on the other side due to projecting buildings.

Some of Busan's design quirks are artifacts of the Korean War, which saw a large influx of domestic refugees entering the city, leading to shanty towns on mountainsides. These temporary dwellings later became permanent. As a result, certain neighborhoods climb up onto steep slopes and feature extremely narrow and winding paths instead of roads, making these areas accessible only to foot traffic or else sometimes smaller vehicles.<sup>59</sup> Along with these parts of the city, there is another thing that is old: Busan's super-aged population.<sup>60</sup> Given this, Busan's well-developed and affordable public transportation system is critical. However, the transit system's viability is limited not just in the urban spaces described above but also insofar as its buses have stairs at their entrances and exits. This situation can be hard for people with mobility issues, which disproportionately include the elderly.

We now turn to gender-based mobility issues, which exemplify how—through social conditioning—culture intersects with physical design to render urban space selectively permeable. While we will shortly examine

<sup>59</sup> See Yon Jung Choi and Connie McNeely, "A Reinvented Community: The Case of Gamcheon Culture Village," in *Sociological Spectrum*, 38:2 (2018), 86–102, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.2018.1430635>> and Sreenidhi Konduri and In-Hee Lee, "Rethinking Sense of Place Interpretations in Declining Neighborhoods: The Case of Ami-dong Tombstone Cultural Village, Busan, South Korea," in *Societies*, 13:2 (January 2023), <<https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13020030>>.

<sup>60</sup> See Oh Seok Kim, et al., "Depopulation, Super Aging, and Extreme Heat Events in South Korea," in *Climate Risk Management*, 38 (2022), <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2022.100456>> and Kee Whan Kim and Oh Seok Kim, "Super Aging in South Korea Unstoppable but Mitigatable: A Sub-National Scale Population Projection for Best Policy Planning," in *Spatial Demography*, 8 (2020), 155–173, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40980-020-00061-8>>.

cases of this in Busan, we start with some general points about cities and Korea.

First, gendered aspects of design are often implicit yet no less detrimental in consequence. For example, a dominant form of fee collection on subways used to be tokens. This was suited to those with two trips a day—to and from work. The arrangement was less ideal for those who travelled with multiple purposes. Historically, this has often been women, who may start by dropping kids off at school, then going elsewhere for groceries, and so on.<sup>61</sup> Challenges like this typify how physical infrastructure bears the imprint of social values.

Second, it is worth noting that in Korea, “feminism” is widely and unfavorably (mis)construed, to the point that some of our interviewees, despite strongly advocating for women, expressed concerns about being publicly identified with the term. Often, however, Koreans are unapologetically antifeminist. For example, President Suk Yeol Yoon—who declared martial law in December 2024—made it central to his successful election campaign that he would abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

What we want to highlight is that cultural values that are to varying degrees hostile to women are embedded in Busan’s infrastructure. An instance of this is that diaper changing tables are almost exclusively located in women’s restrooms and are accordingly inaccessible to men. The social pressures here are multifaceted. On the one hand, men encounter something functionally akin to a negative affordance should they wish to use a changing table. On the other hand, the spatial hierarchies ensure that the burden of work falls disproportionately on women and reinforces the social prescription that this is how it ought to be.

While most of the women we interviewed reported feeling extremely safe in Busan’s public areas, this does not mean the city is without problems. Line 1 on Busan’s subway grid accordingly has cars that are designated for women only during busy times of day to mitigate, for example, unwanted sexual attention. While the measure itself contrasts the earlier mentioned antifeminist attitudes, common reactions from men do not: they regularly complain that the subway arrangement is unfair to them.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps protesting the arrangement, our research group has noted men sometimes ignoring the designation. Additionally, though, ‘women-only cars’ are often more crowded than other areas, with standing room only when seats are free in

<sup>61</sup> For example, Duangporn Prasertsubpakij and Vilas Nitivattananon, “Evaluating Accessibility to Bangkok Metro Systems Using Multi-Dimensional Criteria Across User Groups,” in *IATSS Research*, 36:1 (July 2012), 56–65, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iatssr.2012.02.003>>

<sup>62</sup> E.g., Jin-a Lee, “‘Women-only’ Subway Cars Get Test Run in Busan,” *Korea Times* (16 June 2016), <[https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/12/113\\_207188.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/12/113_207188.html)>.

mixed parts of the train. This suggests that a significant number of women experienced mixed-gender cars as hostile, also undermining men's complaints about "unfairness."

The culture that foreigners bring with them into Busan generates selectively present negative affordances. The issue of traffic in Busan serves to illustrate this point. On this topic, a Korean wiki (나무위키 or *Namuwiki*) cites "the terrain and difficulty of the road," along with "the dangerous and bad driving habits" as "reasons why [...] people from other regions break out in a cold sweat."<sup>63</sup> The situation may be exacerbated by the fact that Korean car windows are tinted at levels that are impermissible in many Western jurisdictions, thereby limiting various forms of visual communication that can occur at intersections and elsewhere on roads. Now, most foreigners primarily deal with traffic as pedestrians. Their experiences with Busan traffic are often shaped by the automobile driving norms of their home region: those from places where drivers are more orderly or less aggressive (e.g., Germany and Paraguay) reported feeling quite apprehensive about the traffic. They find it more difficult to navigate, with their actions accordingly restrained by dangers or negative affordances on the roads. But people who have lived in places like Cairo—known for its lack of crosswalks, signals, and all-around traffic chaos—reported finding Busan very easy to negotiate.

Another place that our data show culturally-based permeability is the Texas Street area near Busan's central train station. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this neighborhood has been Busan's Chinatown. After World War II and during the Korean War, it became a gathering point for US soldiers. Local merchants adjusting accordingly.<sup>64</sup> Later, increasing numbers of people from Soviet or former Soviet Bloc states (Central Asia and Russia) filtered in, with restaurants and bars catering to this cohort, whose members often run them.<sup>65</sup> Texas Street is also known for its sex workers,<sup>66</sup> a profession that is illegal in Korea.

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<sup>63</sup> "Busan Metropolitan City/Transportation," *Namuwiki* (last modified 2 December 2024), <<https://en.namu.wiki/w/%EB%B6%80%EC%82%B0%EA%B4%91%EC%97%AD%EC%8B%9C/%EA%B5%90%ED%86%B5>>.

<sup>64</sup> See Wi-ji Choi, "Texas Street at the Gateway to Busan?... 'Historical Sense Must Be Preserved,'" *KBS News* (13 December 2023), <<https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/mobile/view/view.do?ncd=7841230>>.

<sup>65</sup> See Yong-seok Noh, "부산역 인근 '텍사스촌'의 형성과 러시아어권 이주민 유입 연구 // Study on the Formation of 'Texas Village' near Busan Station and the Influx of Russian-speaking Immigrants," in *민족문화논총 // Ethnic Culture Review*, 82 (December 2022), 353–384, <<https://doi.org/10.15186/ikc.2022.12.31.14>>.

<sup>66</sup> A US government website for naval personnel in Busan mentions prostitutes and expressly forbids sailors from visiting Texas Street from the hours of 17:00–05:00. See Official Website of the United States Government, "Regulations,"

Texas Street's richly layered milieu consequently exemplifies cultural permeability. This means that the area provides different experiences, meanings, and affordances depending on people's culturally ingrained habits. In particular, Central Asian respondents highlighted several ways that culture, age, and gender intersect to make Texas Street more emotionally ominous for some Russian speakers.

First, interviewees explained that certain Russian-speaking aggressors in the area perceive younger men as easier targets. Respondents suggested this perception is based on the idea that middle-aged men have more wherewithal to defend themselves. Regardless of whether this assumption is true, if younger people are targeted more, then Texas Street is inherently more dangerous for them and thus has more negative affordances. Furthermore, if younger Russian speakers are more susceptible to this than those unfamiliar with the language, they may behave more hesitantly. Thus, in the same way that acting like a tourist makes one more vulnerable to touts, apprehensive comportment may selectively increase the presence of negative (dangerous) affordances.

Second, interviewees noted that younger women are prone to receiving unwanted attention on Texas Street, which was assessed as more dangerous to them than men from any culture or age. Slightly older women—particularly Russian-speaking ones—were said to be harried less due to their more assertive comportment. While younger women may be targeted for other reasons, we note that neither higher age nor conservative dress makes one immune to harassment, as evidenced by our own observational work—not to mention convictions across jurisdictions for sexual assaults on elderly women. As one respondent summed up: "Dangerous men tend to target other men when there is something specific they want from them—maybe they were offended by their behavior or something else. ... Rarely do they target men for no reason. ... Women, however, often fall victim to unpleasant comments or even actions without having done anything."

Together, the observations about Texas Street reiterate Manalastas's earlier-cited observation: that we are conditioned by what our own culture allows us to perceive. Additionally, however, the cultural permeability here is such that people do not encounter the same affordances. For instance, younger and older Russian-speaking men not only experience the setting differently; the former also seem to encounter negative affordances (dangers) that are less present to their older Russian-speaking counterparts.

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<<https://cnrk.cnrc.navy.mil/Operations-and-Management/Regulations/>> (accessed 19 December 2024).

### Socio-physical Grammars and Selective Perception

The international cohort of women that we interviewed almost unanimously indicated feeling safer in Busan than in their home cities. This does not, however, mean that none identified problems, as seen in the discussion of Texas Street. In this last section, we take for granted that many urban environments are selectively hostile to women because of unwanted sexual attention and do not dwell on this much. Instead, we elaborate on how women's cultural backgrounds lead them to see the same area in Busan as more or less dangerous. We also give attention to how perception of risk can sometimes contribute to the enactment of unsafe places, increasing negative affordances for women.

Note, then, that cultural permeability is once again evident, with our data confirming that perceived safety in Busan varies depending on how dangerous a woman's home country is in comparison. For instance, one woman from Latin America reported that in her home city, she would plan daily routines with the goal of avoiding sexual assault. Others from certain parts of Central Asia made a similar point, albeit indicating the perils were less extreme. Although women from Northern Europe also experience sexual aggression, they reported a better situation in their nations. Not surprisingly, then, while women from all three cohorts experienced Busan as safe, this perception was more pronounced for the first two groups than for the third.

Several women we interviewed expressed feeling less safe in neighborhoods with smaller buildings situated on irregular, non-grid streets with minimal lighting, particularly at night. Some also mentioned feeling uncomfortable near male dormitories at Busan's largest university, Pusan National University. One such dormitory is located at the edge of the campus, atop a hill bordering a forested mountain area. Here, the mildly threatening atmosphere stems not from specific incidents but from the location's isolation. Although there are some security posts and CCTV cameras, respondents voiced doubts about their ability to receive timely help if anything were to happen.

CCTV cameras are ubiquitous throughout Busan, including on university campuses. To emphasize their presence in an area, large indicators are often projected onto sidewalks or streets. Emergency buttons, sometimes placed nearby or integrated with the cameras (see Figure 9), can be used not only in cases of assault but also for medical emergencies or other urgent situations.



Figure 9: CCTV projections (left) and emergency button with camera (right).

The extent to which CCTV cameras and emergency buttons alleviate women's anxieties and enhance perceived safety appears to depend, at least partially, on cultural background. Among native Koreans, we found a consistent demand for preventative CCTV measures. This may be attributed to Koreans' stronger sense of a public self, as previously discussed in the context of shoeboxes and Dewey's observations about East Asian cultural dynamics. However, a few foreign respondents raised privacy concerns. Some also perceived CCTV cameras as ineffective and did not feel that the cameras enhanced their access to certain areas. In fact, some Westerners remarked that the implied need for such surveillance measures contributed to a menacing atmosphere.

Here, it is worth considering a warning from William Whyte: that "places designed with distrust [often] get what they [are] looking for."<sup>67</sup> Whyte illustrates this concern with an example of how the introduction of security features to a New York City Plaza drove away regular users, ultimately making it more appealing to drug dealers. Our interviewees made several observations that, taken together, underscore a similar point. First, the most dangerous environmental factor for women is the presence of men. Second, spaces devoid of women can feel and *be* more threatening. For example, a North African respondent noted that the risk of verbal harassment and sexual touching in minibuses in cities like Cairo increases as the number of women riding them decreases. As this occurs, fewer women opt to ride, *further amplifying the risk*. This is a case where the perception of a hazard—a very real one that no woman should face—objectively exacerbates the danger. This aligns with enactive cognitive science, which, building on phenomenology, suggests that cognition does not passively mirror a pre-

<sup>67</sup> William Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation, 1980), 61.

existing world but actively constructs it through embodied interaction. As discussed previously, hesitant or assertive bodily comportment can shape emotional atmospheres and here the *warranted* avoidance of an area *really* increases both the danger and hence the hostile aura. Merleau-Ponty captures part of this when he observes: “Our natural attitude is not to experience our own feelings or to adhere to our own pleasures, but to live in accordance with the emotional categories of the environment.”<sup>68</sup>

To return to Busan and areas in it with CCTV cameras, these locales are sometimes devoid of women—and often men—at night. The lack of foot traffic is likely not caused by the cameras but is rather a reason for their installation. Still, the potential for security features to inadvertently decrease women’s safety by driving them away and thereby enacting a space that *really* is more conducive to predatory activity is a consideration for urban planners. This raises a broader question of constructivist-realist aspects of urban design. Following Gibsonian realism, a setting’s function is shaped by its material structure and its embedded normative values, both of which exist independently of any single human agent. Yet as enactive constructivism suggests, places are also co-constituted by how individuals navigate them. The absence of women in certain areas of Busan is not just a passive response to perceived danger—it also enacts that danger by *reconstructing* the social *reality* of the space.

A further dimension to this narrative is that foreign women may have a good reason for feeling less reassured by CCTV cameras than Korean women. Although the risk of assault in public places is very low in Busan, institutional sexual harassment is a problem in Korea, and is, for example, selectively worse for non-unionized employees working in Busan’s transit system.<sup>69</sup> An advisory from the Canadian government likewise affirms Korean police “may not always respond adequately to reports of sexual violence and harassment.”<sup>70</sup> Some interviewees living in Busan had anecdotes in this direction. For example, they mentioned knowing a foreigner who was justifiably criminally prosecuted for harassing a Korean. However, a European student was sexually assaulted (forcibly kissed) in a club and then followed in the street until entering a police station, where she was told there was nothing that could be done since she was a foreigner.

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<sup>68</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 442.

<sup>69</sup> See Joonhee Park, “The Effects of Regular Employment for Non-Regular Workers: A Case Study of Cleaning Workers in the Busan Metro, South Korea” (MA Thesis: Pusan National University, 2016), Chap. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Government of Canada, “South Korea Travel Advice,” (last updated 19 December 2024), <<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/south-korea>>.

With others, Jane Jacobs has stressed not only that there “must be eyes upon the street,” but that they need to belong to what she calls “the natural proprietors,” that is, people who care about the locale and feel licensed to intervene.<sup>71</sup> While an extended sociology of Korea is beyond the scope of this article, some scholars have noted that older generations of Koreans tend to avoid interfering with outsiders. This behavior has been linked to a historical context in which communities were collectively rewarded or punished, fostering a focus on policing members of their own group while ignoring others.<sup>72</sup> Also, within living memory, Korea was comprised of fairly isolated villages<sup>73</sup> separated by mountains, and in-group bias may be a partial artifact of this. Whatever the reasons, it seems that individuals from different parts of the world face varying obstacles or negative affordances, not solely due to the cultures they bring with them to Korea and Busan. Another contributing factor appears to be the selective way in which locals assert a sense of proprietorship over those around them.

## Conclusion

Recently, the notion of selective permeability has been used to articulate how different affordances manifest as a *function of culture* in digital and educational spaces. Strangely, however, the selective permeability model has not been used for an extensive analysis of multiculturalism in cities. This is odder still because the model originated in philosophical work on urban geography and cities are preeminent engines of multiculturalism. Our aim in this article was to address this gap and to add something beyond mere speculation by empirically examining how people from different cultures encounter Busan.

We began by reviewing and philosophically exploring the selective permeability model and its connection to Gibson’s affordance theory. Drawing on cultural psychology, which ties closely to regional philosophies, we articulated how individuals from different cultural backgrounds may encounter varying positive and negative affordances within the same

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<sup>71</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 35.

<sup>72</sup> See Boye Lafayette De Mente and Laura Kingdon, *The Korean Mind: Understanding Contemporary Korean Culture* (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2018), 31–32.

<sup>73</sup> See Sungjo Kim, “Urbanizing the Countryside: The Developmentalist Designs of the New Village and Farmhouse in 1970s Rural Korea,” in *International Journal of Korean History*, 25:1 (2020), 193–232, <<https://doi.org/10.22372/ijkh.2020.25.1.193>> and Hyejin Wang and Chad David Anderson, “History of Korean Urban Development,” in *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. by Ali Farazmand (Cham: Springer, 2022), <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3\\_3817](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3_3817)>.

environment in Busan, making the city easier or more challenging to navigate.

After this, we explored three interrelated points. First, we discussed how social significance can be selectively perceived based on an individual's cultural background, resulting in a single space not appearing the same to all people. Second, we highlighted the intersections between culture and mobility in Busan, noting, for instance, that middle-aged Russian-speaking men may experience greater safety—and therefore greater freedom of movement—on Texas Street compared to younger Russian-speaking men. Third, we analyzed the interplay between gender and culture, both of the individuals affected and those around them, considering how these factors combine to shape whether Busan is perceived as welcoming or hostile, particularly for women.

Throughout, we advanced the idea that socially constructed space selectively imposes obstacles that are real for some people but not for others, depending on individual variations such as culture, age, and gender, which influence bodily comportment. An obvious conclusion is that individuals encounter different opportunities or barriers in Busan. For this reason, they may choose to leave or stay in the city or certain parts of it.

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Article

## Necessary Visions: Richard Sennett's Levinasian Neighbor in Pre- and Post-War Manila

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the deterioration of Manila's urbanism by contrasting the outward orientation of its pre-war elite with the enclave urbanism of present-day Metro Manila. Drawing from Richard Sennett's concept of the Levinasian neighbor, the paper explores how everyday opportunities for exposure to the "different stranger," persons who were not just unknown but also different, were available to the pre-war elite. This developed skilled interaction, undergirding an openness toward and even delectation in public life. Literary and autobiographical evidence is drawn from José Rizal, Nick Joaquin, and Carmen Guerrero Nakpil. The uricide of Manila during the Second World War not only destroyed the city's physical form but also cut short a thriving urbanism that delighted in urban complexity. We critique the metaphysical underpinnings of enclave urbanism and argue that Emmanuel Levinas' privileging of ethics over metaphysics is better for cities.

**Keywords:** Levinas, gated communities, Metro Manila, urbanism

This paper argues that Manila's pre-war elite had an outward-oriented urbanism. They were tolerant of public life and lived it with intensity and pleasure. By intensity, we mean that the everyday life of Manila's affluent was exposed to persons who were not just unknown or barely known. They were also different. Furthermore, these encounters had a greater range, from the structured to the carnivalesque. This is in contrast to contemporary Metro Manila's enclave urbanism, where citizens encounter the different strangers predominantly through hierarchical interactions in classed and fortified spaces like lifestyle malls, gated communities, and branded townships. On the other hand, the posture toward public life of elite urbanism in pre-war Manila can be characterized as Levinasian.

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We divide our paper into two parts. The first part will argue the hypothesis that Manila's pre-war elite's urbanism (i.e., their urban way of being) was open to urban complexity. Literary and autobiographical evidence will be presented. Contemporaneous imaginative literature with reliable narrators is treated as primary sources with unique insight into everyday urban life. Rizal's fiction has long been treated as a record of colonial life. Nick Joaquin drew from first-hand experience of pre-war Manila, his home city, where he set his stories and was a frequent subject of his non-fiction writing. Carmen Guerrero Nakpil was a local of pre-war Ermita, the district she memorializes. The second part of this paper will expand upon what Richard Sennett has called the 'Levinasian neighbor' after the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in pre-war Manila's urbanism.

Before beginning, it is essential to note that, in the historiographic literature, the designation of "elite" is unsettled, especially in its application to the nineteenth century, when social classes became more complex. The two fictional persons this paper puts forward, Rizal's Ibarra and Nick Joaquin's Dr. Monson, once an officer in Aguinaldo's army, can both be classified as *ilustrados*. Highly educated, fluent in Spanish, often but not always comfortable or wealthy, the *ilustrados* saw themselves leading the national project through politics, letters, or war.<sup>1</sup> Ibarra performed this leadership through his school-building, while Dr. Monson, bitterly disappointed at Aguinaldo's loss and Manila's destruction in the Second World War, nonetheless hoped that his foreign-born children would inherit the free nation he strove but failed to bring into being. Both were men of means.

The term *ilustrado* is too weighted with the historical milieu that had long passed when Carmen Guerrero Nakpil lived and wrote about pre-war Ermita. For this reason, we prefer the general term "elite" or "urban elite" to designate a social class whose consumption and ideas shape cities worldwide and, more crucially, for whom engagement with public life was optional. This paper cannot establish which segment of the elite was open to urban complexity. Instead, it argues that Filipinos in pre-war Manila who enjoyed some combination of wealth, higher education, and fluency in the intellectual lingua franca had the option to engage in public life and took this option not on special occasions, but in the everyday, as suggested by the primary sources examined. The option to engage and leave the enclave is also available to Manila's present-day elite, but the enclaved city they inherited and reinforce makes taking this choice difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael Cullinane, *Ilustrado Politics* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003).

## Part One

When writing of the aftermath of Manila's liberation in February 1945, it is commonplace to begin with a comparison to Warsaw. Only Warsaw, it is claimed, was more destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Writers feel compelled to open with this comparison, as we do, because readers are usually ignorant of the deliberate destruction of Manila's most valuable districts and the murder of 100,000 of its civilians, even if these readers are Filipino. The Philippine state does not commemorate the urbicide of its capital city. Hence, the comparison to a European capital whose suffering is known gives Manila's death a place in memory, however transient. But unlike Warsaw, whose heart was carefully reconstructed, Manila's cultural and commercial centers were never restored.<sup>3</sup>

The urbicide of Manila was an immense loss to Filipinos and perhaps the world, but rarely, if at all, is the damage comprehended as a degradation of civilization. The cost is greater than what can be described in an indictment or treaty of reparation. Furthermore, because Manila is now a megapolis at the center of an economy on the way to becoming one of the largest in the world, we can be led to believe that the devastation of 1945 has been long overcome. In such a simplification, the passing of time is rendered as only salutary: The living carry on, new buildings are erected, and heritage is preserved; but the wound that urbicide inflicts is complex and insidious. Time, normally salutary, can instead exacerbate.

A people whose primate city is destroyed suffers more than material loss. They are also robbed of a future in which their civilization develops with a living past, not the historical past, which can be recovered by reading, but the everyday past, or time's accumulation of habits, attitudes, and knowledge that make an urban people more humane or refuse the humanity of strangers, and that are not deliberately learned or recorded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Jose Maria Escoda, *Warsaw of Asia* (Quezon City: Giraffe Books, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Nick Joaquin, "Introduction," in *Intramuros of Memory*, ed. by Jaime C. Laya and Esperanza B. Gatabonton (Manila: Intramuros Administration, 1983; reprint, 2011), 1–14.

<sup>4</sup> See Michael D. Pante, "Modern Living in Third-World Suburbia: Quezon City, 1939–1976," in *Modern Times in Southeast Asia, 1920s–1970s*, ed. by Susie Protschky and T. van den Berge, 15–38 (Leiden: Brill, 2018). The new capital, Quezon City, was envisioned as a modern city for an independent Philippines. However, not only was Quezon City's shortfall in low-cost housing the most severe, land intended for mass housing was diverted, with the state's cooperation, into building the country's first gated community for the middle-class and wealthy, Philam Life Homes. Pante locates Quezon City's failures within a trend of elite, American-led suburbanization accelerated by Manila's destruction. He sees the Manila elite as complicit and (neo)colonial in their consumption of American notions of modern (suburban) living. This paper suggests that this shift in land-use also involved a change in elite urbanism.

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Like all colonizers, the Spanish regime was racist and would remain so until its end. But not all was darkness. Faced with the necessity of rationalizing the governance of its remaining colonies and increasing revenues to the metropole, the nineteenth century saw the opening of Manila to world trade and the liberalization of education.<sup>5</sup> By the middle of the century, Manila was cosmopolitan, the only such city in Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made education in Europe feasible, accelerating the influence of liberalism through young, multilingual Filipinos pursuing degrees or their fortunes on the continent. When discontent reached its high point in the *fin de siècle*, both peaceful reform and armed revolution professed the Western, mainly Spanish liberalism of their middle and upper-class leadership.<sup>7</sup> Fluent in the civilization of Europe and Spain and expectant of recognition, educated Filipinos despised the racism that saw them as categorically inferior and sought to cast it off, first with journalism and literature and later with arms.<sup>8</sup>

The failure of elite liberalism to achieve justice in the Philippines is well-developed in historiography. Liberalism, because it sought only legal equality, was compatible with the elite desire to preserve and expand their wealth in a new nation. No program for redistribution was mooted at the Malolos Congress or the *Katipunan*.<sup>9</sup> And even if we admit that members of the elite and middle class who led the Philippine Revolution of 1896 to 1898 simultaneously had both moral and self-interested reasons for taking up arms,<sup>10</sup> the vestige visible to history, and what better explains the present, is a continuation of the patronage of the Spanish and then American colonial order.

The reforms instituted over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appeared to fail both the educated Filipinos who imbibed their “liberalizing logic,” for they were still excluded racially, and the people, whose betters did not develop their liberal thinking into a program of social justice.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, even if the Filipino elite behaved, for the most part, self-interestedly during the revolution and in their alliances with American colonial administrators, these are not the only tests of their role in the

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<sup>5</sup> See Vicente Rafael, “Revolutionary Contradictions,” introduction to *Luzon at War: Contradictions in Philippine Society, 1898–1902*, by Milagros C. Guerrero (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>6</sup> See David R. M. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See Rafael, “Revolutionary Contradictions,” 7.

<sup>8</sup> See *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, 11–13.

<sup>10</sup> See Fernando Nakpil Zialcita, *Authentic Though Not Exotic: Essays on Filipino Identity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006), 130–131.

<sup>11</sup> See Rafael, “Revolutionary Contradictions,” 11–13.

development of the Filipino nation. It is important to discern how close to the surface the pursuit of self-interest is, and how certain events and situations can make such evident more readily than others. A time of revolution is one of ferment, and, as often pointed out, many of the elite seized singular opportunities to consolidate their wealth and power at the expense of the common good. On the other hand, revolution is also a period of intense vocation, where people feel called to pursue moral or human goals, even if these fall short of social justice.<sup>12</sup>

Surrounding the two years and five months of revolutionary ferment near the close of the century, there is the *longue durée* of everyday life in Spanish, cosmopolitan Manila, an urbanism that survives and flourishes in the American period, and whose mundanity makes tenuous connections to the grand political project that is nationhood. In this diurnal urban frame, “self-interest” as a litmus test becomes blunt because, unlike in nations, cities are agnostic toward self-interest. Mixing, the drawing in of disparate things, is the basic movement of cities and civilization. Unlike political virtue, urban virtue is not undergirded by a desire for purity. If we examine the urban virtues of the elite of the colonial period, we see that not all was dark.

The literary record of daily life in late 19th-century Manila suggests an upper class that had what Richard Sennett calls “exposure.” Their routine encounters with persons of very different circumstances developed in them a facility for “coping with and learning from [urban] complexity.”<sup>13</sup> The political and moral goal of Jose Rizal’s two novels, required reading in the Philippines, was to demonstrate the racist ignobility of some peninsular friars and officials, which could not be cured by violent revolution because the people themselves lack virtue. Much ink has been spilled discussing these grand themes, but the novel form is also apt for representing everyday life, so it captures more than the movement of history. In Chapter IV of the *Noli Me Tángere*, the protagonist, Crisostomo Ibarra, walks in Manila’s commercial district, Binondo, after a long stay in Europe. Like any pedestrian, his eye wanders. What is remarkable are the seemingly insignificant details—a chipped paving stone, a bent grill, one of which he himself bent as a child playing on these very streets—that constitute the joys of homecoming. Moreover, he recognizes the faces of Chinese vendors from before his departure, years past, even if he does not know their names.<sup>14</sup>

This reminiscence suggests an exposure to and embrace of public life, which is complex not because of strangers, but because of exposure to

<sup>12</sup> See Zilacita, *Authentic Though Not Exotic*, 130-131.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 304.

<sup>14</sup> José Rizal, *Noli Me Tángere (Touch Me Not)*, trans. by Harold Augenbraum (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 24-25.

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strangers who are *different*. Strangers who are like us are no goad to growth, especially in an “archipelagic” city like Metro Manila where the elite and middle class can “network without exposure” by pursuing both work and leisure in islands of classed space linked through private vehicles.<sup>15</sup> It is not just possible but common for the affluent in today’s Metro Manila to have only trivial contact with public life. On the contrary, exposure to the different stranger outside ‘safe’ contexts where they are ‘in their place’ can be discomfiting, even fear-inducing, so persons segregate into places which “remove the threat of social contact”. In doing so, the city as a “stage of life” is reduced and trivialized.<sup>16</sup>

On the contrary, Ibarra’s intimacy with the minutiae of the Binondo streetscape, his childhood pranks, and his recognition of the faces of vendors despite a seven-year absence all suggest a long exposure to public life from early youth to adulthood. His fond remembrance suggests not only exposure but delectation in Binondo’s street life. It is instructive to consider how unlikely such a character would be in today’s Manila. The history of exposure implied by Ibarra’s reactions to the Binondo streetscape prevents an explanation of his delectation as only the sentimentality of homecoming, which distorts through affectation. A contemporary author who creates an elite Manileño with a past of exposure to Manila’s public life must take pains to make such a history believable, but Rizal simply does. Neither does the *fin de siècle* setting of the *Noli Me Tángere* before the rise of the automobile, in what has been called the golden age of pedestrianism, fully dissolve the question. Another novel contains a similar reminiscence, but this time set decades later in American Manila when private automobiles had already become popular.<sup>17</sup>

Nick Joaquin, perhaps the greatest Filipino novelist in English, grew up in American Manila and would also represent upper-class characters exposed to the complexity of city life, which they enjoy. In his most well-regarded novel, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, Dr. Monson, once an officer in Aguinaldo’s army, like Joaquin’s own father, tells his sons of their grand old house on the banks of the Pasig River in Binondo, and their morning routine of being awakened by the calls of vendors on boats, from whom they would purchase their daily commodities. This reminiscence is followed by the family mourning their lost urban life in Manila, for that house was

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<sup>15</sup> Edwin Wise, *Manila, City of Islands: A Social and Historical Inquiry into the Built Forms and Urban Experience of an Archipelagic Megacity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019), 179.

<sup>16</sup> Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael D. Pante, “Mobility and Modernity in the Urban Transport Systems of Colonial Manila and Singapore,” in *Journal of Social History*, 47:4 (Summer 2014), 860, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shu023>>.

reduced to ruin by the Second World War. They dwell not on the house as a space of private memory but on its daily interaction with public life on the Pasig River, which was once teeming with commerce. In his remembering, Dr. Monsoon valorizes a domestic life that is oriented outward, the memory of which he bequeaths to his sons.<sup>18</sup>

Though their writerly selves are separated by six decades and their fictional settings are in different colonial regimes, Rizal and Joaquin have designed the reminiscences of their affluent Manileños with an orientation to public life. Both authors could have sequestered their wealthy men within private spaces, away from the crowd. The materials to do so were available to Rizal: A beau monde, pervasive racism, servants, carriages, and commodious houses. All of these could have believably withheld Ibarra from the life of the street. Joaquin not only provides a setting oriented toward the city but marks it with value: of all the memories of home, it is a house's ease of encounter with the different stranger that the exiled Dr. Monsoon chooses for his foreign-born sons.

This outward orientation has survived the Philippine Revolution, the fall of the Spanish regime, the Philippine-American War, and the vanquishing of the First Republic. This suggests that this delectation is not merely a function of pedestrianism or mobility technology. Instead, it is an urban way of being which, as we see in its continuation from Rizal to Joaquin, has durability as daily life. It does not react to the different stranger with an "expectation of hurt but with the expectation of stimulation" or, as we prefer to call it, with delectation.<sup>19</sup>

A contemporary of Nick Joaquin, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, experienced the same public orientation in Manila's elite. Her memoir of pre-war Ermita in *Myself, Elsewhere* dedicates a chapter to her family's ardent participation in Ermita's many fiestas and rituals, which, despite her family's status, were intensely public. However, festival days are only the intensification of Ermita's vibrant everyday life, a portion of which routinely occurred in public spaces, such as the streets and plazas, enjoyed by all. Ermita was a socially, racially, and economically diverse district, yet it cohered.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Guerrero Nakpil writes of her coming to age in pre-war Ermita as a female in a conservative Catholic milieu, which, we would expect, would constrain her participation in public life. However real the constraints of childhood and sex – she recalls receiving a severe spanking after daring to walk home from school – it appears not to have prevented

<sup>18</sup> See Nick Joaquin, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (Quezon City: Anvil Publishing, 2014), 13-16.

<sup>19</sup> Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*.

<sup>20</sup> See Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, *Myself, Elsewhere*, Kindle edition (San Juan, Metro Manila: Nakpil Publishing, 2006), 63.

participation in and an appreciation for public life. Because Ermita Church was not ensconced within a gated enclave but was the center of a very diverse one, the Catholic feasts and frequent Mass she was expected to participate in also meant exposure to different strangers.

It is easy to dismiss Sennett's virtue of exposure in Rizal's, Joaquin's, and Guerrero Nakpil's Spanish and American Manila as nostalgia for bygone times. But the exposure captured in literature is also seen in pre-war habits of consumption: Manila's fashionable did their shopping at stores that embraced the street, particularly those along Escolta and Avenida (today's Rizal Avenue). It is also in the famous practice of evening walks or drives on the Luneta, an authentically public space. Even the walled district of Intramuros, seat of the colonial administration and the Catholic Church, was open to all before sunset. Its festivals belonged to every Manileño,<sup>21</sup> and not just to the resident elite. The following is an excerpt from Nick Joaquin's memoir of the Intramuros of his youth.

No month of the year but offered occasions for special worship in Intramuros; and those who now say that it was foreign ground with no relevance to our lives have no idea how intensely the prewar Manileño lived there and what importance it had in his communal calendar. While Intramuros existed, it acted as a center round which Manila moved as a coherent community, sharing and continuing certain observances and traditions. You were a Manileño because you shared in this continuity, and you felt your identity most keenly at an annual event like, say, October's *La Naval de Manila*. You became conscious that this was a ritual particular to your city and that countless generations of Manileños had participated in what now included and involved you.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars have suggested that Intramuros is the model for post-war Manila's numerous gated communities.<sup>23</sup> The comparison is infelicitous. Intramuros is akin to a medieval walled town where entry was surveilled but widely permitted because public spaces and institutions were inside and, as we can see in Joaquin's memoirs, Intramuros' numerous religious feasts had

<sup>21</sup> See Ian Morley, "City Profile: Manila," in *Cities*, 72:A (February 2018), 25, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.07.022>>.

<sup>22</sup> Nick Joaquin, "Introduction," *Intramuros of Memory*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Verzosa Tanate, *Gated Communities in Metro Manila: An Empirical Analysis on Living Conditions and Social Functions* (PhD dissertation: University of Tsukuba, 2005).

an urbanizing function which transformed strangers into citizens by overcoming their atomization into the separate districts, racial backgrounds, and status. Intramuros was pre-war Manila's public square. The gated communities and branded enclaves of present-day Manila are an entirely different urbanism and, in their institutionalization through laws such as the Magna Carta for Homeowners and Homeowners Associations and seventy years of post-war custom, represent the ultimate truncation of the urbanism of the Pearl of the Orient.

That Manila was once but is no longer the "Pearl of the Orient" is a trope in Philippine studies. The loss of heritage and human lives was immense, but the cost was even greater. What was cut-off was a Filipino urbanism that was only beginning to flourish. Prior to colonization, there were no cities, not even ruined ones, on the islands. At the time of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, the inhabitants of the islands lived in independent villages or *barangays*, each headed by its chief, who traded with other *barangays* or raided them for slaves. The development of Philippine urban culture, we might even say Filipino civilization, if we stress the city as concomitant with civilization, began with colonization.<sup>24</sup>

This urbanism, where the upper class tolerated if not embraced public life, and were exposed to difference in that public life, would likely have made a better, more humane basis for growth than what replaced it post-war. Today, Metro Manila is one of the world's most private and enclaved cities.<sup>25</sup> Public life is shunned by the upper and middle class, who usually live in one of the city's many gated communities, a suburban form that has since been universalized in the Philippines.<sup>26</sup> The elite shaping of post-war Manila has been unsuccessful, resulting in an archipelagic city that allows the privileged to move, live, and form communities but without exposure.<sup>27</sup> It would appear that this is only a continuation of the rapacity that motivated elite logics during the Philippine Revolution. However, what the elite do in their daily life in cities is not necessarily a piece with what they do with revolutions. The urban design specified in the Law of the Indies required the construction of a public, central plaza around which were the parish church, government edifice, and other important buildings. The Philippine elite built homes as close as possible to this central plaza, with the wealthiest homes beside it. These families lived in daily exposure to public

<sup>24</sup> See Zialcita, *Authentic Though Not Exotic*, 167.

<sup>25</sup> See Peter Murphy and Trevor Hogan, "Discordant Order: Manila's Neo-Patrimonial Urbanism," in *Thesis Eleven*, 112:1 (2012), 10–34, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513612450500>>; Marco Garrido, *The Patchwork City: Class, Space, and Politics in Metro Manila* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> See Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> See *Ibid.*, 202.

life, especially on Sundays and fiestas. By the beginning of the American colonial era, this practice was two hundred years old, suggesting that upper-class Filipinos, if not adept at urban complexity, could inherit an openness to it.

## Part Two

How do we return to an urbanism open to complexity? Joaquin's first-hand experience of Intramuros as the city's melting pot, the Pasig River teeming with commerce and interaction across social classes, Guerrero Nakpil's mixed-use and diverse neighborhood of Ermita, and Ibarra's pedestrianism are made possible by the city's physical form and land use. Nonetheless, however crucial urban forms and policy, they are perhaps not the starting point, especially if we consider how deep and enduring the obstacles are to building better in Metro Manila. The recognition of models from a city's past can also be the point at which a project ceases. Nostalgia, utopianism, romanticizing, and superficiality are pitfalls to projects whose impetus is bygone. We must acknowledge, in a spirit of conversation and conservatism, the lost urbanism of Manila. Now, the first thing to do, how do we use the past to orient toward the future?

Richard Sennett, an urban sociologist and philosopher, suggests an openness to complexity can be achieved not only through design but also through ethics.<sup>28</sup> In a lecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in October 2017, Sennett presented an "ethical framework for dealing with people who are unlike oneself."<sup>29</sup> He develops his theory by comparing the ethics of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. For the former, interaction can dissolve the separation between people by means of reciprocal relationships. For the latter, the separation remains, no matter the proximity. "For Levinas, proximity is a relation which pre-exists that consciousness of the Other. [...] it-pre-exists the noetico-noematic structure of intentionality."<sup>30</sup> The epitome of proximity is the proximity of the Other - the neighbor. In the thought of Levinas, the dash in the I-thou cannot be overcome.

They don't integrate, they don't unite, they don't form a  
community. Instead, they become neighbors to each  
other. And the concept of neighbor, for Levinas, is

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<sup>28</sup> See Richard Sennett, "The Open City," YouTube video, 10:02, posted by Harvard Graduate School of Design (10 March 2020), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PoRvQJ-FQ>>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12:37.

<sup>30</sup> Craig R. Vasey, "Emmanuel Levinas: From Intentionality to Proximity," in *Philosophy Today*, 25:3 (Fall 1981), 186, <<https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday19812538>>.

somebody who is aware of another intensely, but is separated by that dash from ever fully becoming one with them. It requires skill to be intensely aware of somebody else, to interact with them, and yet not to try and abolish the boundaries between self and other.<sup>31</sup>

Sennett locates neighborliness in the impossibility of fusion between urban persons, a condition Levinas calls “illeity,” and which does not presuppose a community.<sup>32</sup> Instead of community and the reciprocity it entails, Levinas proposes an infinite responsibility toward the unknowable and ultimately unreachable neighbor, which can be understood in terms of the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbor, which will admit no limit.<sup>33</sup> Sennett reinterprets this into an urban ethics of intense awareness and interaction that does not “suppose the local community is ultimately the ethical foundation of a city.”<sup>34</sup>

In the parable of The Good Samaritan, the man – the victim, understood to be a Jew – was given aid by neither the Jewish Priest nor the Levite. The man, the priest, and the Levite all belong to the same (Jewish) community, and yet they (priest and Levite) both avoided him. Instead, it was the Samaritan, considered to be an enemy of the Jews, who offered aid and assistance to the victim. He, who was not a member of the community, a different stranger, displayed not only an awareness of the Other but also took responsibility for him. The Good Samaritan recognized the man as his neighbor and acted accordingly. The parable is not to be taken only as a directive for action but also as a way to expound on the notion of neighborliness in a richer and deeper sense. Interestingly, in the Parable, Jesus did not ask who viewed the man as his neighbor but who acted as a neighbor among the three. “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?”<sup>35</sup> In other words, it is not just a matter of *having* a neighbor, but also, perhaps more importantly, *being* a neighbor. And being a neighbor orients outward. It does not rest on the consciousness of the Other but exists before it. We are neighbors even before the appearance of the object we designate as neighbor. In the parable, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan are all commanded by the vulnerability of the wounded stranger, their neighbor, even before intentionality and

<sup>31</sup> Sennett, “The Open City,” 14:41.

<sup>32</sup> See Anna Strhan, “And Who Is My Neighbour? Levinas and the Commandment to Love Re-Examined,” in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 19:2 (2009), 157, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/SID.19.2.2044689>>.

<sup>33</sup> Love here is understood as charity or selfless love.

<sup>34</sup> Sennett, “The Open City,” 16:03.

<sup>35</sup> See Luke 10:36.

resulting judgment. On the other hand, inward-oriented urbanism by a violent bifurcation designates Others as neighbors and strangers, which ignores responsibility but cannot silence its demand.

Sennett's development preserves Levinas' radicality by contradicting sentimental prescriptions of urban renewal, which apply an ethics that aims to dissolve the separation between citizens, displacing the neighbor into categories of kinship or friendship. For the urban thinker Jane Jacobs, a basic characteristic of cities is that the great majority of citizens are strangers to each other, even those who live nearby.<sup>36</sup> If strangers are essential to the urban condition, urban ethics must not reduce strangeness if it is not to act against the city itself. Reducing the stranger through proximity or membership, the culmination of which is the "local community," is not just sentimental, a flattening of complexity, but also impossible and violent. Most strangers will fail to become familiar, and if we insist, we are on the precipice of an exclusionary ethic that pits us against them, fracturing the city and requiring the deployment of regimes and technologies, both ancient and new, that guard against the recalcitrant stranger who is the city himself.

Instead of ontological egoism, which focuses on the perspective of the subject (*vis-a-vis* an object), Levinas pays closer attention to the dynamics of the relationship between the self and the Other.<sup>37</sup> The Levinasian precept that our being is not an essence but infinite responsibility for the neighbor is demonstrated in the urban condition. A fragmented city where citizens admit responsibility only for themselves, their kin, or friends is a city only in designation. In reality, it is composed of local communities, more or less tight-knit, intolerant of strangers, and oriented against the city, which is to say it is on guard against an enlargement of responsibility beyond the local. The stranger is essentialized and rendered faceless.

This metaphysical urbanism creates not a city in the proper sense of the word, but suburban islands for which the surrounding city is only an abstraction seen outside the safety glass of private automobiles, one that approaches reality, looks real, but is always away, fleeting, and without dimension. At best, metaphysical urbanism creates simulations of cities, summarized through a brochure or slide deck for any global investor, in a global taste that will offend no one, and managed by an office. This is only the local community at a city-like scale, where the stranger must become either friend or kin or is essentialized into categories that dilute responsibility: office worker, laborer, maid, staff, tourist, local, et cetera. In such a city, the

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<sup>36</sup> See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961; reprint, 1992), 30.

<sup>37</sup> See Jaeseung Cha, "Are you my neighbor?: Jesus and Levinas," *New Brunswick Theological Seminary - Think Critically, Act Justly, Lead Faithfully* (19 April 2024), <<https://nbts.edu/neighbor-jesus-levinas/>>.

stranger whose presentation prevents effortless categorization, to remain strange, is importunate and an irritant. They take us “hostage,” to use Levinas’ arresting verb, by provoking “a responsibility against my will.”<sup>38</sup>

The self does not become responsible solely by itself, for he only becomes a responsible (Levinasian) neighbor when he is made responsible by the presence of the Other. Levinas writes that:

Ethical freedom is *une difficile liberte*...Consequently, the Other is the richest and the poorest of beings: the richest, at an ethical level, in that it always comes before me, its right to be preceding mine; the poorest, at an ontological or political level, in that without me it can do nothing that is utterly vulnerable and exposed. The Other haunts our ontological existence and keeps the psyche awake, in a state of vigilant insomnia. Even though we are ontologically free to refuse each other, we remain forever accused, with a bad conscience.<sup>39</sup>

The acceptance of the gift of responsibility transforms our being, without necessarily transforming that of the Other. They remain a stranger, but one to whom we are being a neighbor. There is no point at which we are released from tension to rest in intimacy with the Other or in perfect indifference. We are haunted and kept awake. The Samaritan left two denarii and promised to repay expenses when he returns. We are not told when that return will be. It hangs over the parable as a moment of freedom. He may or may not return. And, if he does, he will not discover that the victim has, in his absence, already become his friend or brother. They will part ways but in the moment they face each other, the Samaritan interacts with skill. His response will forever be considered in the context of his responsibility towards the other. Ethical freedom, as Levinas states, is a difficult freedom.

The “Levinasian neighbor” can only appear with skill, to carry forward Sennett’s remarkable development. “It requires skill to be intensely aware of somebody else, to interact with them, and yet not to try and abolish the boundaries between self and other.”<sup>40</sup> In present-day Metro Manila, the elite and middle-class urbanscape of gated communities, shopping malls, and branded townships is a domesticated space “promoting familiarity” by

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<sup>38</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. by Richard A. Cohen (Albany, NY: SUNY Albany Press, 1985), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Sennett, “The Open City,” 14:11.

“reducing the risks of unplanned social encounters.”<sup>41</sup> In the private city, no skill can develop because every citizen, no matter their age or intelligence, is forever in an urban infancy whose primary retardation is an inability to deal with the different stranger. Or, to use Sennett’s development of Levinas, an inability to face the stranger with intense awareness and interaction, refusing to let them disturb us with their demand for our responsibility, is a functional retardation disguised as elitism, NIMBYism, parochialism, or “exclusivity.” It is caused by a lack of opportunity to exercise the skill of intense awareness and interaction, colloquially called “street smarts,” which, like all skills, deteriorates without use. By making nearly all social encounters predictable, measured, controlled, and thus safe, the self loses all motivation and means to be responsible.

Although American suburbia has been exported around the world, in the Philippines, they “are deployed primarily through master-planned gated residential projects” that have “entrenched themselves in the rhythms of everyday life.”<sup>42</sup> The success of this form is seen in how it “is now common practice even amongst the poor communities.”<sup>43</sup> However, gated-ness is not fate. Before the 1950s, there were no gated communities in Metro Manila, with the very first, Philam Life Homes, built amidst elite fear of the Hukbalahaps, a communist peasant rebellion popularly known as the Huks.<sup>44</sup> In 1949, President Manuel Quezon’s widow, the former first lady Aurora Quezon, was killed with her daughter, her son-in-law, the mayor of Quezon City, and eleven others in an ambush on the road to Baler from Nueva Ecija, which was blamed on the Huks by the sitting President Elpidio Quirino.<sup>45</sup> Three years later, Quirino presided over a meeting that would lead to the sale of public land intended for social housing for the building of Philam Life Homes.<sup>46</sup>

Besides the Huk rebellion, gating was also a reaction to the (Corazon) Aquino administration enhancing the political stature of the urban poor, leading to a significant increase in squatting, and surging crime in the post-Marcos years, which would fall sharply in the decade after. However,

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Jackson, “Domesticating the Street: The Contested Spaces of the High Street and the Mall,” in *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity, and Control in Public Space*, ed. by Nicholas R. Fyfe (London: Routledge, 1998), 176–191.

<sup>42</sup> Arnisson Andre Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines: Suburbanization, Transnational Migration, and Dispossession* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018), 168–169.

<sup>43</sup> Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> See Pante, “Modern Living in Third-World Suburbia,” 28–29.

<sup>45</sup> See “The Philippines: Murder in the Mountains,” *Time* (9 May 1949), <<https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,800220,00.html>>.

<sup>46</sup> See Pante, “Modern Living in Third-World Suburbia,” 29.

“despite the falling crime rate, the gates stayed up. Moreover, by the 1990s, they had come to be seen as necessary.”<sup>47</sup>

Gating in Metro Manila is an emergency response that endured long after the crises have passed. Today, the gates protect against the city itself. However, this does not mean that residents of gated communities also imbibe a consistent ethics of siege. Arnisson Ortega, in his *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines: Suburbanization, Transnational Migration, and Dispossession*, writes of the ambivalence that residents of gated communities have toward the outside. His respondents speak of the dullness and alienation of life within the gates, dissatisfaction with having to course neighborliness through the Homeowners Association, an intimidating access regime, and “guidelines” that prescribe even the games children play while, at the same time, insisting upon the importance of security enforced through perimeter walls and armed guards.<sup>48</sup> This ambivalence is not entirely explained by security being so fundamental that it overcomes other desires, such as that of having neighbors or *being* a neighbor, but that the basic need for security is achieved through ancient and, in a metropolitan context, obtuse solutions based on weapons, walls, and gates that cannot but exclude the city which is “construed as dangerous, polluted, and crowded.”<sup>49</sup>

While police and their threat of legitimate violence are sometimes necessary, they do not play the foremost role in ensuring street safety. A city’s peace “is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by the people themselves.”<sup>50</sup> Cities do not succeed because walls abound with armed watchers on every byway. Those are symptoms of failure, at first, because there is barbarism about and, later, when the enemy has receded, because citizens are unwilling or unable to rebuild the skill of living amongst strangers without having to turn these strangers into kin, friends, or ‘residents.’ Seventy years of emergency have retarded the urban virtue of the Philippine elite and middle class. This wound lies deeper than intentionality, where we deliberate wrong or right. Undoubtedly, the residents of Metro Manila’s enclaves can know what the common good is, are capable of experiencing authentic emotions of fellow-feeling with the strangers of the city, that is, with its citizens, and may act accordingly. What is doubtful is whether this ability to think the right thoughts, in which is latent right action, can ever be brought to the intensity of awareness and proximity in which Levinas and Sennet locate their philosophy while everyday life is lived apart

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<sup>47</sup> Garrido, *The Patchwork City*, 70–71.

<sup>48</sup> See Ortega, *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines*, 218–226.

<sup>49</sup> Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 34.

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from the public city and while old and new technologies are deployed to prevent routine encounters with the stranger. Ultimately, we face the ancient question on the gulf being knowing the good and doing the good. Reading Levinas and Sennett from within the enclave, does it count for something? We can only hope that it does.

For Edwin Wise, Metro Manila's popular urbanism, which is the urbanism of some informal settlements or of formal but open communities, "resembles far more the growth and nature of the city prior to large-scale projects like Makati or Fort Bonifacio's Global City."<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the "dynamism of popular urbanism comes close to what Sennett calls exposure: the complexities of daily life can be vivid for all inhabitants of popular urbanism."<sup>52</sup> Life in popular urbanism exercises the skill of intense interaction and awareness of Levinasian responsibility but without self-debasement. In fact, for Levinas:

the condition of infinite responsibility is worked out in practice against the needs of many others. Thus, as Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*, 'Everything takes place here 'between us' concerns everyone, the face that looks at me places itself in the full light of the public order' [citation omitted]. My responsibility for my neighbor is enacted within human community and fraternity, and I have a responsibility for myself therefore as well as my neighbor. Although the responsibility to my neighbor is infinite, what that responsibility means has to be worked out within the bonds of human kinship and against the background of responsibility for myself.<sup>53</sup>

Levinas' philosophy assumes a *public order* which, for most of humanity, is urban. If responsibility has to be "worked out in practice against the needs of many others" then it must require skill, and if it does, then the ideal conditions for exercising this skill are in neighborhoods where complexity is at its fullest, outside the denatured urbanism of the enclaves, and where the city is 'as it was.' It is no surprise then that 'street smarts' is commonly believed to be an attribute of the working class. Their facility with public life is not an essential feature of poverty. But, at least in Manila, indigence almost always means living in close proximity to neighbors,

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<sup>51</sup> Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 164.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>53</sup> Strhan, "And Who is My Neighbor?," 153.

constantly sharing the same pedestrian spaces and interacting intensely, so one must skillfully negotiate continually being a neighbor and caring for oneself.<sup>54</sup>

The starkness of Levinas' ethics may make it seem that it is also joyless. "Infinite responsibility" is heroic, even Sisyphean, and anything but pleasurable. But this is only when in the abstract and, if placed within the concrete, one informed by a sentimental, sentimentally tiresome context of relentless charity work. There is, however, one way to understand Levinas while avoiding both melodrama and, on the other extreme, gesturing to the possibility of violence and trauma "in the neighbor's approach."<sup>55</sup> This is to interpret Levinas as describing an urban community with a flourishing public life. Such an interpretation requires only an easy advance, for Levinas' emphasis on community and the "third party" in understanding "infinite responsibility" toward neighbors with whom we have no other bond readily suggests the community of strangers that is the city. However, urbanizing Levinas reveals a vital nuance: Responsibility toward my neighbor is not just imperative. It is also pleasurable. The allure of a great city is, to a significant degree, social. To belong to a city with a flourishing public life is to possess "subjectivity as ethical" and to be infinitely obliged toward the neighbor prior to knowledge, before conceptualization,<sup>56</sup> but simultaneously to take pleasure in it. A public orientation is not learned but lived, and even if one denies it through enclaves, the demand of the urban neighbor that we be responsible for him is unceasing, grows in urgency as the city grows, spurring the reinforcement of exclusivity and, ultimately, the use of violence.

The hedonism possible in Levinasian relations between neighbors is seen in the delectation of the elite and middle class in public life in pre-war Manila. The pleasure taken in public life is not superficial, for just below it is the current of responsibility. An urban ethics of the Levinasian neighbor, that is, of awareness and interaction that is as intense as it is skilled, is implied in Ibarra's recognition of vendor's faces in Rizal's *Noli Mi Tangere* and the history of exposure suggested by his reminiscences, in the old veteran of Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* who passes to his sons the memory of a home embraced by the city, in the urbanizing festivals of Intramuros that made individuals into Manileños, in the racially, socially, and economically mixed district of Ermita that nonetheless cohered into intense public life, and on all plaza complexes in the Philippines that preserved a way of life exposed to the different stranger. The everyday life suggested by these literary and

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<sup>54</sup> See Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 167–168.

<sup>55</sup> Strhan, "And, Who is My Neighbor?," 146.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

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historical vignettes suggest that exposure was not exceptional but carried out with finesse, enjoyment, and naturalness. In short, with skill.

It is important to note that the communities formed by such skill are different from the communities comprehended by Metro Manila's present-day enclave urbanism, with its subdivisions, villages (i.e., semantic narrowings and euphemisms for gated communities), branded estates, and barangays. Except for the last, all of these are closed systems that, for Richard Sennett, are linear systems driven by "hypothesis testing" and not exploration, a Boolean logic of yes/no and not Bayesian logic of maybe, and where failure is not an option. On the contrary, an open system is explorative, Bayesian, and can learn from failure.<sup>57</sup> Enclave urbanism describes an archipelagic city form,<sup>58</sup> in which the affluent can move from island to island, or from enclave to enclave, without exposure to the different stranger. The deep assumptions of enclave urbanism, or its philosophy, is metaphysical and incompetent in everyday, urban life.

For open systems, there is no community, only the street. A street is not bounded. If one end is closed, as in a cul-de-sac, the other must not be, or it would cease to be a street. A network of streets can form a distinct community or neighborhood, as they do in Ermita, Intramuros, and Binondo, but as long as they are porous, share fuzzy boundaries with the neighborhoods that surround them, they will remain complex and open to complication. They can be dangerous and, at the same time, exhilarating, profoundly human and, by being so, provide an education in how to live well with and for others. On the streets, we learn how to render our unceasing responsibility toward our neighbor with skill and even style. As Sennett writes:

A city ought to be a school for learning how to lead a centred life. Through exposure to others, we might learn how to weigh what is important and what is not. We need to see differences on the streets or in other people neither as threats nor as sentimental invitations, rather as necessary visions. They are necessary for us to learn how to navigate life with balance, both individually and collectively.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See Sennett, "The Open City," 17:39.

<sup>58</sup> See Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*.

<sup>59</sup> Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, xiii.

## Conclusion

When Filipinos reflect on what their capital city might have been, they often remember Daniel Burnham's plan for Manila.<sup>60</sup> Burnham and the colonial government that employed him not only aimed to beautify Manila and Baguio through urban design but also sought to "alter the nature of life within them."<sup>61</sup> His City Beautiful plan for Manila was to achieve nothing less than a modern national identity for Filipinos, albeit under American terms.<sup>62</sup> The grand ambition of colonial urban design in Manila was matched by President Manuel Quezon's for the city that bears his name. "Civic virtue became the underlying ideology in the founding of Quezon City: an ideal city to mold ideal citizens."<sup>63</sup> Both plans, however, would be abandoned. Whether they would have achieved the urban virtue Burnham and Quezon envisioned can never be known.

This paper suggests that a model for urban virtue is not in the dreams and parchments of architects and politicians but in the everyday past of pre-war Manila. The urbicide of Metro Manila six months before the end of the Second World War deprived Filipinos of much more than the capital's architecture. The nation mourns the 100,000 dead, but we should also mourn the loss of an urbanism that would have made for a better metropolitan life. The Pearl of the Orient is dead, but the urbanism that made it can be reimaged. Many Philippine towns, even the towns that comprise Metro Manila, still have their town plazas, some of which are being recovered as public space from deterioration and retrogressive usage as car parks or enclosures.<sup>64</sup> However, the greatest difficulty will be dissolving the borders that form an enclave to Metro Manila. Because of the urbicide of their capital city, the Filipino elite have lost the urbanism born from two centuries of exposure to public life through the plaza complex. Most are now ensconced within the enclaves of Metro Manila, networking without exposure, in what

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<sup>60</sup> See Trisha Macas, "Burnham's Century-Old Ideas Can Still Be Used to Improve Manila—Architect," *GMA News Online* (16 October 2014), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/content/383820/burnham-s-century-old-ideas-can-still-be-used-to-improve-manila-architect/story/>>.

<sup>61</sup> Ian Morley, *Cities and Nationhood: American Imperialism and Urban Design in the Philippines, 1898–1916* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 16.

<sup>62</sup> See Morley, *Cities and Nationhood*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Michael D. Pante, "Quezon's City: Corruption and Contradiction in Manila's Prewar Suburbia, 1935–1941," in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 48:1 (February 2017), 91–112, <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463416000497>>.

<sup>64</sup> See "Plaza Libertad's Major Facelift Starts," *Panay News* (5 February 2021), <<https://www.panaynews.net/plaza-libertads-major-facelift-starts/>>.

has become one of the world's most privatized cities.<sup>65</sup> Re-urbanizing the elite is a generational project, beginning with refashioning their most basic propositions about city life. As Sennett points out, coming from Aristotle, the city "cannot come into being by people who are the same."<sup>66</sup> In the big city, purity is vice.

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<sup>65</sup> See Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 179 and Murphy and Hogan, "Discordant Order," 10.

<sup>66</sup> Sennett, "The Open City," 10:53.

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Article

## The Lotus at Dawn: Rethinking Climate Resilience in an Archipelago

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**Marie Franchesca M. Borrás**

**Abstract:** Super Typhoon Rai, locally called Odette, hit the Philippines on December 16, 2021, devastating General Luna, a municipality in Surigao del Norte. Due to this natural disaster, this study—originally written as a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account via *flâneuserie*—endeavors to understand how the mobility of city dwellers contributes to the anthropogenic climate by exploring the ethics of care. Additionally, it seeks to posit inquiries on what it means to be climate-resilient in an archipelagic country such as the Philippines. Beyond economic methodologies, it is pivotal to examine issues of care that deal with our relationship with nature by understanding how, for example, mindful tourism is practiced in a community that experienced a tragic typhoon such as Typhoon Rai. Surely, the climate crisis’ temporal aspects make it more arduous to address, however, producing more philosophically-informed studies with ethics of care in a certain locus brings us closer to the possibility of a more empathetic and caring community. Like the sacred lotus, *Nelumbo nucifera*, that descends at night and blooms at dawn, the city, after grieving, looks forward to a rebirth by way of recognizing our moral responsibility and by employing approaches that are geared towards actual and real-life solutions.

**Keywords:** autoethnography, climate resilience, *flâneuserie*, tourism

**A**s an archipelago, a group or an assembly of islands, the Philippines is home to impressive beaches that are almost always poetic. Coupled with the fact that we are surrounded by bodies of water is the reality that we are also vulnerable to disasters such as typhoons. On December 16, 2021, Super Typhoon Rai, Odette as we call it locally, hit the Philippines, and although it generally affected most provinces in the country, including Metro Manila, General Luna, a municipality in Surigao del Norte located in the southern part facing the Pacific Ocean and is considered a

tourist hub, experienced the calamity's worst threats and effects. As a category five, typhoon Odette made several landfalls, nine to be exact, that caused loss of electricity, limited communication, and a severely damaged airport that temporarily prevented people, especially tourists, from moving out of the island. The wrath of the typhoon led to not just these inconveniences but worse, to loss of life, at least nineteen individuals to be exact, most of them locals.<sup>1</sup>

On account of this natural disaster, this study—originally written as a fragment that features a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account employing the concept of *flâneuserie*—endeavors to understand how the mobility of city dwellers contributes to the anthropogenic climate, particularly as tourists, by exploring the concept of care. Philosophizing on the city<sup>2</sup> is not just confined in the corners of the big cities but also, perhaps, extends to the city dwellers as subjects and how they, we, may affect or have affected our neighboring loci, such as the islands, in the context of the Philippine archipelago. To offer a definition of the archipelago, Robert Shields, a Canadian sociologist and cultural theorist, in his review of *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking*, posits that: “Archipelagoes are figures of connections and solidarity between peoples, places and species who have similar struggles [...] Archipelagoes are not only geographic but human and thus cultural [...] These archipelagos are where islands repeat but where each island is a rearticulation of the others.”<sup>3</sup> This essay aims to establish how city dwellers' mobility impacts the lives of island dwellers, and how they reflect almost the same challenges of living in the Philippine archipelago.

Before a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account employing the concept of *flâneuserie* is presented, there are key terms, and their context, that must be introduced: The *flâneur* is the stroller that philosophizes on the city from an estranged point of view and surveys the street(s) as if it is a place of dwelling—as in Walter Benjamin's idiom, “The street becomes a dwelling for

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Arwin Mercado, “Siargao death toll due to Typhoon Odette reaches 19, *INQUIRER.net* (22 December 2021), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1530774/siargao-death-toll-due-to-typhoon-odette-reaches-19-matugas>>.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau refers to the walker as a city dweller who captures the image of the city through the act of walking: “[T]hey are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it.” In connection to this idea, this study refers to the city as the capital, the urban space, and the center, and is examined by discussing the impact of the city dwellers' mobility to its neighboring islands such as Siargao through the act of walking as method in autoethnography. See Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. by Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

<sup>3</sup> See Robert Shields, “Review: Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking,” *Space and Culture* (28 November 2020), <<https://www.spaceandculture.com/2020/11/28/review-contemporary-archipelagic-thinking/>>.

the *flâneur*; he is as much at home with the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls." The *flâneuse*, on the other hand, refers to a female counterpart of the *flâneur*. *Flâneuserie* then essentially refers to a woman performing *flânerie*. According to Lauren Elkin in *Flâneuse*, *flâneuserie* "not only changes the way we move through space but intervenes in the organisation of space itself."<sup>4</sup>

Other important terminologies consulted in this study are *dwelling* and *measure-taking* in the Heideggerian sense: terms that link man and earth, his place of *building* and *dwelling*. On the one hand, *dwelling* refers to a symbolic way of staying on earth which comes after one's capacity to *build*. On the other hand, *measure-taking* summons a manner of gauging man's existence on earth and his state of being finite vis-à-vis the infinite, that is represented by the sky. German philosopher Martin Heidegger's essay on Friedrich Hölderlin is pivotal in this study as it inquires into man's poetic *dwelling* and deconstructs Hölderlin's poem where the title of one of the chapters – "...Poetically Man Dwells..." – was derived from. Heidegger essentially links the concept of *dwelling* to the *poetic* through understanding Hölderlin's poetics:

This does not mean, though, that the poetic is merely an ornament and bonus added to dwelling. Nor does the poetic character of dwelling mean merely that the poetic turns up in some way or other in all dwelling. Rather, the phrase "poetically man dwells" says: poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building.<sup>5</sup>

Heidegger's postulations on the *poetic* dwelling intrinsically provoke the argument between poetry, the *imagined* and *symbolic*, and dwelling, the *real*, by crossing the perceived reality of the poet from an ideal state of imagining. Although Heidegger's manner of reading Hölderlin's text is contextualized in the European setting, owing to the fact that the *flâneur* emerged from this cultural milieu, his contemplations on the *measure-taking* between sky and earth and the portrayal of the poet's consciousness in terms of dwelling and space remain to be significant points of reference in this

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<sup>4</sup> Lauren Elkin, "Flâneuserie," in *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2016), 288.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Poetically Man Dwells," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1971), 213.

study. To dwell poetically, man has to recognize the between and to look beyond the material. A street is not just a street but a street moving with the shadow of the sky. A walk is not just a walk but a way of looking and lingering, a state of being in between.

Lastly, drawing from the pre-pandemic autoethnographic account by employing *flâneuserie* and consulting terms such as *dwelling* and *measure-taking* in the Heideggerian sense, this study also explores the ethics of care in connection to the recent tragedy that the island witnessed. Caring, as posited by feminist philosopher Nel Noddings, is the foundation of morality, where there is one “caring” and one that is “cared-for.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, philosopher Virginia Held states that, “a fundamental premise of care ethics is that morality should address issues of caring and empathy and relationships between people rather than only or primarily the rational decisions of solitary moral agents.”<sup>7</sup> Caring, although closely linked to vulnerability, appears more to be an act of courage. Furthermore, caring practices also involve resistive practices that can even establish solidarity in the community.

Essentially, this study employs the method of autoethnography to incorporate personal and experiential accounts vis-à-vis understanding the dynamics of care. Specifically, the methodology employed in the pre-pandemic account is anchored on Mary Louise Pratt’s concept and definition of autoethnography from her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Pratt goes on to say that:

a “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among... travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness...but in terms of copresence, interaction, and interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.<sup>8</sup>

A ‘contact’ allows not just interaction between subjects, but it also works as a space where they can recognize their correlation with one another by way of determining habits, practices, and structure, as also underscored in one of the objectives of the ethics of care. The locus involved in this study

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<sup>6</sup> See Mark Smith, “Nel Noddings, The ethics of care and education,” in *The Encyclopedia of Pedagogy and Informal Education* (2004, 2020, 2024), <<https://infed.org/mobi/nel-noddings-the-ethics-of-care-and-education/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007), EPUB.

is regarded as a contact zone—both a space of navigation and a text that serves as the main avenue of discourse as the *flâneuse* meanders and, ultimately, undergoes a process of meaning-making.

## A Pre-Pandemic Sojourn

To introduce General Luna as the main locus in this study, here is a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account that exhibits the state of the island before Typhoon Odette:

At 5:00 am, the streets of General Luna come to life; residents and visitors alike rise with the sun as they carry their boards and walk their way to Cloud 9, the famed surf spot that made Siargao Island a known destination for local and foreign travelers. Here, people can be seen on their motorbikes with boards attached to their surf racks, or just island dwellers or tourists walking to a café.

Located in southern Philippines, Siargao lies in Mindanao facing the Pacific Ocean, home to scenic reef breaks patronized by surfers, both local and foreign. Since this island can be easily perceived as both a surfers' and non-surfers' paradise, it takes several attempts of knowing the place in-depth to reach a state of arrival and to root oneself as this appears to be too surreal for home: huge waves, young coconuts almost everywhere, panoramic view of the ocean.

General Luna, a municipality in Surigao del Norte, is one of the busiest areas in Siargao since this is where the Tourism Road is located. In my several visits here, I have always stayed in General Luna, the most convenient location where one can access the fruit market, surfboard shops, cafés, and a few more essentials, where most of my *flâneuserie* took place.

It was a slow Sunday morning; the neighboring lodging places were taking a rest from an eventful Saturday night. From the backroad in one of the unnamed streets of Catangnan, where the hostel was located, I had to walk to get to the main road. By foot, it takes five minutes to get to the concrete road; on the way to a café to grab a usual macchiato with coconut milk—a staple ingredient in the island—I had a rare encounter with a goat and a cat playing on the side of the road while snacking on grass for breakfast. I paused and took a photo of them staring at me as I interrupted their morning habit.

I walked further and reached the main road; here, houses on the side give life to the road of Catangnan. It was around 9:00 in the morning and the Sunday mass just ended. Of the many times I have been here, it was one of the unusual moments when I saw children clothed in formal attire—collared shirts, slacks, leather shoes—coming out of the church, running and with big

grins on their faces as they run to the beachside to have early lunch with their families. It is, after all, the people of Siargao who made this place a paradise.

It is in these moments of *flânesuerie* that I become more aware of my walk and of a deeper connection with the space I am traversing. One's walk, then, speaks a lot about not just the space the individual is occupying but the journey into the self as she translates her encounters and experiences. This brings me to Angela Manalang-Gloria's poem "Old Maid Walking on a City Street":

She had a way of walking through concupiscence  
And past the graces her fingers never twirled:  
Because her mind refused the heavy burden,  
Her broad feet shoveled up the world.<sup>9</sup>

Angela Manalang-Gloria's work typically involves a female subject or speaker, and often, the woman is portrayed as solitary, unaccompanied, and independent. In this poem, for instance, Manalang-Gloria presents the figure "walking through concupiscence" and exuding a strong sense of self-control as she seems to have full authority of her movement, even the twirling of her fingers. The character seemed to be immovable and unbothered by her solitude as she "refused the heavy burden" and went on with her daily habit—or her life, in general—and "shoveled up the world" just like how a *flâneuse* ignores the threats as she meanders and negotiates her presence in streets.

Although this poem generally describes an old maid and a picture of her daily life, the character's manner of walking resonates with the method of perambulation by the *flâneuse*. The female walker almost always radiates independence in her solitude as this allows time and space for her musing and interventions in her walks. Similarly, *flâneuserie* does not just merely involve a way of walking but it necessitates an act of detachment, for when the female walker is too aware and too absorbed with events that are happening at once in one place, certain signs might be missed that can potentially contribute to the meaning-making in her encounters.

In line with this fragment, this poem by Manalang-Gloria echoes Janet Wolff's statement in "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," as she asserts that, "although the solitary and independent life of the *flâneur* was not open to women, women clearly *were* active and visible

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<sup>9</sup> Angela Manalang-Gloria, *The Complete Poems* ed. by Edna Zapanta Manlapaz (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1993).

in other ways in public arena.”<sup>10</sup> This goes to say that the female *flâneur* does not just exist in shopping malls and in safe arcades, but in other loci as well such as the unnamed streets of island municipalities.

These encounters then—of getting lost in small towns and eventually ending up buying *pan de coco*, of walking in dark backroads to reach the Lotus Shores yoga dojo—somehow fill what was missing then in the literary accounts of female walkers as the *flâneuse* now appears in the public arena. Furthermore, this account also debunks the limited notion of *flâneuserie* in the metropolis as the female walker explores the outskirts of Manila and searches for possible spaces for solitary walking and, ultimately, comes into contact with opposing and connecting images of the street.

### **On Climate Resilience, Mindful Tourism, and Community Building as Form of Care**

Fast forward to 2021, five years after this fragment was written, the site that has been previously described drastically changed. At least 208 Filipinos were displaced, and worse, killed, after the Super Typhoon Rai, Odette as we call it locally, hit our country, especially the regions of Visayas and Mindanao. In particular, houses and even the airport in Siargao Island were destroyed, trees were uprooted, people lost their access to electricity and potable water; the once carefree dwellers of the tropical paradise suddenly turned into climate refugees.

In 2011, there were plans in the same province to build a model community that is climate change-resilient called Ecotown. An Ecotown is “a planning unit composed of municipalities, or a group of municipalities located within and around boundaries of critical key biodiversity areas, which are at high risk to climate change.”<sup>11</sup> However, in 2021, the tourist hub of the island did not prove to be climate change resilient when it was hit by the super typhoon Odette.

Although this study will not dive deep into existing policies and economic methodologies, it aims to emphasize that understanding the concept of anthropogenic climate change from a philosophical perspective allows us to engage in a critical understanding of the world and our role as humans in caring for our home, *our only home*. How is a particular site even considered climate-resilient, for example?

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<sup>10</sup> Janet Wolff, “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,” in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 2:3 (1985), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764850020030>>.

<sup>11</sup> See Climate Change Commission, *Ecotown Demonstration Framework* (n.d.), <<https://climate.gov.ph/files/ECOTOWN.pdf>>.

It is even more vital to discuss, being in an archipelagic country, how mobility in the city affects life on the outskirts and how it contributes to the anthropogenic climate crisis as it is part of our moral responsibility to mindfully arrive and *dwell* as tourists, as visitors.

After years of restrictions in mobility during the pandemic, people were more than eager to get back to traveling to make up for lost time, giving rise to a frenzy of “revenge travel” and causing a heavy influx of tourists in many cities and further increasing the global carbon footprint. While it may be easy to blame airlines for adding flights to maximize profit, the issue is more complex. It also raises critical questions about how we prioritize the welfare and cultural preservation of local communities, as well as how we behave and consume as tourists.

This is perhaps where the concept of *mindful tourism* comes into play. I do not refer to mindful tourism, however, from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy but mindfulness as in the state of being aware of the present and being able to recognize the impact of our mobility and consumption, as tourists, in smaller and vulnerable islands. In Siargao, for example, there have been initiatives by locals and tourists alike (those who eventually decided to reside in the island), even before the island was hit by Typhoon Odette, to practice proper waste management (to illustrate, if you walk along the tourism road, you will see used yet clean plastic packaging and wrappers hung in clothesline, instead of actual clothes, in front of their houses since they can exchange these for some items like toiletries and school supplies for kids in their waste management center). There is also an abundance of vegan options there, although not as affordable in other cities, say like those in Vietnam. In addition, *Lokal Lab*,<sup>12</sup> a grassroots NGO in Siargao, aims to shape a model sustainable island by employing regenerative design and creating livelihood especially for women (i.e. they train housewives to weave and create native baskets that can in turn be used for sustainable shopping by the community).

As city dwellers who witnessed how our mobility and excess, as tourists, affect the lives of people who dwell in islands, such as Siargao, it is our moral responsibility to be mindful of the way we care for our shared home. *But through what do we attain, again, to a dwelling place?* If we contribute in building a community that understands practices of care, by way of critical thinking and writing but also through actual practice and involvement in community efforts, it is already a form of *building, a poetic creation*, if you may. And it is through this building that allows us to dwell.

From a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account of my walk, flâneuserie in Siargao, to a post-pandemic rethinking of the ethics of care and

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about Lokal Lab, see <https://www.lokallab.org>.

how it shapes our communities, my definition and understanding of *dwelling* transfigures from solitary to collective.

Surely, the temporal aspects of the climate crisis and fragmented agencies are challenges that have to be dealt with. However, producing more philosophically-informed studies and dealing with ethics of care in a certain locus brings us closer to the possibility of a more empathetic and caring community.

## Healing as Emancipatory

The climate crisis is here. What is the kind of world that we imagine leaving behind so that the next generation can *live*? The more important question now is how can we show up for each other and how can we care, especially to the most vulnerable? Like the sacred lotus, *nelumbo nucifera*, that descends at night and blooms at dawn, the city, after grieving, looks forward to a rebirth by way of recognizing our moral responsibility and by employing approaches that are geared towards actual and real-life solutions.

In connection to this concluding point, here are a few lines from *Birth Land* by Brandy Nalani McDougall, poet laureate of Hawaii, titled “Water Remembers”:

This is not the end of civilization but  
A return to one. Only the water insisting  
On what it should always have, spreading  
its liniment over infected wounds. Only  
The water rising above us, reteaching us  
Wealth and remembering its name.<sup>13</sup>

To recognize that forms of care are also forms of healing, we liberate ourselves by way of intervening and resisting existing practices that do not allow us to *dwelt*. For example, are existing climate resilience projects in islands beneficial to the locals and are these really a part of a movement towards genuine solidarity OR do they simply happen to bring in more profit for the local government and other partner agencies? The water remembers because it is a witness to our vulnerability as humans; when we recognize that we are connected, that the relationship of the one who “cares” and the one who is “cared for” is reciprocal, we become more mindful of our actions, we become resilient as a community in the most genuine sense. We are not

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<sup>13</sup> Brandy Nalani McDougall, *Aina Hanau/Birth Land* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2023).

just city dwellers, after all, but dwellers of the archipelago, *each island a rearticulation of the other*.

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Article

## Looking at the Cracks and Fragments: *Ressentiment* in the Narrative of Resilience

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**Abstract:** Resilience is a fundamental element in post-disaster recovery and development of states. However, beyond its prominence in state policies, resilience has increasingly been used as a part of a rhetorical ploy to conceal the lack or absence of political action. This narrative involving resilience has problematic implications on collective memory and recognition of the seriousness and extent of the tragic experience. To vividly illustrate true resilience and contrast it with its current depiction, this paper draws on the Japanese art of *Kintsukuroi*. In *Kintsukuroi*, the brokenness is not concealed but celebrated and garnished with gold. As embodied in this art, resilience is not the repression of a tragic memory or making light of the damage to move forward; rather it involves making the tragic experience meaningful by recognizing the extent of loss, embracing the truth, and remembering and integrating it into one's history and identity. This paper will discuss the Schelerian concept of *ressentiment* to explain the differences in the intentionality of resilience in the face of adversity, and it will contrast the 'narrative of resilience'—characterized by delusion and repression of memory—with the authentic process of overcoming that is present in true resilience.

**Keywords:** *Kintsukuroi*, *ressentiment*, resilience, trauma

In the wake of disasters, media coverage often recounts survivors' resilience alongside their usual reports on the affected areas and populations. While these stories celebrate human strength, they can sometimes oversimplify recovery, suggesting that cities devastated by calamities can rebound solely due to this trait. This perspective may inadvertently downplay the depth of suffering and the complex realities that follow such events. Some scholars argue that emphasizing resilience in this

way can become a rhetorical tool that normalizes political inaction or governmental neglect.<sup>1</sup>

Resilience is often defined as the capacity to recover swiftly from adversity. However, this definition can overlook the profound losses preceding recovery. Consequently, resilience encompasses two distinct phases: the experience of loss and the subsequent journey toward recovery. By focusing solely on surface-level recovery and labeling it as resilience, we risk neglecting the depth of individual suffering. This oversight can lead to suppressed trauma, where merely enduring ongoing distress is mischaracterized as resilience. Such narratives may inadvertently normalize political inaction, as the emphasis on individual resilience can obscure the need for systemic support and intervention. In these cases, recovery seems to be illusory characterized by collective delusion and suppression of the truth, and if this is true, then resilience itself can also be deemed as illusory under the given definition.

To clearly contrast authentic resilience with the illusory form of resilience, this paper will use Max Scheler's discussion of *ressentiment* to show that the contemporary portrayal of resilience can be deemed as a form of *ressentiment*. Furthermore, to vividly illustrate how the narrative of resilience in today's society is a form of *ressentiment*, I will be using the Japanese art of *kintsugi* as a metaphor for authentic resilience and transformation. Finding beauty in impermanence, *kintsugi* involves acknowledging the brokenness and cracks of something precious that was destroyed, and it uses the most precious metal, gold, to embellish the cracks and make the beloved item stronger, more beautiful, and more meaningful.<sup>2</sup>

In contemporary discussions of resilience, two critical elements are often missing: the acknowledgment of loss, and the integration of traumatic experiences into one's personal narrative. Authentic resilience involves recognizing tragedy as an integral part of one's past and identity, rather than suppressing or forgetting it. This process allows individuals to confront their trauma, assimilate it into their life story, and ultimately foster genuine healing. Like *kintsugi*, it is not only a form of restoration that one can achieve by restoring the object to its old form, but it is also a transformative process that respects its past and recognizes its vulnerability and brokenness. For the

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Joy Manalansan, "Resilience in the Face of Disasters: A Philippine Perspective," in *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint*, 57:2 (August 2016), 305–315, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12215>>; see also

Abu Al-Rasheed Tanggol, "Challenging the Narrative of Filipino Resiliency," in *Rappler* (18 November 2020), <<https://www.rappler.com/voices/imho/opinion-challenging-narrative-filipino-resiliency/>>.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Juniper, *Wabi-Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2003).

same reason, the craftsman using *kintsugi* intentionally makes the precious item stronger and more enduring, and like this Japanese art, I argue that embracing and recognizing the suffering and vulnerability are vital for achieving a more profound and authentic form of resilience.

### ***Ressentiment* in the Narrative of Resilience**

In contemporary portrayals of resilience, particularly when individuals are lauded amidst devastating events, one can discern the presence of *ressentiment*—a concept introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche described *ressentiment* as a form of self-deception arising from feelings of powerlessness and incompetence, leading to an outward projection of blame and the creation of a “slave morality.” This morality inverts traditional values, elevating traits like humility and submissiveness while denigrating strength and assertiveness. In the context of resilience narratives, this dynamic can manifest as a collective delusion, where the true extent of suffering is suppressed and mere endurance is glorified, potentially hindering genuine recovery and personal growth.<sup>4</sup> A man of *ressentiment* is coming from a position of powerlessness and weakness, and to overcome his current condition, he engages in delusion or self-deception by ascribing values and distorting the image of the good such as those in the case of impotent hatred and revenge. Nietzsche mainly used this concept to denounce Christian morality as celebrating weakness and impotence as virtues. The kingdom of God and the idea of salvation, for instance, are seen as a disguise to rationalize the fear and hatred of weak Christian men.

Ironically, by drawing on Nietzsche’s same ideas on *ressentiment*, Max Scheler turns his diatribe against Christianity on its head. A “Catholic Nietzsche,” Scheler elaborated on the former’s ideas about *ressentiment*, defining it as:

a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by and Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22–25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, ed. and trans. by Lewis B. Coser and William Wolfgang Holdheim (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 45.

From this definition, the act involves a form of self-imposed delusion that is intentionally done by the subject, and it involves one's judgment, desires, and emotions. Due to incapacity, weakness, or incompetence, there is a revaluation or devaluation of the object to fit one's condition. An example of this would be the act of *sourgraping*. This act, which is a coping mechanism, is done by making oneself believe that his object of desire is not good and desirable when he is incapable of having the object. Using grapes as an example, when he becomes aware that he cannot have sweet grapes, he convinces himself instead that the grapes are not really sweet but sour.<sup>6</sup> The person may also focus on some negative aspects of his desired object to change how he values the object. In *ressentiment*, one has an awareness of the lie but tries to poison the mind by forcing themselves to believe that it is devoid of value. Since the judgment on the value of the object changes, the emotions and desire for it also follows—if the thing is devoid of value, then desire for it also ceases.

In Scheler's *Formalism and Non-formalism in Values*, he presents a hierarchical structure of values, where spiritual and holy values are higher than vital and material values. However, this hierarchy may be disrupted when *ressentiment* is present. One may convince themselves that values of utility are more important than other higher values due to weakness and incapacity. This phenomenon is visible in the practice of asceticism. In its true state, the one practicing asceticism recognizes the value of both the thing sacrificed, and the thing to which the sacrifice is being made for, as well as the difference of the two things in terms of hierarchy. However, when *ressentiment* enters the picture, the intentionality of the practice of asceticism is fundamentally changed because it is not only deliberately abstaining from things of lower value, but the thing being sacrificed is now being denied of value.<sup>7</sup> One is changing their original valuation of the object not only as something lower to spiritual values, but devoid of any value and significance. This failure to recognize its value renders the whole act as pointless, and the act may not be even deemed as a sacrifice, if the essential element of 'giving-up' something of value is removed from the equation.

This also applies to the concept of resilience. The phenomenon involving *ressentiment* is present in an illusory form of resilience. Etymologically, resilience is defined as the ability to return or jump back or recoil. It comes from the Latin word, *resilire*, wherein the root word 'salire' which means 'to leap' or 'to jump', and adding the prefix 're', the term means

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Max Scheler and Manfred S. Frings, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). See also Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 154.

‘to jump again’ or ‘to leap forward again’. This conveys the idea of springing back to the original shape after being bent or stressed, or returning to the original position. Looking closer at the meaning of the term, a vital aspect that could be inferred from it would be that before recovery there is a state of brokenness and imperfection that is often neglected. One is already deemed resilient once they appear to function ‘normally’, or once they appear to be able to bear it and live with their daily lives. However, if the state of loss and brokenness would be devalued and undermined. Similar to the case of false asceticism, resilience would lose its essence. For how could there be true recovery, if the thing or state to recover from is denied of value and recognition?

This etymological definition is aligned with the definition used by United Nations and other state agencies, which view resilience as the ability of the community or society to absorb, resist, accommodate, and adapt to a certain hazard in an efficient manner.<sup>8</sup> To measure this ability, there are criteria and resiliency points to take into consideration which is then used to create framework and strategic planning. However, these plans focus mainly on the economic implications of a catastrophe that it has even become an economic metric for some institutions.<sup>9</sup> This overemphasis on the economic aspect has the effect of underestimating the extent of the problem and suffering of the victims. This is why many scholars criticize the use of resilience as rhetoric intended to justify and excuse the lack of political action by the government to reach out and address the real conditions of the people. The rhetoric of resilience, especially when its focus is on individual adaptability, fits well with neoliberal forms of governance. In such cases, governmental neglect is concealed and communities are trapped in the same vulnerable condition where they have to be resilient in order to survive. This happens in two ways: firstly, by looking at recovery simply as getting back to the old state where the community is functioning again, and where houses and buildings are rebuilt. Here, the psychological and emotional well-being of the individuals displaced and traumatized are neglected. Secondly, while the attention of the state is directed at physical and infrastructure recovery, the individuals neglected in the same process are at the same time burdened with the image of resilience imposed on them—the image, unfortunately, allows them to be further exploited and commodified. Looking at resilience as a mere glorified virtue of enduring suffering, the traumatized condition

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), “Resilience,” <<https://www.undrr.org/terminology/resilience>> (accessed 13 January 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lauren E. B. Eastwood, “Challenging Resilience: The American Red Cross and Disaster-Related Commodification,” in *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 9:3 (September 2019), 306–315, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2019.1613738>>.

and vulnerability of the victims are neglected, and the institutions and real causes allowing and aggravating the tragedy are left not accountable.<sup>10</sup>

A vital aspect of being resilient as an individual, or even as a community, is the recognition of what was lost and the extent of the suffering endured. In fact, inherent in the act of acknowledging the damage and loss is the affirmation of the value and honor of those that were lost and destroyed. Aside from implicitly devaluing those things when the suffering and the damages are neglected, failure to recognize these also prevents true reconciliation, mourning, and repentance, which serve as pivotal catalysts of structural and institutional changes for the city or the state. Without recognition, *ressentiment* enters the picture as one indulges in a delusion of reality and misplaced pride in the suffering itself rather than genuine recovery and healing.

### The Art of Kintsugi as a Metaphor for Resilience

To further illustrate the nature of authentic resilience and contrast it with *ressentiment*, the art of *Kintsugi* will be used as a vivid metaphor to illustrate the nature of resilience. Looking closer at the philosophy and the principles behind this art, one can better understand when resilience is authentic and when it is *ressentiment*.

*Kintsugi* is a famous Japanese art form, and its origin can be traced back from *Xiushi* art of China used in making lacquerwares.<sup>11</sup> According to Tsai Wen-Ting, the Japanese even sailed to China to study this technique in making lacquerwares, bringing into Japan the Ming Dynasty classic on lacquer ware *Xiushi Lu* (*A Treatise on Lacquer Art*).<sup>12</sup> The technique in repairing porcelain wares uses lacquer and gold foil to decorate the pieces. Moreover, in China, the craftsmen used curium nails to repair broken vases and teacups. The art began to reach and develop in Japan when a teacup was given as a gift to General Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa. He deeply cherished the cup,

<sup>10</sup> Clemence Humbert and Jonathan Joseph, "Introduction: The Politics of Resilience: Problematising Current Approaches," in *Resilience*, 7:3 (2019), 215–223, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2019.1613738>>.

<sup>11</sup> Wubin Xu, Yue Ma, and Chenxi Xiao, "Study on the Restoration Aesthetic and Cultural Connotation of 'Kintsukuroi' in Contemporary Lacquer Art," in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society (ICCESE 2018)*, <<https://doi.org/10.2991/iccese-18.2018.159>>.

<sup>12</sup> Tsai Wen-ting, "In Search of Lacquer's Lustrous Past," trans. by Jonathan Barnard, in *Taiwan Panorama Magazine: An International, Bilingual Magazine for Chinese People around the World* (1 June 1998), <[https://www.taiwan-panorama.com/en/Articles/Details?Guid=c2662bd9-b7a0-4452-995c-b3afd3a66482&CatId=8&postname=In+Search+of+Lacquer%27s+Lustrous+Past&srsId=AfmBOokRY0E\\_1FAVclTzmyVLTeeCTiD4Fv1x4MBJ9jpEINSTjiRTR\\_2](https://www.taiwan-panorama.com/en/Articles/Details?Guid=c2662bd9-b7a0-4452-995c-b3afd3a66482&CatId=8&postname=In+Search+of+Lacquer%27s+Lustrous+Past&srsId=AfmBOokRY0E_1FAVclTzmyVLTeeCTiD4Fv1x4MBJ9jpEINSTjiRTR_2)>.

but it accidentally fell and it was shattered. The general heard through his messenger the restoration process of the Chinese, but the idea was found to be repulsive since there will be damage in piercing the curium nails in the porcelain. So, the Japanese developed their own art of restoration using Chinese lacquer and golden foil. They call this unique aesthetic process *kintsugi* or *kintsukuroi*.<sup>13</sup> The process in *kintsugi* is almost similar to the art of restoration in China for lacquerwares except for the part that, instead of curium nails, it uses an *urishi* sap as adhesive, which hardens and breathes into it as it ages. It also uses red wet lacquer, and 24 karat golden dust as embellishment and support for the cracks of the porcelain.

Aside from the difference in technique, the art of *kintsugi* is also imbued with philosophy, and it stems from the *Wabi-sabi* philosophy of Japan deeply rooted in traditional Buddhist culture. *Kintsugi* reflects the core of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings found in the *Tevijja Sutta*, and this includes the four sublime attitudes or the four *Brahma-viharas*: *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā*, *uppekhā*.<sup>14</sup> The *mettā* can be understood as a loving mind, a form of love that is unselfish, universal, and all-embracing. It is also often depicted as the love of a nourishing mother towards her newborn. Meanwhile, *karunā* is a form of compassion. It is not a mere feeling but an act in itself, characterized by the desire to alleviate the desire of another. Somehow similar to *karunā*, *muditā* also involves overcoming barriers and seeing oneself in another. The third sublime attitude can be understood as empathized joy and involves caring for the well-being of others as his own well-being. Lastly, *uppekhā* is a form of wisdom characterized by having pure love and compassion for others.<sup>15</sup> The sublime attitudes or *brahma-viharas* emphasize the acceptance of flaws, impermanence, and imperfections which are incorporated in the *Wabi-sabi* philosophy behind *kintsugi*. The thing is perfect in its imperfection, and there is beauty in this state of imperfection and transience—one of the most salient Japanese aesthetic ideals. In this art, the broken lines are not concealed but rather highlighted with gold—recognized and celebrated. Its imperfection, fragility, and brokenness are embraced, marked, and assimilated into its new form, and has become a part of its story.<sup>16</sup> It is not only a form of restoration, but a transformative process as the precious object is not only repaired but

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<sup>13</sup> Xu, Ma, and Xiao, "Study on the Restoration Aesthetic and Cultural Connotation of 'Kintsukuroi' in Contemporary Lacquer Art,"

<sup>14</sup> Alyx Becerra, "The Japanese Art of Kintsugi," *The Ethnic Home*, <<https://www.theethnichome.com/the-japanese-art-of-kintsugi/>> (accessed January 2025).

<sup>15</sup> Bijay Kumar Sarkar, "Buddhists Concept of Brahma-Vihar: An Analysis of Morals," in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 4:1 (2019), 185–188, <[https://old.rrjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/185-188\\_RRIJM190401037.pdf](https://old.rrjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/185-188_RRIJM190401037.pdf)>.

<sup>16</sup> Juniper, *Wabi-Sabi*, 105–109.

also enhanced.<sup>17</sup> The analogy is also applicable to the process of recovery of communities and individuals after a tragedy. For there to be true reconciliation, repentance, and true recovery, one must be able to embrace and confront the truth since the healing journey only begins when there is recognition of the true condition of the community or individual.

### Recognition of Loss and Suffering

Recognition and acknowledging the true state of affairs is vital to be able to truly recover. However, in the case of the victims, the desire to suppress and forget the horrors and memory of the tragedy is natural, as recalling makes the victim suffer twice. In the case of a city struck with war or calamity, it is essential to assess the extent of loss, identify the individuals or institutions accountable, and understand the causes that led to destruction to have a holistic view of the tragedy. This would enable the city and its inhabitants who are victims to have a stronger sense of identity, as it also paves way to genuine desire for change.

The opportunity for the victims to let out their narratives is essential to their recovery, for one to see himself as a survivor, one should be able to look face to face at his horrifying past; otherwise, one would not be able to assimilate this occurrence in his memory. In fact, this very act of bearing witness can be likened to the metaphor of *kintsugi*—akin to filling the cracks of a vase with gold.<sup>18</sup> In line with the philosophy behind *kintsugi*, this could resonate with the four sublime attitudes where embracing one's true state is essential, as well as having compassion and empathy for others. Furthermore, according to Buddhist teachings, having these sublime attitudes prevents one from experiencing tension and resentment.<sup>19</sup> Since in this act of witnessing, the fragility and the suffering of the victim is being extracted, recognized, and considered vital to himself and to others. Overcoming *ressentiment* requires one to speak up and be true to himself. As Nietzsche observed:

While the noble man lives for himself with trust and candour (*gennaios*, meaning “of noble birth” stresses the nuance “upright” and also probably “naïve”), the man of resentment is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and direct with himself. His soul squints. His spirit loves hiding places, secret paths, and back doors. Everything furtive attracts him as his world, his security,

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<sup>17</sup> Becerra, “The Japanese Art of Kintsugi,”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

his refreshment. He understands remaining silent, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily diminishing himself, humiliating himself. A race of such men will necessarily end up cleverer than any noble race.<sup>20</sup>

To be able to truly recover, an essential step is breaking the silence and being true to one's self. Furthermore, on a community level, absence of witnesses and testimonies to a certain catastrophic or traumatic event would suppress the truth of that event, although even if the truth is repressed and buried to oblivion, it somehow plays a formative role in how their life will continue. Cathy Caruth, a scholar of trauma and memory studies, noted that:

The survivors did not only need to survive so they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.<sup>21</sup>

In an event where many lives are lost, most especially if they are taken brutally, and if the horrors of the event are beyond ordinary and traumatic, the victims may be rendered incapable of being a witness. Caruth calls this phenomenon 'collapse of witnessing', a condition where the tragic event left no witnesses, as the experience made the victims unable to articulate their experience, and unable to be a witness to their own selves and to others. The Holocaust is her primary example of this phenomenon, as the event is unfathomable, which according to Caruth, is almost cognitively impossible for it to have a witness, as it, at the same time, made the victims believe their deserved subhumanity. It has eradicated the imagination of an 'Other' in their mind—which is vital since this other is, at the same time, a listener, a bearer to the testimony of their own experiences.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 63.

<sup>22</sup> Caruth made reference to Buber's I-thou relationship. In Buber's discussion, when another person is referred to as 'thou' in this sense, it means that the person is not held purely as an object of experience only, a bundle content grasped by the 'I' but as another subject'. Here, Caruth is discussing that this possibility of regarding another person as 'thou' was impossible during the holocaust. The victim cannot even turn to anyone, and be regarded as a subject, they could not even turn to themselves and see themselves as subjects to bear witness to their own experience.

Caruth argued that it is helpful for the victims to have an outsider to the event who will serve as a listener to their tragic experiences. The outsider-listener serves as a witness to the survivors, and it gives the survivors an opportunity to relive their experience of the event.<sup>23</sup> Through this mechanism, the outsider-listener becomes the witness to the event before the witness becomes a witness to himself and the event. The outsider-listener becomes a bearer of a narrative that was difficult to face for the victim, while at the same time able to sympathize authentically with the victim while maintaining one's separateness from the witness and the event.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the listener is able to objectively perceive the lived experience of the survivor. Through this process, the survivor is able to reclaim his position as a witness, and at the same time, he would no longer feel that he bore the experience alone, as the event would already have two witnesses (the listener and his own self). Also, through this process of extracting testimony, a victim is able to truly recover and survive the event. As Caruth eloquently puts it:

It is the realization that the lost ones are not coming back; the realization that what life is about is precisely living with an unfulfilled hope; only this time with the sense that you are not alone any longer—that someone can be there as your companion—knowing you, living with you through the unfulfilled hope, someone saying: 'I'll be with you in the process of your losing me. I am your witness'.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it is important for the state to provide an avenue for these kinds of narrative exchanges to help the victims reclaim their identities, so that they could really continue with their lives.

Moreover, aside from recognizing the extent of loss and suffering of the victims, another essential dimension to recognize is the fault or the shortcomings of the state and institutions that are expected to protect these individuals from catastrophic events. The victims may feel betrayed as they had entrusted themselves to these institutions which have failed to protect them, and ultimately this subsequently led them to lose their sense of trust and safety to the city or the state.<sup>26</sup> Hence, another vital factor in achieving holistic recovery is the presence of sincere reconciliation, consisting of true

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>24</sup> Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. by Peter Heath (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

repentance from those accountable, and forgiveness from those affected and victimized. However, this is only possible when there is recognition of the damage and their accountability to it.

According to Scheler, forgiveness eradicates revenge and other forms of *ressentiment*, as it has the effect of lifting a debt—releasing what is suppressed.<sup>27</sup> Deconstructing the act, one can see that the act of forgiving would be indicative that one recognizes that there is something done and a resulting damage that has to be forgiven. Without these two elements, the act would lose its object. Forgiving is an act of the will, and inherent in the act is the recognition that he remembers the suffering endured, and that he is able to overlook the fault due to mercy and compassion. As Paul Ricoeur wrote elsewhere, forgiveness indicates that something is not forgotten.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in this process when the damages and loss are truly seen for what they are, the values and the integrity of those things lost or damaged are affirmed. Hence, one can say that in this act, a huge partaking in the act is the confrontation with the truth.

On the other hand, in asking for forgiveness one should be truly repentant, and for this to happen, there are two elements that must also be present: there should be recognition of the damage done, and one's awareness that one is accountable for it. As Scheler noted in his work, *On the Eternal in Man*, "repenting is equivalent to re-appraising part of one's past life and shaping for it a mint-new worth and significance."<sup>29</sup>

If one truly has remorse for what has been done, then one would necessarily feel the desire to undo something that is already unalterable, and this is only possible when one was able to recognize the extent and the seriousness of the damage, loss, and suffering caused by his actions. Moreover, upon confronting this reality, a truly repentant person wishes therefore that it had not happened; but since this is not possible, as the past cannot be undone, this usually leads one to make good resolutions and promises not to commit the same mistakes again. As Scheler puts it, "the more you close your eyes to what should be the subject of repentance, the more tightly you bind on your feet the chains that encumber your progress."<sup>30</sup>

To make lasting, institutional, and systemic changes, this kind of remorse is necessary. According to Scheler, someone who is truly repentant is driven by an inner recognition of their own fault, and a willingness to admit

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<sup>27</sup> Scheler, *Ressentiment*. See also Max Scheler, *Person and Self-Value: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. by Manfred S. Frings (Dordrecht, Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 486–493.

<sup>29</sup> Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man* trans. by Bernard Noble (London: SCM Press, 1960).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

and be accountable for their mistakes.<sup>31</sup> This kind of conversion in a person is crucial, as this breeds genuine desire for change that makes the city or the state stronger and more resistant to adversities.

Furthermore, this kind of repentance is necessary if we want to make our cities truly resilient. There has to be an avowal of fault, desire to ask for forgiveness, and a genuine act of forgiveness after reflecting on the depth of the fault. As Ricoeur discussed, in the exchange of forgiveness, the act of forgiveness is an extraordinary act that reaches far beyond the altitude of the fault.<sup>32</sup> Similar to the art of kintsugi, the defects and cracks from the fall are not only confronted and mended, but the finest materials and the most precious metal—urushi sap, red lacquer, and 24 karat golden dust are used to cure the object. In true reconciliation, similar to restoring porcelain vases, the act of forgiveness goes with a recognition of fault and a promise. This is why authentic resilience that possesses these traits is not only able to bring back the object to its old form, but also address its vulnerability and fragility, which makes it stronger and more resilient.

### Building from the Ruins

When a porcelain vase falls, it breaks and loses its function and beauty, and the first step to begin its journey to recovery is to acknowledge its current state, and pick up the fragments. This also applies to human beings and communities. After the tragedy, a person is left with remnants of the destruction, and fragments of blurred and tragic memories of their last days with their loved ones. While the reality may be difficult to face, recognizing what is lost and the real state of affairs is vital for true healing and the initiation of the recovery process—one has to know and to build from what is left.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of any disaster or tragedy, the city is not only destroyed physically, but it also loses its identity—its being a place of solace, childhood, and livelihood for its people. Given this, a certain way of life cannot be restored anymore. However, the situation becomes worse when instead of recognizing their suffering and loneliness, the responsibility of being ‘resilient’ and adapting to the current situation is imposed on them for the sake of the recovery of the whole community.<sup>33</sup> Looking closer, one can see that even the rebuilding process can be imbued with *ressentiment*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–61.

<sup>32</sup> Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 486–493.

<sup>33</sup> Lovely Mae Laborte, “How ‘Filipino Resiliency’ Is Being Used as a Means to Elude Climate Justice and Government Accountability in the Philippines,” in *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 11:3 (2022), <<https://doi.org/10.24940/ijird/2022/v11/i3/mar22025>>.

The glorification of resilience shows the state's denial and neglect of the real condition of the community. In aiming to be resilient, communities often emphasized collective endurance at the expense of recognizing the individual suffering of a person. This phenomenon can be analyzed using Scheler's criticism of humanitarianism. In *Ressentiment*, one of the defenses posed by Scheler against the attack of Nietzsche on Christian love and morality, was that Christian love was erroneously equated to the universal love of mankind, 'humanitarianism', or 'love towards every member of the human race'.<sup>34</sup> The two kinds of love are different, and in the latter kind of love, Scheler assented to Nietzsche that *ressentiment* can indeed be found at the roots of it. This universal love of mankind is built from *ressentiment*, and it is worth noting that this kind of love views community similar to how society in the present times views 'resilient' communities.

In humanitarianism, the object of love is an abstract collective entity. The 'neighbor' or the 'individual' present in real love is replaced by 'mankind'. The 'neighbor' degenerates into being a mere member of an abstract totality—or a representation of humanity. This shift is significant since in the love for 'neighbor', the object which is the neighbor is deemed as the closest person who can help us to deep and spiritual connection outside ourselves.<sup>35</sup> Comparing the two, in love for neighbor, love is a movement, and a spiritual action. It is not only a mere feeling, or a passive act. On the other hand, love of mankind is more impersonal and springing from a delusion.<sup>36</sup>

This love for 'mankind' is imbued with *ressentiment* according to Scheler, as it is originally coming from a desire to escape, or a hatred towards the self or a smaller unit of people in the community. It affirms the importance of the whole to deny the value of the members. This is akin to how modern society treats 'resilient' communities, as they are seen as a sum-total of individuals, where an individual life barely matters and is reduced to a number comprising the whole. As Scheler claims, the fundamental forms of communal life are valued far above all individual interests, opinions and intentions.<sup>37</sup> After a city is afflicted with a catastrophe, the recovery of the sum-total of the inhabitants is taken as the recovery of the whole city, and individual sufferings are left not accounted for.

According to Laborte, in the hopes of having a resilient community, it is usually the oppressed, the indigenous, or the poor people who bear the responsibility of being resilient. They are vulnerable, and their appearance as

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 114 and Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

<sup>35</sup> Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 116.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

able to function is being glorified, leading the city to hastily consider this as recovery of the whole, without regard to their personal stories and trauma.<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting to ask, if resilient individuals are deemed resilient because they can endure and survive from a tragedy or disaster that happens regularly, is the community truly resilient?<sup>39</sup> Indeed there is a problem with affirming this view. Since if there has been true recovery, then one should not find himself as a regular victim of the same cause. In cases like this, the vulnerability of individuals and real problems are not really recognized and addressed.<sup>40</sup> Resilience, in this phenomenon, is seen more as a virtue of being able to endure and live with the suffering. Their true state is concealed, and their bare survival is affirmed. This condition in itself is given a positive value to downplay and overshadow the value of what is lost in the tragedy, and to deny accountability for what was lost—which is a mark of *ressentiment*.

Furthermore, aside from recognizing the vulnerability of individuals, the vulnerability of structures must also be recognized. In the aspect of reconstruction, houses and establishments should not only be rebuilt in the same manner as they were originally created but instead built with foresight. The vulnerability and faulty foundations of the old structures must be addressed, and the structures must be rebuilt with a view of making them stronger. Moreover, in the process of recovery, not everything is restored and rebuilt. People determine which is significant and valuable: what is to be restored, and how it should be restored. However, as described by Scheler, modern society has also become utility-focused, and some things of higher value are often neglected. To achieve a holistic recovery, there should also be attempts and efforts to recover things of higher value, such as the identity and historical heritage of the city.

Historical churches and heritage sites, for instance, should not simply be rebuilt and repaired for them to merely function, but rather they must be craftily restored with the hope to get its original appearance and form to maintain its old identity.<sup>41</sup> Hence, usually the same materials are used, and often the rubbles from the old form of the building would be the same materials to be used to rebuild the historical site. In this process, it is not only the structure that is aimed at being restored, as they are built for the people who value them. Their way of life, sense of community, and identity are also in the hope of being returned to normal. In trying to preserve the history and

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<sup>38</sup> Humbert and Joseph, "Introduction: The Politics of Resilience."

<sup>39</sup> Laborte, "How 'Filipino Resiliency' Is Being Used as a Means to Elude Climate Justice and Government Accountability in the Philippines."

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Paolo Belardi and Giovanna Ramaccini, "From Suffering to Hope. The Survey of Rubble as a Measure of Resilience," *Disegno*, 7 (December 2020), 129–140, <<https://doi.org/10.26375/diseigno.7.2020.14>>.

identity of the city, the people who advocate for it show their affirmation of the value and historical relevance of the destroyed site.

Furthermore, as Belardi and Ramaccini remind us: the rubbles or the remnants of the ruins that are used to rebuild architectures such as historical churches would be the *conscience of history*, as they stand as a witness and as a reminder of what was lost and has been overcome.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, ruins may not only symbolize physical destruction but also its resilience—whether in individuals or cities. Moreover, the manner of rebuilding reflects the technique of *kintsugi*, where the fragments and pieces of the broken vase are the ones used to rebuild itself, but the goal is not only to put it together but make it more enduring and stronger. The old form is respected as there is no alteration made, but its vulnerability is recognized.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, where there is authentic recognition of those things, reality is confronted, and true healing happens. Through this manner of holistic recovery, resilience is not reduced to a mere illusory product of *ressentiment*, since the suffering is not downplayed and things lost are not devalued, as Scheler notes the usual structure of *ressentiment*: “the formal structure of resilience is always the same: A is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the un verbalized intention of denying, devaluating, and denigrating B. A is ‘played off’ against B.”<sup>43</sup>

Given this structure, *ressentiment* is indeed present and embedded in the very idea and modern conception of resilience, evident in the suppression of truth, delusions of recovery, and failure to recognize the true condition and reality of the society. Instead, what is being recognized and attributed with a positive value is the suffering, as the city takes pride in the bare survival of the tragedy. How individuals live and survive after the event is not given significance. Furthermore, in the devaluation and downplaying of the damages, one closes his eyes to reality, but at the same time, there is an awareness of the need to close his eyes and avoid confronting the truth. According to Scheler, these are some of the common features of *ressentiment*, and clearly in this process, the community engages itself in a self-imposed delusion.

This paper explored the nature and effects of *ressentiment*, and illustrated how it is present and partaking in how resilience is conceived and used in the policy literature of the last few decades. The discussion also emphasized the importance of acknowledgment in affirming the value of

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 68.

what was lost, and the value of the experiences marked by trauma and suffering. Furthermore, the mainstream idea of resilience is shown to be misleading, and following Scheler, the structure of modern conception of resilience would contain the usual pattern of resilience, as it downplays the reality and extent of tragedy, and overemphasizes superficial recovery.

To further illustrate the nature of true resilience in contrast to the illusion of resilience, the art of *kintsugi* was used as a vivid visual representation of genuine resilience. The Japanese art is coming from the *Wabi-sabi* tradition rooted in Buddhist religious philosophy, and the four sublime attitudes under it further illustrate how the art shows the importance of embracing the truth—the reality of imperfection and impermanence of things.

Moreover, in illustrating how vital the act of recognition is, this essay examined the significance of witnessing both for the healing process of the victim and to the society at large. The act of recognition also plays a crucial role in such cases when victims feel betrayed and marginalized by the state that was expected to protect them. To have an exchange of forgiveness and systemic changes, the one asking for forgiveness must acknowledge his fault and accountability, and the one forgiving must recognize the fault to be pardoned. These two elements are essential in the act, as this exchange is an extraordinary act of the will. Genuine repentance goes with the desire to change oneself, and forgiveness relieves one from harboring a vengeful form of *ressentiment*.

Furthermore, the process of recovery—whether individual or communal—must consider the presence and effects of *ressentiment*. When the sufferings of individuals are neglected, recovery efforts become surface-level, as shown in Scheler's critique of the depersonalized and detached approach of humanitarianism where the Other becomes a mere member of an abstract collective entity. Ultimately, part of authentic resilience is true reconciliation and healing which is more than just rebuilding and restoring what was lost, and this requires empathy and shared acknowledgement. These principles underlie the art of *kintsugi*, which makes witnessing, acceptance, and true healing and forgiving possible.

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Article

## Immunology in the 'City Interior': Questioning Resiliency in Everyday Life<sup>1</sup>

**Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland**

**Abstract:** In this paper, I argue that our conception of resilience, as a manifestation of immunological reason, is equated to the city's neo-liberal design, and that we need to refocus our attention on the 'city interior.' It is easier to conceptualize resilience in relation to something from the outside, yet perceived external threats such as terrorism, illegal migration, or environmental disasters, I argue, stem from overlooked immune practices, done by the city to immunize itself. What should be of greater focus thus is how the very paradigm of resilience is fractured in equating resiliency with a culture of consumption. In this paper, I work on Sloterdijk's immunological reason to project how our current understanding of immunity qua resilience is firstly highly neoliberal and pathological, and I next seek to highlight the 'city interior' to problematize our immunological reasoning. I do so by offering a cursory sensorial of the urban via three personal anecdotes to give a renewed sense of resilience.

**Keywords:** Sloterdijk, city interior, immunological reason, resilience

Taking the words *resilience* and *urbanity* together might seem straightforward today. Resiliency is properly understood when cities are able to "absorb, recover and prepare for future shocks (economic, environmental, social & institutional)."<sup>2</sup> This definition from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is supplemented by that of the World Bank and the United Nations, in pointing out how within the next few decades 2/3 of the total population would be

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of the paper "Resilience from Within: Questioning Immunology in the 'City Interior'," which I presented during the 2024 POTC summer colloquium at the Ateneo de Manila University, 1-3 July 2024. I wish to thank the participants with whom I shared this paper for their insights. Besides them, I wish to thank Dr. Raniel Reyes who invited me to lecture on this topic for the seminar class on emerging trends in Philosophy and his students. My ideas were further refined and deepened through my discussion.

<sup>2</sup> OECD, "Resilient Cities," <<https://www.oecd.org/cfe/regionaldevelopment/resilient-cities.htm>> (accessed 30 June 2024).

living in cities.<sup>3</sup> Following their views, resilience is measured by hitting key targets in the areas of the economy, society, governance, and the environment, featuring a balance between the GDP growth rate, household income, revenue of various branches of government, and accessible green areas. However, the very etymology of resilience – from the Latin verb *resilire*, meaning “to rebound or recoil”<sup>4</sup> – suggests this capacity to bounce or spring back from an unfortunate situation, and with this a return to the status quo. To jump back therefore captures the very nature of resiliency, particularly the return to the status quo or the accustomed rhythm prior to any disruption.

However, where I begin my problematization is when the words *urban* and *resilience* are taken together. I argue that a tension arises in so doing since the action of springing back is directed to an unqualified sense of the “urban.” This phrase of “urban resilience” provides a rather paradoxical image of the intersection between resilience and the city: on the one hand, urban resilience points to the capacity of a city to reap the benefits of urbanity while fending off the perils brought about by such a form of development especially through collective effort,<sup>5</sup> while on the other hand, it points to the continuous enforcement of means to maintain a sense of civility or urbanity. In practical terms, the first refers to the conditions of experiencing natural disasters as direct consequences of human action, such as extensive and persisting flooding in Metro Manila as a result of deforested natural protected areas, while the second signifies the capacity of a city to enforce means of perceived civility, such as banning citizens from roaming around shirtless as this is perceived as ill-decorum despite the country’s intensive heatwaves.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See World Bank Group, Resilient Cities (7 October 2019), <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/brief/resilient-cities-program>> and Asako Okai, “Urban resilience: Addressing an old challenge with renewed urgency,” United Nations Development Program (27 June 2022), <<https://www.undp.org/blog/urban-resilience-addressing-old-challenge-renewed-urgency>>.

<sup>4</sup> See *Etymology Online*, s.v. “resilience,” <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/resilience>>.

<sup>5</sup> There is arguably a close link between resiliency and Filipino culture. Along with *bayanihan*, resiliency or this capacity to remain jovial in the face of calamities and constant challenges in once daily life is a trademark in fact of the life of a Filipino, although something which can be to the detriment of Filipinos. See Abu Al-Rasheed Tanggol, “Challenging the narrative of Filipino resiliency,” in *Rappler* (18 November 2020), <<https://www.rappler.com/voices/imho/opinion-challenging-narrative-filipino-resiliency/>>.

<sup>6</sup> All 16 cities of Metro Manila prohibit drinking and not wearing of shirts in public. (See Joseph Morong, “What you need to know about the tambay crackdown,” *GMA News Online* (27 June 2018), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/specialreports/658446/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-tambay-crackdown/story/>>). The issue of toplessness is closely tied to the hostile regard against a *tambay* culture, against perceived idleness and its equation with unproductivity and laziness. (See Clarence Batan, “A Conceptual Exploration of the Istambay Phenomenon in the Philippines,” in *Philippine Sociological Review*, 60 (2012), 101–130, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43486342>>.) In this regard, enforcing such measures against this

The result of this paradox demonstrates the very nature of urbanity that seems to naturally exclude everyday experiences, those which would not serve any of these two ends.

From my prelude of resilience, I argue how the state of society's immunization that stems from Peter Sloterdijk's qualification of immunological reason is falsely equated to consumerism. My point here is to underscore the theoretical weakness of our current concept of resilience due to the great disjunct between such theoretical presentation on the one hand and the actual visceral experience within the city on the other. This divide is something that I work on as the 'city exterior' and the 'city interior.' I attempt to elucidate Sloterdijk's take on immunity through a critique of the logic of consumption that seems to be at the center of our definition of the modern person. This is supplemented with a probe of our internality, specifically the Philippine landscape, capped with the next section through what I offer as a cursory sensorial of the urban via three personal anecdotes. Through both a theoretical and an experiential presentation of the city, I challenge what may be subsumed as resiliency in the neoliberal logic of the city and ultimately argue a renewed epistemology of the urban grounded on the 'city interior.'<sup>7</sup>

### Spherical Immunology

Beginning this section, it would be beneficial to consider how the serious concerns of society today are framed as threats from the outside: marginalized groups as scapegoats to society's ill are pushed to the fringes of rational thought and the borders of civilized life such as those taking illegal drugs, carrying out acts of terror due to extremist convictions, illegally migrating into the country, a particular race or gender or religion or even social class. Conversely, the same narrative is present even with environmental problems as the threat is perceived from the outside figured through a hurricane or typhoon approaching a landmass, waves battering the shore, a volcano erupting, and the ground suddenly shaking. When urban resiliency then is considered, one would be fundamentally safe when one is

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form of nudity would be considered aligned to the respective cities' desire to maintain the perception of civility in their own units.

<sup>7</sup> I considered how to translate this philosophic endeavor into Tagalog for a fuller sensorial dimension of the city (as part of a personal project of the language's intellectualization). I render immunology either as *immunología* or *immunolohiya* while the phrase 'city interior' tentatively is conveyed as *iláya* or *loóban*. Whereas *loóban* touches a definite sense of interiority (as found in the phrase *kabutihang-loób*), *iláya* provides an actual spatial dimension, in urban phraseology as the innermost part of the city (*pinakaloób ng báyan*). See KWF Diksiyonáryo ng Wí kang Filipino, s.v. "ilaya," <<https://kwfdiksiyonaryo.ph/>>. Thus, I translate "Immunology in the 'City Interior'" as "Immunolohiya sa Iláya."

assured of security amidst these environmental and even social disasters. My introduction of the tension between urbanity and resiliency stems from what I argue as dysfunctionalities in our current idealization of the city, based on the dominant way of life, i.e., a neo-liberal type of living.<sup>8</sup> The external source of our urban discontent stems from, I argue, overlooked immune practices, actions done by the city to immunize itself.

To make better sense of this, it is necessary to consider how Peter Sloterdijk asserted that immunity and community go together, how co-immunity is fundamentally what lies at the heart of any group of people.<sup>9</sup> His spherological account spread across several books, especially the three volumes of his *Spheres*, refers to his voluminous undertaking of mapping the spatial dimensions of the world from the intimate two-unity sphere in the uterus to the pluralistic foam-like cells that characterize city living, the progression of immunitary reason to delimitate the interior.<sup>10</sup> Immunity is part and parcel of the human being, with its formation tied to that of a community, and immunitary reason stands as this blanket term for the driving factor behind immunity desires.<sup>11</sup> Sloterdijk outlines a very biological and social picture of an individual's development from the placenta to society. The biological development of the human being coincides with the social dimension of institutions taken into account; the very primal institution is that of the family, with the primordial relationship between the mother and

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<sup>8</sup> In the Philippine spatial context, this may be noticed through the dominance of shopping malls throughout the country. In fact, a town would pride itself, claiming a status of being progressive, as a particular shopping mall is constructed in their vicinity. This equation between urbanity and consumerism is once again experienced in Philippine society. See Don Johnson Lontoc, Abigail Arellano, and Raquel Baquiran, "Shopping Mall as New Urban Core? A Morphological Study of Contemporary Urban Fabric Influenced by Shopping Malls," in *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, 47:2 (2023), 114–124, <<https://doi.org/10.3846/jau.2023.17677>> and Inquirer Bureaus, "Shopping malls changing traditions, economic landscape in provinces," in *Inquirer* (20 December 2016), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/854952/shopping-malls-changing-traditions-economic-landscape-in-provinces#ixzz8lQIBAmh2>>. To be critical of this, one ought to understand how the urban is framed vis-à-vis the city. Martin Heidegger's discourse on en-framing and how technology allows us to be conditioned to life is a suitable context. (See Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt [New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977], 20.) Enframing signifies nothing technological in itself but rather points to the interplay of various elements that allow for a contextualized approach of living in the world through one's presence in the world.

<sup>9</sup> See Jean-Pierre Couture, *Sloterdijk* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 55ff.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles. Spheres Volume I: Microspherology*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2011), 23ff.

<sup>11</sup> Although the term immunitary reason not directly from Sloterdijk, how this may be understood is sources from Peter Sloterdijk, "Wounded by Machines. Toward the Epochal Significance of the Most Recent Medical Technology," in *Not Saved: Essays after Heidegger*, trans. by Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

the child or as Sloterdijk puts it between the placenta and the fetus, that eventually becomes supplemented by much bigger ones.<sup>12</sup> There are rather transitional elements within this. We see here the role of the school or perhaps even of the church to reinforce what is first played in the family and eventually perfected in the state.

Immunology was formerly offered by theology and cosmology.<sup>13</sup> These narratives provide us with two fundamental spheres according to Sloterdijk. Yet, the bigger picture shows us that there are in fact three distinct orbs—God, the world, and the third is the individual trying to probe these, which parenthetically reminds us of Kant’s transcendental ideal (God) and ideas (world and soul).<sup>14</sup> A certain form of hierarchy enters the picture once the gradation of these spheres is considered, or perhaps better framed as the spheres’ expansion. Theology and cosmology as disciplines – and here Sloterdijk seems to rehearse Kant’s epistemology without direct reference or association – represent to us the desire to understand the absolute. It is an attempt to absolutize knowledge, or maybe our own take to assert ourselves, our spheres. The role of immune systems becomes more prominent once we consider the relationship between this individual orb (of the self) and the two other transcendental orbs. The self becomes immunized to the degree it becomes identified with such transcendental view of reality, be it in relation to God (religiosity) or in conquering the world (imperialism). And history exhibited to us how these perfect orbs seemed to devalue themselves, with the world’s secularization and the exit of colonialism and imperialism in the global narrative. Sloterdijk provides headway on this point. With the seeming demise of such perfect (absolute) views of these two orbs, what is needed is a new form of immunization. One cannot simply just cling on to religion or a sovereign to fight the perils of the world. Today, the crucial roles that networking, insurances, and even telecommunication or social media play

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<sup>12</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, trans. by Christopher Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 343–396.

<sup>13</sup> Sloterdijk makes an argument concerning the merging of these two spheres in *God’s Zeal*. When he mentions that the Christians no longer have an interest in possessing Jerusalem, one may read this and extend this lackluster to the entirety of monotheistic faiths, arguing that the monotone of one’s religion, i.e., this direct relationship with the divine, becomes redirected to a seemingly more interesting idea—the *cosmos*. See Peter Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 105ff.

<sup>14</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith, second rev. ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 322ff. This becomes even more obvious when we read this in junction to Kant’s assertion of three forms of a priori absolute unities or ideas: that of the subject, of the series of conditions of appearance, and of the unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general, or psychology, cosmology, and theology respectively.

signifies how we have adapted to the bursting of divine or cosmic bubbles and have learned to immunize ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

What I maintain here is that the pathological aspect of this thrust toward immunization may eventually take an extreme form of protectionism, ironically manifested as globalization's discontent. Globalization is the prerequisite for theorizing the present; it is necessary to understand the effects of two-way global movement that decimated any sense of distance.<sup>16</sup> Sloterdijk tries to emphasize here how radically different today's two-way traffic is, traffic as globalization's second phase as opposed to the one-way movement of European colonization. This destruction of distance naturally begot more rapid forms of communication and navigation. What this signified was a shift in focus from the transcendental orbs to our very selves. Globalization is in fact the embodiment of the very project of modernity. It is the "de-ontologization of fixed edges" as the history of modernity unfolded as the spatial movement toward the outside and beyond.<sup>17</sup> This de-ontologization is best encapsulated by the demise of the absolute orbs, and a theoretical narrative of the absolute orbs' bursting may be sourced from the condition of God's death, famously heralded by Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>18</sup> What this demise signifies is twofold: a clinging onto former ways which falls rightly under the discussion of nihilism (and the appropriate response, as Nietzsche figures) and the dawn of new species or rather the birth of new techniques for self-mastery.<sup>19</sup> This second point brings the narrative back to Sloterdijk.

From this point on, the fundamental enculturation of human beings appears under a twofold light: First, culture signifies the resumption of a biological nest-privilege with the resources of civilization – in this context, domestication means neither entry into the

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<sup>15</sup> See Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 35, 140–141.

<sup>17</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *Globes. Spheres Volume II: Macrospherology*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014), 790–791.

<sup>18</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 181–182.

<sup>19</sup> The first of these two is something I discussed in a previous publication on Nietzsche's take on nihilism. I qualified here what I considered as Nietzsche's nihilistic triad of the Christian/Jewish–German/Aryan bourgeois/modern culture, arguing that his comments of one aspect of this triad ought to be read in junction with the other elements. My association of these three elements aimed at providing a grounded definition of nihilism of something not simply as the devaluation of the highest values, as commonly referred to, but the spiritualization, passivation, and privatization of humanity. See Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, "Nietzsche's Nihilistic Triad," in *Kritike*, 18:1 (March 2024), 136–156, <<https://doi.org/10.25138/18.1.a6>>.

house of reason nor into the house of civilization, but rather the gradual transformation of nest-security measures into architectonic protections and socio-technological privileges. It has since been very clearly recognized how culture as a whole functions like an immersive incubator that envelops its members. Second, through these reflections it becomes clear that *Homo sapiens* is dependent on cultural guidance for even its motivational disposition. After the breakdown of a purely biological programming of orientation, due to its extreme neoteny, the instinctive framework of *Homo sapiens* no longer guides it from within and it loses the firm linking of brain and environment, losses that require compensation.<sup>20</sup>

Immunity is a natural drive toward the recognition and creation of enclosures that make possible the formation of an identity based on culture, an incubator of a new form of immunization. There is, according to Sloterdijk, this natural link between immunity and community that only became severed from each other during modernity.<sup>21</sup> Once again, latent in species is the desire to inoculate oneself against what is foreign or, to take a more nuanced approach, this desire resembles a projected form of protectionism, especially when one considers how societies interact (at times rancorously) with each other. The realization of a universal humanity, commencing with the discovery of the world's spherical structure, meant the persisting need to consider those outside one's group. This also entailed, at times to one's chagrin, the constant ghoul haunting us in the impersonal figure of the Other.<sup>22</sup> Sloterdijk tells us that domestication should not simply be understood as the taming of the species but the transference of privileges, and with it the degree of immunity, from the biological nest, i.e., the initial sphere within the mother, to our socio-cultural and even -technological environment.<sup>23</sup> Culture now is the crux of our immunity desires, consequently becoming the standard for the recognition and creation of enclosures that makes possible identity-formation.

Sloterdijk points out how humans "exist not only in 'material conditions', but also in symbolic immune systems and ritual shells" in spite

<sup>20</sup> Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *The Aesthetic Imperative: Writings on Art*, trans. by Karen Margolis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 168.

<sup>22</sup> See Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, "The Domestication of Being: The Clarification of the Clearing," in *Not Saved* and *Ibid.*

of any social, political, or economic situations.<sup>24</sup> The close tie between individuality and community explains the tremendous value the latter plays in providing the actual margins to designate what is immune from foreign, and what is crucial here is how in lieu of the space of the absolute orbs, an empty concept of culture becomes the placeholder. However, also from him is the rather remarkable observation of the emptiness of such a universal concept of 'humanity.' To wit: "'Mankind' – it enters the stage of contemporary thought in a state of progressive self-discovery and interconnection as the vague and splintered para-subject in a universal history of the coincidental, a latecomer whose emergence, if not its character, remains entirely determined by the chance circumstances of its discovery."<sup>25</sup> From the bursting of the cosmological and transcendental bubbles, we today are roused in our immunization by the specter of globalization—the concept of humanity. While this may be a promising idea, especially with the advancement of human rights globally, the essential emptiness of this idea – in it being devoid of theological underpinnings and cultural ties to be free from the constraints of a single religion and of a particular country – makes it all the more vulnerable to be a captive of capitalism.

### The Formation of the City Exterior

In the foregoing section, I tried to lay the groundwork to my paper's argument by providing, from Sloterdijk, the eventual emergence of the empty concept of humanity along with this general disposition to immunize ourselves. What I sought to hint at was how this is a precarious situation since in being an empty concept, 'humanity' is bare to any form of capitalization (with the pun intended). I now turn to its contextualization through the city, illustrated through the Philippine landscape.

Sloterdijk points out how individual interest in immunity only became prominent in the modern world, and a genealogy of globalization exhibits the transition from a communal, parochial lifestyle to a globalized albeit hyper-individualized one. Concerning the citizen, this may refer to our tacit duty to pay taxes and statutory insurance systems as a remnant of more compulsory forms of public conscription.<sup>26</sup> One may draw parallels between

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. by Wieland Hoban. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, 142.

<sup>26</sup> Sloterdijk raises critical points against this compulsory fiscal culture and instead provides an alternative paradigm through a voluntary contribution. See Peter Sloterdijk, *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010) and "Vom Unbehagen in der fiskalischen Kultur," in *Der Staat streift seine Samthandschuhe ab: Ausgewählte Gespräche und Beiträge 2020-2021* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021). See also Hans Gribnau, "Vrijwillige

this observation of Sloterdijk and that of, Philippine National Artist for Literature, Nick Joaquin. Writing under the pen name Quijano de Manila, Joaquin describes the construction of the San Ildefonso de Toledo Parish in Tanay, Rizal, from 1773–1786 which was made possible not simply due to the commune’s forced labor, as what may immediately be assumed, but also from the support of the Franciscan Order (under whose pastorship the church was placed), the neighboring towns of Baras, Pililla, and Majayjay, and even the distinguished Philippine delegate to the Spanish Cortes, Ventura de los Reyes—in brief, the “entire region had cooperated in the building of a town church.”<sup>27</sup> What is significant from this is the active participation of various members in collective immunization. Notable is that the church’s erection was only possible after political pacification, spearheaded by Juan de Salcedo.<sup>28</sup> The infant town eventually experienced not just the joint venture of both the church and the state, but of various individuals and communities, further bolstering a collective sense of immunity. Sloterdijk’s general theory bears a localized narrative through Joaquin’s commentary:

the fashion today is to condemn those edifices as the product of slave labor. But the labor may be regarded not as slavish but as a form of taxation; the people paid with labor instead of money. Today, so that we may have public edifices, we pay taxes, but never set a hand to the construction. We cannot truly say that we build our own schools or town halls or legislative buildings. Our sweat never actually goes into their making; our hands never shape their stones. Perhaps the old way was happier: the people worshipped in churches their own labor had raised up; they were part of their churches and they could bequeath them as their very own work to succeeding generations. And because they did the work themselves, what they produced had an intimate beauty.<sup>29</sup>

Joaquin’s argument is that these edifices – Tanay’s church in his discussion – resulted from a collective effort. Perhaps they began with coerced labor, but instead of simply abandoning their town, these people

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belastingbetaling,” in *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Fiscaal Recht*, 818 (2014), 1–6, <<https://www.ndfr.nl/content/NTFR2014-818>>.

<sup>27</sup> Nick Joaquin, “Here Hustled History,” in *Language of the Street and Other Essays* (Metro Manila: National Book Store, 1980), 110.

<sup>28</sup> See *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–111.

seemed to have devoted themselves to such a task that bore fruit not simply spiritually in it being the shrine of their devotion, but also practically as how the convent was later made into a school for future generations.

Today though takes on a more different tone: maintaining the example above, appeals for the construction/renovation of a particular church require not the actual toil of parishioners but simply another collection or, more vivaciously, a raffle or a similar game. Conversely, a political perspective does not give a totally different assemblage for rather than actual military conscription, such decision to serve a particular branch is voluntary, and the payment for these services are taken from what is taxed from the general population. Taxation then is our contemporary form of participation in these immunization practices, although seeming detached from us.<sup>30</sup> Today's contribution definitely seems different compared to the past, and although we may sigh in relief at the absence of any corporeal requirement in spiritual-political immunity, we subjugate ourselves willingly, I argue, to another form of immunization—the dictates of a neoliberal, hyper individualized lifestyle.

The history of the city, especially in Philippine society provides a great demonstration of our identification in collective immunization. From participation in religious (i.e., immunizing) activities, society's liberation and development signaled the neoliberal design to become the cultural summit. The identity of the Philippines' capital could be featured to further elucidate this in its transition throughout the years.<sup>31</sup> Intramuros' seven churches that towered the walled city with the *reducciones* as the template for any city-formation was the essential character of the Spanish colonial might. The cathedral faced the plaza, which shared the equal lot with the *ayuntamiento* (town hall) and the *Palacio del Gobernador-general*. This then became sidelined in the shift toward the City Beautiful humanistic principles behind the Burnham Plan of Manila. The city's very center was moved from the center of Church and State in Intramuros toward civic virtue exalted in the entire expanse from Luneta's parade grounds to the post office. Furthermore, another shift came with the Philippine Commonwealth's decision to create a new capital, further exalting the humanist principles, this time in a purposely

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<sup>30</sup> My general argument here, following Sloterdijk and Joaquin, is that taxation is our contemporary experience of contributing to immunizing practices. Parenthetically, this should mean in the Philippine context the capacity to demand for clearer demarcations between immunized and not. Capacity to demand greater accountability in government officials and hold them responsible for mismanagement, especially with the drastic effects of mining, imprudent land conversion, and deforestation that are today experienced in the constant threat of flooding.

<sup>31</sup> For a concise overview of the development of the country's capital, see Edwin Wise, *Manila, City of Islands: A Social and Historical Inquiry into the Built Forms and Urban Experience of an Archipelagic Megacity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2019).

built city named after its founder to which much of the post-war reconstruction fund was allotted. However, time only proved this new city's untenability in the capital's reversion to Manila – and the later creation of Metro Manila (or the National Capital Region) – yet this time, a different Manila, a vital element of our current neoliberal language rather than symbolizing a singular identity.<sup>32</sup> From the city's culture which symbolized this merge of faith and politics, or properly as life *bajo de las campañas*, what we are left with is the city entrenched in a political imaginary that legitimizes the capitalization of labor and the creation of values according to its own (neoliberal) logic.

From the city's perspective, this is contextualized through the conscious decision to prioritize a car-centric design for the city. Manila's skyline, once characterized by the spires of the churches, is now dominated by high-rise condominiums, offices, and shopping malls. Such vertical displays of immobility are aided by an immobile horizontal display, best seen in the metro's acclaimed *carmageddon* traffic jam, morbidly subtitled by a news writer as the "indignity of commuting in Metro Manila."<sup>33</sup> What this experience manifests is the pathological element of a neoliberal city's design, rooted in how thoroughfares are falsely equated to economic pulsation.<sup>34</sup> A city, thus, aligned to this ideal considers road-widening projects and similar works as standards to progress, falsely considering such as the vascular system that supports the nation's body. The pathology of this association is the false sense of immunization from any social or even environmental threat as long as one has a house that is high enough from the floods and a vehicle big enough to drive through any puddle.

More on the city exterior's formation, we know how Metro Manila is no stranger to the constant threat of flooding, yet the year 2024 stood out with an unusual number of typhoons and incidents of flooding and other calamities, and it is projected that such experiences will persist due to climate change and environmental damage caused by deforestation and mining and

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<sup>32</sup> Rogelio Braga provides an excellent review of Glenn Diaz's recent novel, *The Quiet Ones*, from a critical vantage influenced by Marx and Critical Theory. His argument features Diaz's Manila within the country's wider neoliberal economic system that makes both labor and the nation constant and immobile in both space and time. See Rogelio Braga, "*Capital-as-presence and Space-as-absence: The Language of Neoliberalism and the Narrative of Capital in Glenn Diaz's The Quiet Ones*," in *Kritike*, 18:2 (September 2024), 98–120, <<https://doi.org/10.25138/18.2.a4>>.

<sup>33</sup> Ana P. Santos, "Carmageddon: The indignity of commuting in Metro Manila," in *Al Jazeera* (24 October 2019), <<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/10/24/carmageddon-the-indignity-of-commuting-in-metro-manila/>>.

<sup>34</sup> See Claudia Berg, "How far do roads contribute to development?," *World Economic Forum* (14 December 2015), <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/12/how-far-do-roads-contribute-to-development/>>.

coupled with a poor levels of preparedness and knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Flooding throughout the country is not an entirely modern issue, as such events were constant realities in the past. Rivers flooded the adjacent lands, fertile for agricultural harvest, and one may even argue that life centered around the river; the lasting effect of American colonialization altered this memory of the river's centrality forever.<sup>36</sup> This trend continued, leaving us today with the lack of open spaces throughout the metropolis and even more constant threat of flooding. There seems to be a lack of a centralized or fully coordinated effort to address this due to the absence of a central authority tasked with executive powers over the entire National Capital Region. The LGU code meant that it was easier to convert agricultural land throughout Metro Manila, based on the sound judgement of the local units, but consequently a voluntary effort to coordinate certain projects is necessary. This especially extends to coordinating flood-control projects and even certain measures to address the true source of these issues, and in place of a centralized government over NCR, what we have today is the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), whose function seems to be reduced to beautification projects, managing traffic, or certain provisions on waterways. However, I need to note that while it is easy to blame this lack of centralized governance over NCR as the root of this issue, one must remember that this fragmentation stems from a wariness of central authority in the aftermath of the atrocities of the Marcos dictatorship.<sup>37</sup> We are thus left with a crucial

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<sup>35</sup> Vincenzo Bollettino et al., "Public perception of climate change and disaster preparedness: Evidence from the Philippines," in *Climate Risk Management*, 30 (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2020.100250>>.

<sup>36</sup> Although perceived as a health issue due to how unsanitary the *esteros* have become, these water passages were considered during the height of the American occupation as a liability rather than their previous accolade of the avenue of opportunities. See Michael D. Pante, "The Esteros and Manila's Postwar Remaking," in *The Resilient City in World War II: Urban Environmental Histories*, ed. by Simo Laakkonen et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 237–257.

<sup>37</sup> With the end of the Marcos dictatorship, the formation of a new constitution sought to remove the possibility of a repeat of an authoritarian form of governance on the entire expanse of Metro Manila, resulting in the empowerment of local government units. This is an aftermath of the Marcos dictatorship in which as Marcos Sr. was the president, his wife was appointed by him as the governess of Metro Manila. While the official narrative is that they were set for the rebirth of traditional values, the *Bagong Lipunan* (New Society) movement was aimed at centralizing power into their own hands. This came at the tragic loss of countless lives. The position of the MMDA chairman therefore replaces the now-defunct Metro Manila governor. See Wise, *Manila, City of Islands*, 76–95; Gerard Lico, *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth, and Marcos State Architecture* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003); and Gerard Lico, *Arkitekturang Pilipino: A History of Architecture and the Built Environment in the Philippines*, Volume 2 Post-colonial to Contemporary Era (Quezon City: Arc Lico International Services Corp. and College of Architecture University of the Philippines, 2021), 663–706. For more insights into the

paradox: the metropolis is no stranger to such environmental blows, yet constant emergency or preemptive evacuations take place with schools as one of the primary evacuation centers.

We therefore have to ask, in what sense is resiliency framed in these experiences of flooding? What arises in our experiences of calamities is a tautological question of whether this reduction of immunological participation to fiscal contributions (taxation, fees, etc.) is the effect or the cause of capitalism and/or neoliberalism. This is a pressing question ignored by society, yet this logic of contribution and purchase is internalized, and as such, immunizing practices are today realized through the latest trends in consumer purchasing. This is true for a small device, evidenced in the rather appalling phenomenon surrounding the release of the latest iPhone – and queueing 56 hours to get the first unit – or even to huge ones, how hundreds of thousands of vehicles were added to the streets of Metro Manila for the year 2024.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps, the problem arises not from outside but from within the city, within the individuals who swing like a pendulum between indifference and fear.<sup>39</sup> Citizens who are indifferent to the drastic effects of our consumerist logic and who become fearful once the alarms are sounded of the river's sudden rise.

### A Cursory Sensory of the City Interior

My choice of the Tagalog translation for 'City Interior' is *iláya* (Hispanized as *yláya*) in that this word evokes a particular spatial dimension within the city as its innermost part or the route thereof, opposite to *ibabá*, as in the case of Calamba in Rizal's time.<sup>40</sup> This tension of upper and lower, or

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joint rule of the spouses, see Primitivo Mijares, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos*, rev. ed. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> See Anjilica Andaya, "56-hour wait: Couple from Taguig first in line for iPhone 16," in *Interaksyon* (21 October 2024), <<https://interaksyon.philstar.com/trends-spotlights/2024/10/21/285757/56-hour-wait-couple-from-taguig-first-in-line-for-iphone-16/>> and Kris Crismundo, "PH vehicle sales up 11.8% in H1 2024," in *Philippine News Agency* (12 July 2024), <<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1228829>>.

<sup>39</sup> See Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennett, *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), §1.

<sup>40</sup> See Joaquín, "Calamba and the Rizals," in *Language of the Street and Other Essays*, 25. The Tagalog and Cebuano *iláya* originated from the Proto-Austronesian *daya*, and cognates of this word are used in the Philippine languages: the Tagalog and Cebuano *iláya* signify the town's interior or upper part, the area away from the coast or town; the Bikol *iráya* and the Masbatenyo *irayá* denote the inland or even the hinterland, similar to the Hiligaynon *ilayá*, meaning also somewhere upstream/upriver like the Maranao *raya*, the Binukid *diraya*, and the Isneg *mandáya*; the Aklanon *edayá* is the dry land while *ilayá* is the town's inland section; the Waray-Waray *irayá* is a tract of land devoted to agriculture, found at the upper or interior part of a town (away from the sea); and the Itbayaten *iraya* as land in opposition to the sea. A somewhat cosmological or

properly, inner and outer, flanks the centrality of the *Calle Real*. Yet, it is necessary to ask what is evoked by the city interior, by the *iláya*? The answer is rather straightforward—what is not immediately accessible. Sloterdijk tells us that the problem of modernity is not the loss of the center but ironically the loss of the peripheries.<sup>41</sup> We perhaps within our own city have lost this sense of what the true peripheries are of our neoliberal social design. This section comprises the last of this paper in which I provide a cursory sensorial of our social periphery, a sensory of three select places in Manila that seeks to challenge our conception of resilience.

*Liwasang Bonifacio (in front of the Manila Central Post Office), Ermita*

*March 29, 2023. Around 2:36 am. When stress is a bit too much, I frequent this area around Intramuros during the wee hours to allow my mind to roam free. The heavy traffic of the rush-hour periods is long past, and what always remains is a picturesque moment: the ability to adore the architectural wonders spanning the post office to the Luneta, remnants of the ideals of the American occupation. For today's journey, I wanted to spend more time before the post office building to allow myself to be bemazed by its neoclassical grandeur. Yet, as I turned around, facing now the open square opposite the building, I was taken aback by the sight I beheld: this evening, the plaza was teeming with worn out bodies on makeshift beds, unfolded carton boxes with – a luxury for some – a piece of cloth doubled as a blanket. Homeless individuals are usually considered the scorn of society, and a child from a middle-class family would have grown up being told to study well lest ending up like them. "Where are these people to be found during daytime?" I asked myself. Seeing them reclaim the park as theirs made realize that illegal settlers they are, yes, they are the true residents of the city. They, who are compelled to hide in obscurity as the first streaks of daybreak rip through the heavens, are those who cannot simply leave the city. They are condemned to experience the city's discontent—as the public square fills with life and economic activity, they retreat to the dark alleys or congregate on the street, often to the discontent of ourselves, we who are simply in Manila just because of commerce or recreation. Through their silent occupation of the plaza in the evening, they reclaim the 'public' as theirs.*

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metaphysical connotation of the term's usage is contained in the word *dáya* used in Ifugaw, Kankanaey, and Bontok to mean sky, heaven, or even a particular cosmic region. Further cognates of this word are found in other Austronesian languages such as *raya* in Bare'e and Saisiyat, *zaya* in Paiwan, and *raza* in Bintulu. See Robert Blust and Stephen Trussel, Austronesian Comparative Dictionary, s.v. "*\*daya*" (2020), <[https://www.trussel2.com/ACD/acd-s\\_d.htm](https://www.trussel2.com/ACD/acd-s_d.htm)>.

<sup>41</sup> See Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, 29.

*Isetann Mall, Recto Ave. cor. Quezon Blvd., Quiapo*

March 2018. Around 9:20 pm. Taking the LRT-2 (Light Rail Transit) is my mode of transportation from Manila to the station nearest to my home in Marikina, and this was even the safest way considering that my last class ends at 9 pm. From the university I take a jeepney and alight just as the vehicle ascends from the underpass along Quezon Blvd. It is a short walk from there to the Recto train station, traversing the semi-arcade section offered by the mall. That evening was a peculiar one because the pavement/arcade was not filled with the usual peddlers selling all sorts of vegetables on their karitons or those who offer cellphones in a highly suspicious manner. In lieu of all those, under the light post at the corner of Recto Ave. and Quezon Blvd., was a man dancing. On other days, there would be music playing from vendors of CDs and stereos, but only the sound of vehicles flying by and blaring honks filled the air that evening. This man, visibly insane, seemed quite joyous as he swayed his arms and kicked his leg, somewhat imitating the King of Pop. People were skirting around him for obvious reasons, darting him suspicious glances, while others, irate ones. I was taken aback by the bliss that was evident on his face, a certain ignorance of how we passersby were galled by his foolishness; the dances are mad to those who cannot hear the music.

*Pasig River Esplanade (phase 1C, behind the Post Office), Ermita*

March 31, 2024. Around 11:03 pm. Tonight's particular visit to this familiar area was not due to stress but an opportunity that made itself available—and one that perhaps would never come twice. Luckily, I grabbed that moment and found myself parking the vehicle I drove a stone's throw from the paifang that stands rather grandly at the foot of Jones Bridge. From that bridge toward the newly developed (phase 1C) Pasig River Esplanade, one could not help but notice how alive the area is despite the dimly illuminated sky. Children were playing with each other, a few couples trying to have private conversations, a youth groups recording TikTok videos, and the occasional peddler of food and other items shooed away by security personnel. The serenity of the evening was framed by the gentle flow of the river and the soft brightness radiating from the (baroque) lamps that line the bridge all the way to the esplanade. In my solitude with another, a group of three children approached and began talking. The first thought in my head was that they were going to beg for alms, and already my fingers were searching for loose change in my pockets. But to my great surprise, they began sharing stuff about themselves, and I eventually realized that a conversation was all they wanted: they asked me what I taught, where I lived, what it is like to be a teacher, and they in turn shared that they are in school, one of them also works as a volunteer firefighter—at such a young age!—and that they enjoy the peacefulness offered by this newly constructed place. I eventually bade farewell as

*it was getting late, but the guilt of my initial thought lingered within me; they simply wanted a conversation with a person they just met.*

Does any formulation of the city's resiliency include personal encounters such as these? These are stories from the city interior, the part of the city to which tourists do not flock, to which even we citizens turn a blind eye. Yet, these are glimpses into the actual lived experiences of people who, rightfully so, are the real inhabitants of the city unlike me, whose encounter of the city (of Manila) is through formal education and concomitant to both study and work. More so, do our forms of immunization include these who are the most vulnerable in the city? Questioning the interior ought to necessitate a change from the accumulative logic, evoked by a neoliberal language of fiscal contribution and purchase, to an attentiveness to those who are marginalized. Life from the perspective of the *iláya*, is one of constant travails, yet one which brings one closer to one's neighbor, best represented in the Tagalog *kapwa*. The marginality of these three anecdotes has great potential, for only from this peripheral position can a renewed urban epistemology make more sense, can urban resiliency be provided a better direction. It should be not simply toward progress or the outside, but toward consideration of where we come from, who we are with—the inside. Resilience should not simply evoke a return to the urban or to the human, explicated as theoretically empty concepts, but rather a movement toward the margins, those who are weakest.

### Concluding Remark

In this essay, I sought to probe immunology in the 'city interior' and by doing so question resiliency as found in everyday life. I argued that the paradigm of the city exterior, as manufactured by the neoliberal logic of accumulation, is fractured when life is perceived from the everyday perspective of the city, i.e., from the city interior. Through my cursory urban sensorial, what I sought to offer was a holistic aesthetic of the city; if there be a sense of return in resilience, it should be toward the margins, those whose voice are ignored. What I attempted in this essay was to question resiliency and to source its revaluation in everyday life, from the city interior.

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Article

## Existential Resilience in the City

*Shane Epting*

**Abstract:** Severe weather continues to challenge cities worldwide. Typhoons, wildfires, floods, and extreme temperatures test urban systems, communities, and governments at all scales. To combat such effects, resilience has emerged as a term geared towards increasing their ability to address impacts, strengthen infrastructure, and deal with cleanup measures. Although this business sounds straightforward to non-philosophers, ethical and existential elements remain out of view for the sciences and require investigation. This article fleshes them out. The first step is to identify relevant stakeholder groups and competing interests. The second is discovering equitable ways to bring professionals and city dwellers together to develop proactive safeguards and recovery protocols for such tragedies. When they engage in the necessary practices, they can take responsibility for the city and find meaning in the process.

**Keywords:** existentialism, philosophy of the city, resilience, severe weather

Climate change challenges cities worldwide. From temperature fluctuations to extreme weather events—it is doubtful that any place is entirely exempt from such troubles. Municipal responses, even though they can help mitigate related harm, can create other problems. Not only are such outcomes avoidable, but dealing with them carefully can provide opportunities to create meaningful interactions between urban residents and municipal administrations. Such exchanges are essential for cities and city living. Examining the dynamics of those relations can show what taking responsibility for the city looks like—and it can give additional meaning to residents' lives. It involves looking at how the enmeshments of material and social technologies impact residents in several ways and realizing the possibilities, which includes choosing ones that support ethical outcomes among stakeholder groups.

For instance, cities require technologies like physical infrastructure that can reduce flood damage and prevent property loss, but they also require “tools of thought,” theoretical devices we can employ to help us think

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through the procedural aspects of managing socio-material technological arrangements. Resilience can be one such “technology” to help achieve desired outcomes. Yet, how it is built is a significant ethical issue. It can be a vital element of proactive and reactive strategies for dealing with climate change’s impacts on cities—if carried out *with* the community rather than *for* them (assuming they want to participate). This point entails that it cannot *exclusively* be a top-down directive for policy, which holds that employing resilience as a thought technology has normative elements that require examination to determine legitimacy.

Unfortunately, operations that involve urban residents working alongside city officials go against the status quo. In turn, it seems reasonable to hold that any ideas and practices that go against tradition should anticipate pushback from those benefitting from it and the subjects who accept familiarity as the pinnacle of progress. Leaders are used to leading, and the same goes for followers. However, accepting such arrangements as gospel counts as dogma, but using the “tools of the philosophic trade” can help us move beyond it. Outside of the discipline, schools of thought such as participatory planning remain on the periphery, and cities largely ignore them.<sup>1</sup> Wanting something more from our cities requires thinking about them in unorthodox fashions, which is why philosophy is one of the best testing grounds to explore such ideas. To that end, the term “co-planning,” short for “cooperative planning” will be fleshed out in later sections.<sup>2</sup>

This reality suggests that all germane measures must be carried out with judicious reasoning. Suppose these kinds of pursuits take guidance from recent works in the emerging philosophical literature on cities that endeavor to address these conditions. In that case, they can help safeguard cities while radically restructuring municipal-community relations. Once we address the ethical complexity of these matters, we are positioned to discuss the existential aspects of such affairs. They involve how residents and municipal agents can find meaning in the process while taking responsibility for the city in the face of disaster preparedness and clean-up efforts following tragedies. This article fleshes out these ideas, showing how we can move from theoretical dimensions to their limits, gesturing toward real-world implementation.

It begins with examining the kind of challenges of concern to gain familiarity with *some* of the climate-change issues plaguing cities. Next, it briefly looks at the numerous stakeholder groups that require ethical

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Nyamadzawo, “The Paradox of Participatory Planning in Urban Planning,” in *The Wagner Planner*, 9 (14 December 2020), <<https://wp.nyu.edu/wagnerplanner/2020/12/14/the-paradox-of-participatory-planning-in-urban-planning/>>.

<sup>2</sup> This notion is examined fully elsewhere. See Shane Epting, *Urban Enlightenment: Multistakeholder Engagement and the City* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

consideration, then shows how “moral ordering,” one such advancement in the philosophical literature on cities as mentioned above, can provide direction for those combatting climate-change issues in built environments.<sup>3</sup> With this view established, it examines how we can think about resilience in ways that reveal the conditions required for the integrity of the term’s internal structure. The goal here is to see how we should think of and use the term “resilience” to safeguard cities ethically and authentically. Then, I connect these ideas to the more complex existential conditions that make pursuing this inquiry worthwhile. Lastly, I conclude by discussing the limits of this kind of thinking, which sets the stage for future work for municipal agents and urban residents who find it useful.

We should care about this topic because it examines how resilience efforts are ethical affairs emerging on our city streets and suburban cul-de-sacs. Investigating this issue can enhance how urban dwellers understand themselves in the face of severe weather. Considering that climate change’s full range of effects remains to be seen, the following notions could inform neighboring issues or assist municipalities searching for ways to make resilience efforts matter to the people who must contend with those threats and their increasing realities.

### Climate Change’s Challenges

Despite having countless resemblances, cities differ in myriad ways. Accordingly, their challenges vary in scale, from the macro to the micro, and in intensity and duration. For example, most cities have electricity, but sources and delivery modes vary, along with the natural hindrances they face. We can apply this line of reasoning to mobility, housing, commerce, and countless cultural elements. Many island cities must contend with typhoons, rising temperatures, and other challenges that remain constant and evolving.<sup>4</sup> Only uncertainty is certain when it comes to the totality of such events and their impacts.

However, preparation and responses could mitigate this condition, lessening its impacts on cities and their inhabitants. Consider that several cities within proximity to woodlands now view frequent fires as recurring

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> William N. Holden and Shawn J. Marshall, “Climate change and typhoons in the Philippines: Extreme weather events in the Anthropocene,” in *Integrating Disaster Science and Management* (2018), 407–421, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-812056-9.00024-5>>.

problems.<sup>5</sup> Numerous places must deal with severe and ongoing droughts.<sup>6</sup> Although the issues above are direct effects of climate change, they have several indirect consequences that further complicate efforts, adding to the burden that communities must shoulder.

For example, cities facing extreme heat during the summer months are witnessing their power grids fail due to demand for air conditioning.<sup>7</sup> Enduring such conditions often puts seniors and other vulnerable groups in deadly and dangerous positions. Such tragedies are not isolated, but numerous places worldwide see deaths associated with sweltering heat yearly.<sup>8</sup> Severe weather events can cause substantial loss of power for lengthy times, putting hospitals and emergency services in precarious positions.<sup>9</sup> Even though budgetary adjustments might reduce felt impacts, using such funds could take away from needed community projects and necessary municipal improvements.

Other indirect impacts require additional observation, such as those that do not have an immediate physical counterpart. Consider the rising costs of home insurance.<sup>10</sup> Even though coastal cities in hurricane zones and those dealing with wildfires account for significant damages, insurance companies also provide coverage to residents across vast territories away from those kinds of landscapes. This point suggests that residents of inland areas will also have to contend with rate increases to cover the total losses these companies face. In addition, landlocked cities remain subject to floods and tornados, meaning they will also have threats that could raise their rates.

While the above list of instances is non-exhaustive, it indicates the kind of issues of concern. Each city will also have specific problems that will

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<sup>5</sup> John Rennie Short and Abbey Farmer, "Cities and climate change," in *Earth*, 2:4 (November 2021), 1038–1045, <<https://doi.org/10.3390/earth2040061>>.

<sup>6</sup> Jolanta Dąbrowska et al., "Between flood and drought: How cities are facing water surplus and scarcity," in *Journal of Environmental Management*, 345: 118557 (2023), <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2023.118557>>.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Paddison, "Heat waves are getting longer and more brutal. Here's why your AC can't save you anymore," *CNN* (4 July 2024), <<https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/04/climate/heat-waves-air-conditioning-climate/index.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> Qi Zhao et al., "Global, regional, and national burden of mortality associated with non-optimal ambient temperatures from 2000 to 2019: a three-stage modelling study," in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5:7 (2021), e415–e425, <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00081-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00081-4)>.

<sup>9</sup> Ed Lavandera, Ashley Killough and Elizabeth Wolfe, "Houston area residents struggle without power and water as excruciating heat continues," *CNN* (12 July 2024), <<https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/12/weather/houston-texas-power-outages-heat-friday/index.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Li Cohen, Tracy J. Wholf, Marina Jurica, "Climate change is making home insurance costs more expensive. These maps show prices and weather risks in your state," *CBS News* (17 September 2024), <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/maps-home-insurance-costs-state-extreme-weather-risks/>>.

test infrastructures built long before climate change was a problematic reality and upgrading them to safeguard urban residents must hold steady. One preexisting condition is that past injustices linger, and many marginalized communities are still living with their ill effects. For example, the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, in the US fits this description rather well. Hurricane Katrina was an extremely deadly event, killing close to 1900 people and causing over 100 million USD in damages in August 2005.<sup>11</sup> Environmental justice scholars illustrate how members of the African American community there had to endure a long history of harmful treatment (to say the least) before Katrina, and the conditions associated with resilience could be seen as an extension of such treatment if distribution efforts are lopsided against them.<sup>12</sup> For similar cases, climate change only makes matters worse, compounding harmful conditions for such communities.

Within the notion above, there is a tension between dealing with past and present issues regarding marginalized groups—which are also situated within larger scenarios wherein they compete with other stakeholder groups' interests. Yet, decisions must be made. These kinds of issues bring the problem of moral prioritization into view.<sup>13</sup> It concerns decisions that affect multiple stakeholder groups that have inherent moral dimensions, considering that whose interests receive focus, action, prioritization, and being able to have a meaningful voice is a moral issue itself. As mentioned earlier, some such groups have already been harmed, neglected, and/or disrespected.

"Moral ordering" is a theoretical device that can help us deal with this issue.<sup>14</sup> One could argue that this approach is the most recent advancement regarding moral extensionism in the Western approach to applied philosophy. It provides a way to deal with problems confronting distinct stakeholder groups that each deserve moral consideration equitably. They can include but are not limited to marginalized groups, vulnerable persons, the public (which includes those groups), nonhumans (i.e., ecosystems and individual species), possible future people, and urban artifacts.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For more information, see National Weather Service, "Extremely Powerful Hurricane Katrina Leaves a Historic Mark on the Northern Gulf Coast," *National Weather Service* (last updated: September 2022), <<https://www.weather.gov/mob/katrina>>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright, "Introduction," in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, ed. by Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Shane Epting, *Urban Enlightenment: Multistakeholder Engagement and the City*, (New York: Routledge, 2023), 28.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

The idea is that all groups deserve moral consideration, but they should not receive it equally. For instance, most people would never want to say that an urban artifact like a streetlight deserves the same moral consideration, which could include protection, as a human infant.<sup>16</sup> Such a situation would warrant public outcry if someone were to defend this view. This extreme hypothetical exhibits a scale or order of groups, persons, or stakeholders that deserve consideration and action above others under specific conditions.

Consider a group that was harmed regarding disaster relief preparedness. Again, thinking about the African-American population living in New Orleans and affected by Hurricane Katrina is an exemplar, considering the insights from environmental justice scholars showing that they were in a disadvantaged position.<sup>17</sup> That case exemplifies the kind of conditions associated with a preexisting condition in disaster preparedness. In turn, when considering new ways to address preparedness in a given area, those groups require prioritization to ensure they do not remain in harm's way or add to the list of times they have been on the receiving end of inequitable planning. Despite having increased mindfulness of such situations, the idea is not that other groups deserve less attention or effort, but it makes sense that any plan or action benefiting them could do so while also taking care of preexisting conditions simultaneously.

Examining these realities exposes the preexisting conditions that must be dealt with before or while addressing current issues unless there is an urgent need that could cause greater harm. Now that it is clear that groups in these situations have "buy-in," warranting special consideration and action, we can study the pattern behind such actions to determine similar instances that require like treatment. Some other cases could include requiring extra care to live the same life as anyone else. Being vulnerable could include some elderly or disabled persons or any other scenario wherein additional insights are required to deliver fair distribution of municipal services. Although being vulnerable is not the same as being marginalized, the conditions associated with it require that those fitting this description should receive a kind of buy-in, assuming they want it.

The public comes next in the moral ordering sequence, which includes the previous groups.<sup>18</sup> This notion entails that any solution or mitigation effort should not harm them or put them at a disadvantage. Any such solution must bring their interests firmly into consideration. Nonhumans come next by default, except in cases wherein not prioritizing

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<sup>16</sup> A similar point is made in *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Bullard and Wright, "Introduction."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

ecosystems would harm humans in general or specific groups. Placing nonhuman interest above humans in environmental ethics received ample criticism, holding that it ignores race.<sup>19</sup> Similar thoughts exist regarding environmental thought being imperialist.<sup>20</sup> Doing so implies that green lives matter more than marginalized lives.<sup>21</sup> To avoid making this claim, nonhuman life must come after human life, except when a pressing or urgent need can support an incredibly strong case for such decisions. After nonhumans, we have to give some consideration for possible future people. Wanting to make decisions prioritizing them over other human groups says that nonexistent lives matter more than people living and struggling today. Lastly, artifacts come last by default because things are often replaceable, and people are not.<sup>22</sup>

One key feature of moral ordering is that its inherent nature entails flexibility, meaning that a lower-order stakeholder group can receive increased attention and action for situations requiring it, such as urgency or threats to human wellbeing.<sup>23</sup> This suggestive order provides normative guidance, but the affected groups must have an outcome-shaping voice, such as those associated with political recognition.<sup>24</sup> In turn, one could argue that associated results will concern material impacts like infrastructure or relief services, but such considerations only account for one kind of concern. The reality is that “value,” conceptually, goes beyond monetary units and the like. This notion suggests that most reasoning will involve the instrumental use of resources, highlighting their significance and how they are valued. However, intrinsic value also comes into view, meaning we can morally consider things on those grounds. The specific variety of intrinsic value required here is

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<sup>19</sup> Eugene Hargrove, “Forward,” in *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, ed. by L. Westra & B. Lawson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), ix–xxvi. Also see, Charles Mills, “Black Trash,” in *Faces of Environmental Racism*.

<sup>20</sup> Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,” in *Environmental Ethics*, 11:1 (Spring 1989), 71–83, <<https://www.uky.edu/~rsand1/china2017/library/Guha.pdf>>

<sup>21</sup> Shane Epting, “On moral prioritization in environmental ethics: weak anthropocentrism for the city,” in *Environmental Ethics*, 39:2 (Summer 2017), 131, <<https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics201712146>>.

<sup>22</sup> Moral ordering has numerous elements that account for several conditions associated with multistakeholder engagement. Exploring them here goes beyond this paper’s scope. For more information, see Epting, *Urban Enlightenment*, 6–8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Recognition without Ethics?” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18:2–3 (June 2001), 21–42, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276012205176>>.

“collective intrinsic value.”<sup>25</sup> This particular category stems from Eugene Hargrove’s version of weak anthropocentric intrinsic value.<sup>26</sup>

This notion entails that the people affected by and who have expertise on an issue must decide if it is valuable for those reasons. In other words, the pattern associated with recognition must extend into how we think about every dimension of value formation and disaster preparedness and relief. If we bring back the idea that thought technologies can help us in our endeavors to safeguard cities, then we can say that the concepts we employ to help us shape relevant policies and our lives do as well. In turn, it makes sense to say that “resilience,” as a thought technology, is one such term. It is simply good, aside from any instrumental value that it can provide. As Hargrove puts it, the criterion for this kind of value is that valuers, typically relevant experts, assign it.<sup>27</sup> However, going with the idea that social and material conditions shape technology, resilience could have its intrinsic value negated if those conditions yielded harmful or bad outcomes.

That point aside, looking at resilience through the lens of moral ordering, we learn how we must form its conception, which entails its promise, peril, and limitations. The goal is to lay out procedures wherein the term is defined in a manner that reveals why it deserves study, not only for philosophical pursuits—but also for ones that could help cities deal with some of the problems that climate change brings. Yet, accounting for all relevant stakeholder groups does not address all relevant ethical affairs. Those having the power to define the term *must* include the people affected by how it is used to address events such as extreme weather preparedness, clean-up efforts, and restoration. Laying out the conditions for these values is the first step toward learning how resilience can be an existential affair, requiring a thorough fleshing out.

The section below does just that. It begins by interrogating the term, paying attention to how its juxtaposition with moral ordering can show us how to employ it to show respect for the people it should serve. Establishing this view shows how to bring the term into practical conversations about policy and infrastructure in a manner wherein the term has integrity, which will ready us to reveal its existential dimensions in later sections.

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<sup>25</sup> Shane Epting, *Meaning in the Metropolis: Toward an Urban Existentialism* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. Also see Eugene Hargrove, “Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value,” in *The Monist*, 75:2 (April 1992), 183–207, <<https://doi.org/10.5840/monist19927529>>.

<sup>27</sup> Hargrove, “Weak Anthropocentric Intrinsic Value,” 198.

## Moral Ordering Resilience

So far, I have touched on the conditions surrounding resilience but have said nothing about the term itself. Common conceptions could hold that it is the ability to endure hardship and recover or stay strong when facing tragic events. The academic reality is that the term exists in numerous areas of study and contexts, and most share conceptual ground in accord with the brief account just mentioned. The term first emerged in ecology during the 1970s.<sup>28</sup> Today, there is enough research on the term to do a “meta-literature review” on the literature dealing with resilience. Patrick Martin-Breen and J. Marty Anderies’s review that offers insights into the terms applicable nature addresses the expanding use of resilience:

Resilience has, in the past four decades, been a term increasingly employed throughout a number of sciences: psychology and ecology, most prominently. Increasingly one finds it in political science, business administration, sociology, history, disaster planning, urban planning, and international development. The shared use of the term does not, however, imply unified concepts of resilience nor the theories in which it is embedded. Different uses generate different methods, sometimes different methodologies. Evidential or other empirical support can differ between domains of application, even when concepts are broadly shared.<sup>29</sup>

When applying the term to describe people, it could be to suffer setbacks, injuries, or just the trials of life while maintaining composure or recuperation. The words can change by degree of emphasis, but the pattern behind them holds the same sentiment. New accounts with nuanced differences will continue to emerge in the literature. When we think about the term applied to urban infrastructure, it would be able to endure a storm and not fail or bounce back with quickness. Yet, as Martin-Breen and Anderies illustrate, the term in an urban studies (i.e., academic) context has taken on a life of its own, so to speak. There are also numerous descriptions of “urban resilience” and “city resilience” that capture the essence of resilience above.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> City Resilience Index, *City Resilience Framework* (The Rockefeller Foundation and Arup International Development, 2014), 3  
<[https://preparecenter.org/sites/default/files/arup\\_rockefeller\\_resilient\\_cities\\_report.pdf](https://preparecenter.org/sites/default/files/arup_rockefeller_resilient_cities_report.pdf)>.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Martin-Breen and J. Marty Anderies, *Resilience: A Literature Review* (Brighton: Bellagio Initiative and The Institute of Development Studies, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> City Resilience Index, 3.

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Yet, no matter how academics or municipal agents problematize, synthesize, or legitimize their conceptions, they might mean little to city dwellers unless they can help construct or define the term or assess and agree with offered accounts. Urban residents might identify with all or parts of preconceived ideas of what urban resilience should contain. However, Fraser-inspired notions of political recognition could hold that attempts at paternalized acceptance of pre-packaged resilience are ill-fated. This point does not dismiss expertise. Still, it holds that legitimacy depends on how it is defined and by whom, meaning the people whose lives will be affected by how a definition informs its material correlates (e.g., infrastructure) should be involved.

Despite resilience's current prevalence in the academy, countless historical urban tragedies force residents to deal with situations that embody the term's definition. This point implies that aside from scholarly endeavors, city dwellers have been dealing with the conditions surrounding the term throughout time. Such an idea suggests that many cities have faced situations that bring the term to our attention. For instance, long before climate change was an undeniable condition of existence, tragic events made the term relevant. The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 could count.<sup>31</sup> Other events like tornados, typhoons, and hurricanes also come to mind, along with isolated tragedies like Superstorm Sandy that hit New York City in 2014 that can damage infrastructure.<sup>32</sup> While such events test systems and people, climate change's effects, although similar to those mentioned, are unique in the sense that they are the results of our collective existence, steered mainly by the usual suspects such as governments and the fossil fuel industry. Not everyone is responsible for those outcomes, but everyone must endure their inevitability.

Now, with anthropogenic climate change, resilience must occupy space within more encompassing terms like sustainability. Consider that using resources without compromising others' capacity to do the same could bring resilience into the conversation regarding how resources and abilities are employed strategically to achieve that result. Such a notion requires us to examine how using specific materials, fuels, policies, human resources, and several other things could impact municipalities' ability to respond to severe

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<sup>31</sup> This fire killed about 300 people, left 100,000 homeless, and covered 2100 acres of the city. For more information, see Chicago Architecture Center, "The Great Chicago Fire of 1871," <<https://www.architecture.org/online-resources/architecture-encyclopedia/the-great-chicago-fire-of-1871>> (accessed January 2025).

<sup>32</sup> Mikami Takahito, Miguel Esteban, and Tomoya Shibayama, "Storm surge in New York city caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012," in *Handbook of Coastal Disaster Mitigation for Engineers and Planners*, ed. by Miguel Esteban, Hiroshi Takagi, and Tomoya Shibayama (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2015), 115–131.

weather events. In turn, paying attention to the instrumental values associated with resilience deserves considerable attention regarding how it benefits sustainability (or does not), and we can keep its intrinsic value in view as well.

This point entails that we must consider that resilience, as a conceptual element, bolsters the integrity of sustainability as a conceptual device. In other words, if sustainability is a larger conceptual device that helps us create cities that will endure without compromising possible future people's ability to do the same, considering resilience as a vital smaller part makes sense. We can consider it inherent to a robust definition of sustainability that does not require us to examine it to point to where its significance is lost. For this context, it would be a red herring or pedantic superficialities parading as substance.

That point aside, turning to the applied world, we find that numerous incorporated cities now have sustainability offices and management teams, and this term applies to such operations. They often use resilience as a term to showcase the strength of their department and its relationships to how the municipality works for residents. Other municipalities lacking those offices nevertheless accept severe weather as a motivation to justify expenditures to help prevent floods, power losses, and catastrophes and increase the ability to bounce back quickly after such events.

For all such cases, it is easy to see the instrumental value of resilience as part of how we conceptualize sustainability. Consider infrastructure that can withstand nature's forces or can be quickly repaired when damaged. Those cases illustrate why it is practical and useful to want sustainable infrastructure to embody this quality. Yet, does it make sense to say that sustainability and resilience have intrinsic value? That is to say, do they have any kind of quality wherein it is not valued for what it can do for us in any shape, form, or fashion? I answer in the affirmative and will argue that we can know it. Moreover, we can take an additional step and say that urban residents must, under most circumstances, define the term and many of its facets. There is a justice element to such claims.

Robert Figueroa explicitly makes this point when formulating necessary conditions for environmental justice, employing Nancy Fraser's conception of recognition, holding that those impacted by policy decisions must be able to weigh in on them.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned earlier, the pattern of this thought extends to less complex notions, such as resilience, that have the same effect on people. This point suggests if resilience is a term that makes

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Figueroa, "Evaluating Environmental Justice Claims," in *Forging Environmentalism: Justice, Livelihood, and Contested Environments*, ed. by J. Bauer (Amonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), 360–376.

up part of sustainability, emergency preparedness, and clean-up efforts, those impacted need to be recognized by inclusive efforts that provide them with a way to shape the term's conception and execution as it informs those engaged in moral ordering. Still further, the process of coming to know the intrinsic value of urban resilience could take on an existential dimension that can provide residents' lives with additional meaning.

Here is how it unfolds. The first order of business is to determine who defines the term, how it is employed, and its limitations. For example, it is an integral part of many normative frameworks (e.g., Figueroa) that people affected by policy decisions must be able to weigh in on how such policies are shaped. In step with moral ordering, relevant marginalized groups and vulnerable populations must have the ability to weigh in first so that they are not further harmed or subjected to conditions that challenge their ability to exist alongside everybody else. This reason underscores why we must employ Fraser's conception of recognition, holding that each person be respected for their humanity and treated as equals.<sup>34</sup>

This point entails that any such account of resilience that appeals to the public, to which they also belong, must manifest so that the conditions of such a conception do not perpetuate wrongdoing or create new harm. If such a conception is to exist, it must benefit everyone, meaning that any sort of utilitarian framework will inherently lack the necessary structure. In turn, how the term is defined is inherently an ethical issue. As mentioned, recognition is the fulcrum of urban resilience.

Although the exploration thus far exhibits the ethical dimensions of urban resilience, there is also an existential element that requires fleshing out. It concerns engaging in resilience planning and practices in ways that provide people with access to meaningful experiences. The section below does just that. It looks at the kind of actions associated with resilience-focused efforts. By exploring these elements, we expose the existential opportunities that merit further investigation to see a fuller range of possibilities associated with the events that make this topic deserve our attention.

### **The Existential Possibilities of Resilience Efforts**

Although severe weather events often cause stress, damage and injury, and death, those negative experiences and tragedies do not need to maintain a stranglehold on us or our resilience efforts entirely. The threat of such events is largely unavoidable, but this reality does not entail defeat whenever they strike. This notion suggests that communities can find comfort in safeguarding themselves and developing strategies to deal with

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<sup>34</sup> Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?," 21–42.

catastrophes. This point provides an opportunity to explain how existentialism can enhance our thinking on this topic and might play a significant role in helping cities protect themselves against severe weather events. In turn, we must employ the concepts above.

Doing just that involves examining the typical circumstances associated with the operational procedures wherein moral ordering takes place, which require stakeholders to work with municipal agents on resilience matters. Such partnerships count as what has been called cooperative city planning—or “co-planning.”<sup>35</sup> The procedure is like participatory urban planning, but cooperation requires emphasis to underscore the central element of both parties actively working in concert.

Here is a fictitious example. Imagine there was a fenced vacant lot in the city under municipal authority. A group of residents lacked space for their dogs to exercise. They approached city leaders, asking for the land to be turned into a dog park. Instead of carrying on business as usual and denying the request out of habit, they listened to community needs (perhaps local elections were on the horizon). The city agreed to transform the underutilized space into the requested park. They assigned landscape architects, inspectors, and park services to work with future users to gain input on what the dog park should look like to meet their needs. Once the park is complete, all parties involved could see how their dedication and efforts, such as co-planning, worked to create a new part of the city that they could feel responsible for and add meaning to their lives in the process. Although this case is imaginative, it embodies the spirit of cooperative measures that can unify residents and municipal leadership.

There is now a body of academic research showing how cities can develop operational procedures that give residents a seat at the decision-making table.<sup>36</sup> However, real-world examples such as the fictitious case above are more elusive than ubiquitous. Despite the reality that actual change is the goal, we must think through these desired outcomes, questioning power structures, the status quo, and business as usual that would preserve elements that have produced urban systems that already cannot withstand severe weather.

Thinking about what it means for everyday people to be able to engage with municipal professionals to work on projects to improve their lives, one could argue that such undertakings align with “urban existentialism.” Let me flesh out this concept while connecting it to moral

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<sup>35</sup> Epting, *Meaning in the Metropolis*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Muki Haklay, Piotr Jankowski, and Zbigniew Zwoliński, “Selected Modern Methods and Tools for Public Participation in Urban Planning – A Review,” in *Quaestiones Geographicae*, 37:3 (September 2018), 127–149, <<https://doi.org/10.2478/quageo-2018-0030>>.

ordering and co-planning. For instance, when stakeholders co-plan with municipal agents with moral ordering as their guide, they think together with ethics at the forefront of their minds. Unlike other existential thinking like Sartre's works, such as *Existentialism and Humanism*, this positioning focuses on groups thinking from a place of ethicality from the outset.<sup>37</sup> In turn, all parties learn about each other. As city dwellers, they are taking responsibility for the city in a limited fashion. This notion suggests that they are playing roles in shaping their urban experiences to a degree, meaning they are taking responsibility for the quality of their lives with others who are doing the same.

This point intersects with the idea that resilience should be an integral part of sustainability as a concept.<sup>38</sup> We use the term to bolster sustainability efforts by supporting infrastructures that balance immediate and long-term resource use. Residents defining resilience in this sense can have meaning, but it differs from severe weather-related resilience. Here is what I mean. Psychological research shows that climate change's impacts and severe weather have harmful mental effects on populations.<sup>39</sup> We can separate these kinds of harm into at least two categories. One is the stress of losing one's home, property, possessions, and life through severe weather events. Such stress could qualify as a form of "dreadful conditions" inspired by Kirkegaard's use of dread.<sup>40</sup> This term entails that social and material arrangements, things like regulations and physical infrastructure, can make people feel dread—or dreading engaging in a particular action because of a range of discomfort or harm. Dreadful conditions can encompass a range of intensity.

For example, sitting in traffic for hours because local laws prevent one from riding a bicycle could be a dreadful condition, especially considering that very few people enjoy sitting in traffic endlessly.<sup>41</sup> Another example could include living in a flood-prone area, constantly concerned about rising waters during storms. The way to deal with dreadful conditions is to extricate residents by removing or altering them, aiming to deliver better

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<sup>37</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. by Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Brian Walker and David Salt, *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Charles Schmidt, "Climate Anxiety: The Existential Threat Posed by Climate Change is Deeply Troubling to Many Young People," in *Harvard Medicine: The Magazine of the Harvard Medical School* (Spring 2023), <<https://magazine.hms.harvard.edu/articles/climate-anxiety>>.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Søren Kierkegaard, "Either/Or," in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 37–84.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on this topic and ideas in this section, see Epting, *Meaning in the Metropolis*, 42ff.

living environments. Extrication answers the question: “What can we do for people enduring dreadful conditions?”

However, removing dreadful conditions through extrication should be a co-planned process because of the recognition concern mentioned above, meaning that people should have a voice in determining the measures to change the urban environment that will affect them. It is reasonable to hold that such experiences will count as taking responsibility for the city in a limited capacity; engaging in the required efforts could give one’s life additional meaning.

This notion underscores the reason we co-plan, which is to think together. It is the needed activity required to live together in a civilized manner. A community becoming resilient benefits from everyone cooperating to do their part to achieve what is greater than isolated efforts. In times of crisis, communities come together, exhibiting the humanity that is always there. Making a city resilient reveals the community spirit hidden by the daily grind’s busyness. By engaging in co-planning efforts to bolster infrastructure, we, in turn, strengthen the community ties that remain underutilized. Considering the unique outcome, we can say that it is “authentic” in this sense, even though it differs from more customary uses of the term in traditional existential literature.<sup>42</sup> Residents and municipal agents still produce something that is one-of-a-kind through co-planning. We can describe such a scenario as having “collaborative authenticity,” bearing in mind that the authenticity hinges on those parties cooperating. Putting in the work to achieve real-world, materialized outcomes could count as meaningful experiences.<sup>43</sup>

Residents and municipal agents could see their cooperation as impacting their lives or the way they see the world and their place in it. In turn, it seems reasonable to hold that undertaking these projects could give people’s lives additional meaning—while taking responsibility for the city in the process. Although existential terminology can help us understand the significance of co-planning, taking *responsibility* and finding additional *meaning* are the conditions that make such operations require existential thinking to gain an enhanced view of those experiences. Even though city dwellers and municipal agents are impacted by the threats of climate change and the tragedies of severe weather, co-planning proactive resilience efforts, and clean-up measures can mitigate such effects.

These ideas in tandem, we see how they can account for the existential dimensions of urban resilience. Here is a fictitious example of how

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<sup>42</sup> E.g., Jean-Paul Sartre, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, ed. by Stephen Priest (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Epting, *Meaning in the Metropolis* 34.

such an enterprise could play out in the city. Suppose that municipal agents bring in relevant professionals like engineers and architects. Then, they recruit community groups to help them determine how previous extreme weather events impacted them or share their concerns about such tragedies in general. These experts could explain the technical aspects that require advanced, specialized education and training. Then, once they develop a plan, municipal agents could work with local, state, and perhaps national agencies to implement needed measures.

Although this hypothetical is incredibly reductionist, it illustrates the basic structure of how co-planning resilience efforts could count as taking responsibility for the city, which is a process that could add more meaning to residents' lives. Moreover, these kinds of examples show that when calamity strikes and such efforts protect residents or reduce harm, these notions would arguably increase in meaning multiple times over. Residents, municipal agents, and other professionals could clearly see how their work together led to positive outcomes or reduced harm, which are still winning situations in the fight against climate change.

As mentioned earlier, cities have different characteristics. They include but are not limited to topography, weather, history, cultural considerations, politics, social elements, and, of course, threats. Co-planning measures to deal with wildfires in California will require unique strategies, and the same is true for typhoons in the Philippines. Hurricanes in Florida demand intense study to mitigate harm. In addition to bolstering each city's ability to take a punch, they could also benefit from co-planning measures concerning clean-up efforts and repairs. Despite the horrible events that residents must endure and emergencies requiring immediate medical attention, post-catastrophe co-planning might also provide meaning in residents' lives. It could also help determine how to help stakeholders in ways that attend to the required measures that require intimate knowledge that the process could reveal.

## Conclusion

While the ideas explored in this article remain in developing stages, the hope is that exploring them in multiple contexts could inform enhanced ways to contend with unavoidable tragedies. This notion suggests that much more interdisciplinary research is required to map the necessary considerations for equitable treatment before and after extreme weather events. This investigation focuses on these issues' ethical and existential dimensions, which is atypical for dealing with these subjects. While this notion is accurate, and we cannot discount the work needed in engineering and sciences that can save lives and property, such events usually only

exclusively define part of one's life in terms of negativity. Through thinking through preparation and clean-up efforts via co-planning, we can approach the inevitable in ways that show that we are not defenseless against severe weather. How we deal with these matters proactively not only could add meaning to people's lives, but those actions also partly define us.

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Article

## Spinoza and Urban Imagination: Resilience as the Persistence of Hope

*Jan Gabriel S. Boller*

**Abstract:** This paper introduces Spinozist thought in informing the issues and complexities presented by the city. Drawing on various definitions of the city as a process characterized by complexity and multiplicity, I intend to reinterpret and approximate the city as a concept to Spinoza's notion of an individual where persistence, or what he terms as *conatus*, establishes itself as the individuating principle. Here, the gap between the individual and the city could be addressed through the philosopher's notion of imagination. By turning from the metaphysical and ontological signification of the individual in juxtaposition to the city as a process to a hopeful social configuration of ethical relations aided by the imagination, I demonstrate the relevance of Spinoza's thought in conceiving and philosophizing about the city. This includes its individuating principle, relational and affective capacities, and the notion of resilience as a double constitution of hope and fear, shaping our perception and imagination of the urban.

**Keywords:** Spinoza, imagination, persistence, resilience

Philosophy of the city as an emerging scholarship is abundant with concepts that can be interrogated and reinterpreted in order to establish new ways in thinking about the city. Philosophizing about the city means grasping it within the domain of concepts. On one hand, Johannes Mueller-Salo defines the concept of a city as a complex interplay of built structures, practices of culture and everyday actions.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Achilles Varzi notes that this complexity involves emerging properties that change how cities are defined but still remain evident enough for us to intimate ourselves with. As a city is continuously in flux, we can treat it as a process-like object.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by looking at a city from the level of concepts, we

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Mueller-Salo, "Three Ways of Doing Philosophy of the City," in *Philosophy of the City Journal*, 1:1 (2023), 19–30, <<https://doi.org/10.21827/potcj.1.1.40978>>.

<sup>2</sup> Achilles Varzi, "What is a City?," in *Topoi*, 40:2 (2021), 399–408, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-019-09647-4>>.

ascertain its metaphysical property: that it is processual, dynamic, and complex – yet maintain its familiarity for us to recognize, immerse, and engage with.

In this vein, I want to establish a philosophy of the city that is in close proximity to Spinoza by understanding the underpinnings of the philosopher's metaphysical doctrine. Through this, we can arrive at an understanding of the city as it is informed by the Dutch thinker. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I intend to draw, quite preliminarily, a Spinozist metaphysics of the city and its dynamism through a relational assessment of particular individuals that make up what we commonly identify as a city. Here, I argue that through Spinoza's relational ontology, we can understand the concept of a city as a particular social configuration of ethical relations. In this context, resilience emerges as a particular approach toward interpreting individuals, communities, and cities as they affectively oscillate between hope and fear – a distinct duality in the Spinozist sense in which we can appropriate it with the kind of imaginary that we ascribe to the urban.

This paper is divided into four parts: (1) *Relationality and Individuality* discusses Spinoza's philosophical tenets regarding his ontology of relations; (2) *The Individual and the City* talks about the relationship between an individual and the city, and how one informs and transforms the other; (3) *Resilience: Configuring Hopeful Imaginaries* situates the idea of urban resilience as a particular conative configuration of the Spinozan individual; and lastly (4) the *conclusion* summarizes the arguments and discussions with allusions to hope as a distinct characteristic of resiliency I made from the preceding discussions.

## Relationality and Individuality

Spinoza paints an intricate picture of an ecology of relations in his metaphysics of substance. However, this only surfaces and becomes quite explicit in the later part of his posthumous work, *Ethics*. Before arriving at a metaphysics of individuation and the relational individual, we first must, quite painstakingly, deal with his geometric exposition on the nature of god, mind, and the physics of emotions. As he seeks to overturn Cartesian dualism that favors the mind over the body, and posits the transcendence and immortality of the soul, he nonetheless established substance monism, that which he calls God or nature. By treating substance as “that which is conceived in and through itself” Spinoza posits an immanent ontology, as opposed to Descartes' transcendental principle.<sup>3</sup> As he states that “God is the immanent and not the transient cause of all things,” he further solidifies his

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. by Clare Carlisle, trans. by George Eliot (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 73.

position that everything is in God or nature as modifications of substance, seen in the attribute of thought and extension.<sup>4</sup>

This immanent ontology allows Spinoza to rethink how we view individuals as modes of the substance. Through the attributes, substance expresses itself. There are two moments here. First, the expression of substance in its attributes pertains to its essence. Second, attributes express themselves in turn through modifications (or modes) of their respective attribute.<sup>5</sup> The former establishes what he calls a “genealogy of the essence of substance,” while the latter explains the production of particular things. This manifests in Spinoza’s double constitution of substance as *natura naturans* (expression of itself prior to its implications) and *natura naturata* (production of modes as attributes express themselves). The matter of expression allows us to rethink Spinoza’s idea of substance.<sup>6</sup> By having the substance turn around modes at the second moment, modes in turn gain an ontological upper hand, a significance that puts individual things at the front, representing substance through the diversity of attributes (thought and extension). In turn, interpreting Spinoza in this way alleviates the danger of attributing pantheism to the philosopher by allowing for a more robust understanding of the power of the individual.<sup>7</sup>

The focus on the individual precipitated by Spinoza’s principles of substance monism gave way for a turn on contemporary understanding to engage more on the modes as expression rather than merely seen as static and passive products of substance. As Spinoza understands individuals or particular things as “modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a certain and determinate manner,” it lends itself into a complex web of relations.<sup>8</sup> Lee Rice explains that “it is the relation among its parts, and not the parts themselves, upon which Spinoza fixes in order to characterize an individual.”<sup>9</sup> This is not without controversies, of course. For example, he brings up criticisms aimed at Spinoza’s idea of the individual not being an agent because of the exclusion of freewill in his system, and that an individual’s existence is dependent upon an infinite chain of causes—the former looking at an inherent characteristic of a human individual while the latter accounts for a temporal regressive analysis of production of individual

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Jayson Jimenez, “Expressionism, Univocity, and Sense: Rethinking Deleuze’s Spinoza,” in *Cosmos & History*, 18:1 (2022), 331–354, <<https://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/996>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 95.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Rice, “Spinoza on Individuation,” in *The Monist*, 55:4 (1971), 640–659, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27902233>>.

things. These are valid criticisms aimed towards Spinoza. As the philosopher himself does not allow contingency in his system, the question of freewill and agency of a human individual would surface, leaving the question concerning human actions in the hands of necessity. This has been the theme among some of the controversies in relation to Spinozism. Another example I would like to mention is that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi accused Gotthold Ephraim Lessing of his inclination to Spinoza where the former argues that Spinozism, or any rationally obtained philosophical principles for that matter, lead to fatalism and atheism.<sup>10</sup> But, as I would further argue, necessity in Spinoza's system is hinged on substance as *natura naturans*, or God or nature's free expression and *natura naturata*, or particular modes as the expression of the attributes of substance which in turn demonstrates emphasis on the relational aspect of his ontology provides a richer understanding of an individual as a mode in relation to others. By highlighting this, we would be able to give particular attention to an individual as the locus of action, where the parallelism of thought and extension as attributes of substance allows for the connection of relations between individuals.

Relationality is the principle which holds that every individual continuously shapes, informs, and transforms every other individual through an affective process of determination. Although Spinoza himself has little to say about relations, he nonetheless expresses a relational account of metaphysics to which his physics of emotions, the tenets of the free individual, and the establishment of the city is based upon.<sup>11</sup> Here, it is important to note the philosopher's employment of the term *affect*. He defines it as "those affections of the body by which its power of acting is increased or diminished."<sup>12</sup> Emphasized here is the capacity of bodies to configure other bodies in a continuous relationship with it. By recognizing how a body is affected, we can specify the determinations it undergoes. This means that to think of the Spinozan individual means to think of the individual in relation to the whole. We must analyze the workings of the relations between individuals and what constitutes them. This is what Juliana Merçon identifies as an individual in the Spinozist sense: not as self-contained, but as relational. Therefore, an individual as a mode indicates an opening.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Myriam Bienenstock, "The Pantheism Controversy in the 1780s," in *Oxford History of Modern German Theology*, ed. by Kaplan Grant and Kevin Vander Schel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 221–238.

<sup>11</sup> Zachary Gartenberg, "Spinoza on Relations," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. by Yitzak Melamed (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 179–188.

<sup>12</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 163.

<sup>13</sup> Juliana Merçon, "Relationality and Individuality in Spinoza," in *Revista Conatus: Filosofia de Spinoza*, 1:2 (2007), 51–59, <<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4016348>>.

In one of his letters, Spinoza associates our perception of individuality similar to a worm in a vein.<sup>14</sup> When we are unaware of our relation to other entities in the bloodstream, or to the human body at large, we commit the mistake of thinking of ourselves as individuals that are self-contained and independent. This kind of thinking is inadequate as he warns us that “men suppose themselves free because they are conscious of their volitions and appetites, and do not even dream of the causes by which they are disposed to desire and will, because of these they are ignorant.”<sup>15</sup> In this expression, we are encouraged to pay attention not only to ourselves and particular individuals in order to know the nature or essence of things, but also to the relations that invite us to acknowledge this challenge. Here, as Aurelia Armstrong argues, Spinoza’s rejection of autonomy that is dependent upon an idea of an isolated individual informs us that we should not look at an individual in isolationist terms that divorces us from the network of relations in which we are situated.<sup>16</sup>

In the context of an ontology of relations, we are taken to a renewed concept of the individual. In this sense, there are no subjects nor objects. Nor are there humans and non-humans, only individuals. Vittorio Morfino puts it this way: that “the individual is a relation between an outside and an inside paradoxically constituted by this very relation.”<sup>17</sup> Or, as Spinoza reminds us, there are no teleological determinations that are bequeathed upon human individuals. This relational principle brings us to an understanding of the complex web of ecology of relations to a recognition of sociability in terms of a social configuration of ethical relations. Constitutive to this is the space between individuals that allows for a collective life and striving.<sup>18</sup> As I will discuss in the next section, and in close proximity to Spinoza’s philosophy, the city as a dynamic process of various configurations presents this particular arrangement. By juxtaposing the individual to the city and vice versa, we can pin down how one informs and transforms the other in forming the “the urban,” both as a concept and as a material reality in all its complexities, modes, and configurations.

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<sup>14</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, “Letter 32, to Oldenburg,” in *Spinoza Collected Works*, ed. & trans. by Edwin Curley (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Aurelia Armstrong, “Autonomy and the Relational Individual,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, ed. by Moira Gatens (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 43–63.

<sup>17</sup> Vittorio Morfino, “Spinoza: An Ontology of Relation?,” in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 27:1 (2006), 103–127, <<https://doi.org/10.5840/gfpj200627115>>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Individual and the City

Here, I present the city in contradistinction to the individual. From a metaphysical point of view, the former is fundamentally what Steven Barbone calls a quasi-individual, devoid of essence where it can establish itself as a real category of the latter.<sup>19</sup> However, essentialism in this sense would be counterproductive. It is in the nature of cities, as a dynamic process, to change. Cities change, and their identity is not established as it affects an individual in a particular manner. In this, we see a parallel in Spinoza's line of argument that a single individual is capable of affecting us in many ways.<sup>20</sup> Considering this thought, we are presented with a paradox. As Ramoneda and Kochhar-Lindgren argue: the identity of a city is its non-identity.<sup>21</sup> Whenever we refer to a particular city, such as Manila, we attach not only its physical, sociological, psychological, and political characteristics, but also its metaphysical properties, to what makes it a city. Hence, at the level of the concept, cities demonstrate a resistance towards a particular definition that hints at an identity that shortchanges the multiplicity of its constitution. It is in this sense where Henri Lefebvre warns us that in terms of thinking the city as an absolute identity, we reduce and extrapolate it in simplistic terms.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Anna Bloom-Christen articulates that in order to know a city, we must also understand its social capacity besides its material and spatial reality.<sup>23</sup> Consider Manila again. Beyond its narrow roads, winding rivers, and historical landmarks, it is a city that has undergone significant changes. Beyond its borders, the city invites us to delve deeper into its complexities and variations not only spatiotemporally, but also our conception of it, and how it is denoted in both experience and thought. These, as Varzi concludes, are the enthralling elements that are present when we philosophize about the city as a process-like dynamism.<sup>24</sup> Building on this idea, I would like to add a Spinozist twist to this dynamic by incorporating a naturalized view of the

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<sup>19</sup> Steven Barbone, "What counts as an Individual for Spinoza?," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. by Olli Koistinen and John Ivan Biro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89–112.

<sup>20</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Josep Ramoneda, "A philosophical idea of the city," transcript of lecture at Yale University (2003), <<https://www.publicspace.org/multimedia/-/post/a-philosophical-idea-of-the-city>>. Also see Gray Kochhar-Lindgren, *Urban Arabesques: Philosophy, Hong Kong, Transversality* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Lefebvre, "Philosophy of the City and Planning Ideology" in *Philosophy and the City: Classic to Contemporary Writings*, ed. by Sharon Meagher (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 136–139.

<sup>23</sup> Anna Bloom-Christen, "Knowing the City," in *Philosophy of the City Journal*, 1:1 (2023), 1–9, <<https://doi.org/10.21827/potcj.1.1.40776>>

<sup>24</sup> Varzi, "What is a City?"

human individual and integrating it with our conceptualization of this dynamism.

We can trace the genesis of the concept of a city in Spinoza's *Ethics* as a form of sociability.<sup>25</sup> This particular point in his work is where the philosopher derives, through a form or semblance of social contract, how a state is configured from mutual interests of individuals occupying a particular place, informing how we understand a community. He writes: "the good which everyone who desires virtue follows for himself, he desires for all human beings, and the more, in proportion as he has greater knowledge of God."<sup>26</sup> As he proceeds to demonstrate this further, he ascertains that, following his notion of striving to persevere or *conatus* in relation to the civilized man in a city, "they give up their natural right and give mutual security that they will not do anything to each other's injury."<sup>27</sup> Here, there is a sense of belongingness that one is expected to act in a certain manner in order to contribute to the flourishing of a community. This understanding of the *State*, however rudimentary it could be based on Spinoza's definition, may be translated into our contemporary idea of the city: as a process-like dynamism that is based on human beings' natural drive to persist and strive towards what they deem as good, determined by the relations that affect them. What makes a 'good' city' is how it affects its citizens positively – or in Spinoza's words – joyfully, by increasing their power and capacity to act. Conversely, a 'bad' city brings about sadness, restraining one's power of acting. Here, Spinoza signals the affective relational capacity of the city as it informs and transforms the citizen in its affective and rational dimensions.

Etienne Balibar sees a double constitution in this configuration. He refers to Spinoza's whole philosophical project with an objective of composing various modes of communication which utilizes affects and rationalization.<sup>28</sup> In other words, Spinoza's interconnected model of

<sup>25</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 4, Proposition 37.

<sup>26</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 251.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Spinoza refers to natural right as "the very laws or rules of nature, in accordance with which everything takes place, in other words, the power of nature itself." See Spinoza, "Political Treatise" in *Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes. One of the most important aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics is his concept of *conatus* or persistence. In e3p6, he articulates it as the essence by which every individual thing maintains its own existence. In relation to Spinoza's naturalized view of the human individual, there are no particular ends assigned to them at an ontological level. They are seen as modes of the substance expressed through certain attributes such as thought and extension. Therefore, good and evil only arises based on how a particular individual relates to a particular thing, as affection. These affections affect an individual on two levels: experience (which informs imagination) and reason.

<sup>28</sup> Etienne Balibar, "Philosophies of the Transindividual: Spinoza, Marx, Freud," in *Australasian Philosophical Review*, 2:1 (2018), 5–25, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/24740500.2018.1514958>>.

substance metaphysics influences individuals both at the level of affective constitution and the dictates of reason. Here, Balibar introduces his understanding of the Spinozan *transindividual*, which, borrowing the term from Gilbert Simondon, is inherently relational, and where it is through the emphasis of relations that we can understand movements, activities, and motivations of an individual. It is in this argument where he rejoins Gilles Deleuze; that it is in the “capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, an individual’s singularity cannot be isolated from a network of relations with others. This is the transition where Spinoza articulates the city as a form of social configuration of ethical relations. For him, it is through the common notion of benefit as the reason that we form a state, or in this case, a city, in order to enjoy mutual harmony, preserve, and advance the interest of individuals. It is through the relations of individuals, and not individuals themselves, that allow us to form a city that protects us from harm by instituting laws, building infrastructures, inventing and maintaining cultural practices, and forming economies.

The formation of a city is an affective rationalization as a collective form of love and enjoyment. Here, reason takes on a mimetic activity. As affectivity is at all times present in a sociability, it becomes the primary mode by which reason imitates, through politics, the constitution of a community.<sup>30</sup> As Spinoza demonstrates further, “the good which everyone who follows virtue desires for himself, he will desire for all human beings.” This mimetic dimension in Spinoza’s proto-political philosophy begins with the affective state of individuals that make them produce a community of mutuality. In this sense, as Thomas Minguy states, politics forms citizens as it is in the community of rational human beings to imitate affective states that give joy and reduce such that bring about sadness.

In a similar vein, Alexandre Matheron presents an understanding that implicates Spinoza’s requirement of a city. Still referring to the particular passage presented above (*Ethics* 4, Proposition 37), he exposes Spinoza’s implicit demand of forming a political society (i.e., a city) where human individuals can achieve three requirements: (1) that they could peacefully enjoy the pleasures of the senses; (2) that they live in economic comfort; and (3) that they spread honors (democracy and institutionalization of the people’s welfare and interests).<sup>31</sup> These underpin an implication that in order

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<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 123.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Minguy, “The Desiring Constitutions of Community: A two-fold reading of Spinoza’s social philosophy in the *Ethics*,” in *Journal of Spinoza Studies*, 2:1 (2023), 64–82, <<https://doi.org/10.21827/jss.2.1.38195>>.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandre Matheron, *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza: Essays by Alexandre Matheron*, ed. by Filippo Del Lucchese, David Maruzzella and Gil Morejon, trans. by David Maruzzella and Gil Morejon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 115.

for human beings to live harmoniously, they must reside in a society, where a political unit such as a city exhibits the multiplicative power greater than that of the single, isolated individual. This political society, for Spinoza, functions only as a pure and simple operational model, which, as Matheron states, is only projected ontologically, since in the Spinozan model of human nature, there is no such end or goal for an individual, only desires.<sup>32</sup> Antonio Negri unveils this ontological projection as an ethical surplus which penetrates into the individual's field of subjectivation and politics. The process by which one's will, translated in consciousness as desire, transforms this ontological surplus into a particular individual orientation wherein the power of passions becomes demonstrated at the ontological level.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Spinoza's passage "nothing is more useful to man than man" tells us less about the mechanical utility of individuals, but more about his concept of the multitude, enriched with the notion of transindividuality at the heart of his substance monism.<sup>34</sup> The idea behind the multitude in Spinoza is not an organic one. Negri affirms that there is no multitude in nature. It is, ontologically speaking, the tendency of individuals to form a politics based on encounters.<sup>35</sup> As a particular mode of thought of a collective which projects a social configuration of relations, a multitude is one that is constitutive of the dynamism and optimism of reason, and classifying such configuration as a city properly fits this denotation. Through reason's ontological scheme, it produces a common society or a city, where its power lies on its generative ability in creating laws and maintaining rights of an individual.

Going further, in understanding the philosopher's notion of right, we must understand it simply as power. As Spinoza states, "the right of the individual is co-extensive with its determinate power."<sup>36</sup> The idea of right as power is coherent with the philosopher's *conatus* doctrine. That is, through an individual's persistence that continuously defines and redefines its individuation, it strives to exist in a community. Here, resilience emerges as a particular orientation of an individual in its inclination to persist, transforming into right or power as it participates in a social configuration of ethical relations known as the city. With the aid of imagination as it is informed by the various experiences of the individual complemented by its rational thought, hope becomes the object by which an individual strives, thereby becoming resilient in the process. In the next section, I show the

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>33</sup> Antonio Negri, "Spinoza, Necessity and Freedom," in *Spinoza: Then and Now*, trans. by Ed Emery (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 72–87.

<sup>34</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 240.

<sup>35</sup> Negri, "Concerning the Concept of Multitude," in *Spinoza: Then and Now*, 47–58.

<sup>36</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. by Jonathan Israel, trans. by Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 196.

plasticity of the concept of resilience and how it becomes a way in which the imagination (in Spinozan terms) utilizes it as a form of persistence.

### Resilience: Configuring Hopeful Imaginaries

We can see traces of persistence in the previous discussions regarding the city as a conglomeration of transindividuals in multitude. It is in this light where we can make sense of Spinoza's *conatus* principle as the driving force which accommodates complexities and conflicts in terms of thinking the urban. For Iris Marion Young, it is in urbanity where we presuppose and define our relationship with the material surroundings, structures, and other individuals in our immediate consciousness.<sup>37</sup> City dwellers are not necessarily identical in a sense that they all possess the same philosophical, political, economic, and social identities. So, apart from looking at a city as a single, static, monolithic thing, we must also understand its complexities through its processual and personal affective capacities. Here, Caroline Williams asserts that we can use Spinoza's *conatus* principle as a device in thinking a way out of this reductionist approach. By thinking of *conatus* as that which is beyond the individual and into the relations among them as a field of forces that enables the production of subjectivity and materiality, it exhibits the various asymmetrical modes of existence by which an individual thing participates in a particular field.<sup>38</sup> This understanding of Spinoza's *conatus* in terms of participatory politics allows for a continuous construction and reconstruction of individuals in a particular scene we refer to – in this case, a city.

Imagination is an aspect that informs an individual's *conatus* or persistence to exist. Beginning from the level of experience, it forms and produces ideas which are neither true nor false. What makes imagination closely tied to an individual's mode of persistence is that it directly involves the way in which an individual perceives, for example, its urban reality. Here, representations matter. Moira Gatens argues that Spinozistic imagination in close proximity to political, institutional, and social narratives helps us to understand the way in which a human individual becomes immersed in a particular affective constitution, where it regards signs, symbols, images, and representations as constructive of its own persistence, or *conatus*. Here, the interplay between imagination and an individual's conative inclination becomes explicit, helping us to appropriate it in the perspective of resilience

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<sup>37</sup> Iris Marion Young, "City Life as a Normative Ideal," in *Philosophy and the City: Classic to Contemporary Writings*, 163–174.

<sup>38</sup> Caroline Williams, "Unravelling the subject with Spinoza: Towards a Morphological Analysis of the Scene of Subjectivity," in *Contemporary Political Theory*, 16 (2017), 342–362, <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-016-0063-1>>.

as a form of persistence in the context of the urban imaginary. Ultimately, I argue that resilience is one of the conative configurations of an individual in terms of thinking and traversing the city.

Resilience, according to Kevin Grove, is an infinitely elastic concept.<sup>39</sup> As an object of research, it presents itself in multiple ways. For example, it is seen by Fridolin Simon Brand and Kurt Jax not only as a descriptive concept that represents various facets of reality, but also as a normative one that dictates human-environmental relations. For Ben Anderson, we use the term resiliency as a blanket to avoid specificities when we use it as ideology, governmental rationality, or a metaphor in characterizing teleological ends as normative ideals. It can also be used as a tool for maintaining political and economic status quo, according to Coaffee and Rogers. While, as Folke and Wilson maintain, it can advocate for a transformative social and political change. All these examples, however, imply normative commitments and ethical demands.<sup>40</sup>

As a site of contestation, resilience, in essence, is a contested concept. These are concepts that not only have multiple, often disconnected and contradictory meanings, but are also loaded with contested normative implications that reflect social realities. Hence, resilience is among one of the many configurations in which an individual is oriented to. As a response to the insecurities and uncertainties we experience, such as the climate crisis and the wider implications of the Anthropocene, economic instability of the world market, transport crisis, housing crisis, to name a few, resilience refers to the particularities of our responses to these experiences, as they sometimes overlap with each other pertaining to their interconnectedness in some ways, all the while maintaining their own, as particular phenomena with underlying implications they also produce.<sup>41</sup> In this context, urban resilience is one of the characteristics most cities and citizens of the world must take up, in order to persist and keep their mode of sociability as a community of mutual security, belongingness, and flourishing.

Underneath the narratives of resilience, we are always faced with two affections: of hope and fear. For Spinoza, hope is the “inconstant pleasure arising from [the idea of] a past or future thing, concerning the issue of which we are doubtful”.<sup>42</sup> This is in contrast to fear, as it is pain instead of pleasure that arises from the same fact. This double constitution of the same affective compound alludes to the idea that there is no hope without fear, and fear without hope.<sup>43</sup> Such interplay between hope and fear, pleasure and pain

<sup>39</sup> Kevin Grove, *Resilience* (London: Routledge, 2018), 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, 212.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

from the idea of a past or a future, situated into the context of resilience, involves a particularity when it comes to understanding ourselves in the midst of insecurities and uncertainties that we face. Most importantly, through collective imaginings, we may utilize this affective compound into informing a powerful politics that performs actions that bring about transformative change.<sup>44</sup>

In relation to the urban reality that we face today, configuring resilient cities mean that there is a level of anticipation when it comes to the challenges and conflicts that they may face in the future, based on past experience. Anticipation helps us, to make sense of what the future brings. On the one hand, hope fuels resilience in such a way that there is an anticipation of a future that may bring pleasure, or that which increases our power of acting. On the other hand, fear informs resilience by reminding us that there is a need to overcome the pain that we may experience in the future. So, resiliency as a concept involves a hopeful way of looking forward in relation to the fear of the past that brought harm, in order to determine a future that minimizes pain in our persistence in achieving joyful configuration of ethical relations. In this double bind, or the dual nature of resilience, there is a need to employ different strategies and methods: scientific, economic, political, social, and philosophical. Becoming resilient requires that we look not only at the infrastructure and economy of the city, but also the perception and capacities of the citizens. In this way, configuring hopeful imaginaries in the urban means actively understanding and reevaluating the way in which we view ourselves in relation not only to our immediate environment in the city, but the whole ecology to which we are situated in, and more importantly – how our actions inform and transform ourselves and our communities.

## Conclusion

As a way of concluding this paper, I will summarize the points I made in this particular study. First, I elaborated Spinoza's philosophical principles on relationality and individuality. This demonstrates an understanding of the individual based on how it is related to others. Ultimately allowing us to reinterpret the involvement of individuals in an ecology of relations. Second, intimating Spinoza's dynamic ecology of relations to a conceptual understanding of the city as dynamic and processual provides us a renewed perspective that exhibits the philosopher's relational ontology as a social configuration of ethical relations. Lastly, through

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<sup>44</sup> Moira Gatens, et al., "Spinoza: thoughts on hope in our political present," in *Contemporary Political Theory*, 20:1 (2021), 200–231, <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-020-00406-4>>.

persistence, such configurations are determined and maintained by their persistence to exist, this is where the contemporary notion of resilience becomes relevant as it is between the dual nature of resilience to oscillate between hope and fear.

It is through these arguments that I, at least preliminarily, address how resilience as an affective configuration with a double aspect of hope and fear that we can begin to recognize the contemporary urban condition. As we reorient ourselves towards an understanding of the immanent processes of our urban reality, we understand the relational properties among individuals as they affect, inform, and transform one another. Through Spinoza's philosophy, we can treat the contemporary urban condition as a way of finding the balance and relations between the individual and the city as they both navigate the challenges and risks that threaten their persistence and striving for joyful existence.

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2. Kritike is a refereed journal and follows a double-blind review policy, which means that the identities of both the author and the referee are concealed during the review process. As such, please make sure that your manuscript is prepared for blind review, meaning your name and institutional affiliation should not appear in the body of your manuscript. If you cited your own previous work(s) in the article, delete your name from the citation(s).
3. We recommend that, at the first instance, you use our prescribed citation style: Click here to visit the journal's style guide page (<https://www.kritike.org/kritike-style-guide.html>).

4. Submit your text in 2.0 line spacing with 12 points font size. Quotations exceeding four lines should be indented and single-spaced.
5. Save your paper as either a Rich Text Format file (\*.rtf) or a Microsoft Word document (\*.doc or \*.docx).
6. Submit your paper as an email attachment to **submissions.kritike@gmail.com** with the following required information and additional attachment:
  - Complete name: Surname, first name, and middle initial
  - Institutional affiliation (e.g., Department of Philosophy, University of Santo Tomas, Philippines)
  - Official email address (preferably your institutional email address)
  - Title of your submission
  - 200-word abstract in English with at least 4 keywords
  - Attach your updated curriculum vitae
7. By sending us your submission, you agree to be bound to the Terms and Conditions stated in the journal's Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement (<https://www.kritike.org/copyright-and-ethics.html>).

**NB: We will only honor unsolicited submissions with complete information and attachments. Thank you.**

# Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement

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The Editorial Board ensures that manuscripts are prepared for blind peer-review. It is the responsibility of the Editorial Board to accept, reject, or recommend a manuscript for revision and resubmission. Such decision is based, to a large extent, on the recommendations of nominated experts who act as referees. It is the responsibility of the Editorial Board to inform an author about the status of his/her submission, regardless of the decision. The Editorial Board may choose to reject a paper that violates legal provisions on libel, copyrights, and originality (plagiarism). Information regarding a manuscript under review must remain confidential until it is finally accepted for publication. The Editorial Board does not necessarily endorse the views expressed in the articles published in the journal. **As an Open Access journal in the Gold category, KRITIKE does not charge any fees to complete the publication process. No charges are levied against the authors or users for submission or article processing.**

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