

Article

Immunology in the 'City Interior': Questioning Resiliency in Everyday Life¹

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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)."² 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

¹ 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.

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

living in cities.³ 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”⁴ – 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,⁵ 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.⁶

³ 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>>.

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

⁵ 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/>>.

⁶ 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.'⁷

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

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

⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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

⁸ 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.

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

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

¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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).¹⁴ 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

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

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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

¹⁵ See Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 25.

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

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

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

¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ 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

²⁰ Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20th Century?*, 27.

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

²² See Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, 141.

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

of any social, political, or economic situations.²⁴ 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."²⁵ 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.²⁶ One may draw parallels between

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

²⁵ Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, 142.

²⁶ 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.”²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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

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

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

²⁸ See *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁹ *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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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

³⁰ 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.

³¹ 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.³² 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."³³ What this experience manifests is the pathological element of a neoliberal city's design, rooted in how thoroughfares are falsely equated to economic pulsation.³⁴ 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

³² 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>>.

³³ 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/>>.

³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ We are thus left with a crucial

³⁵ 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>>.

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ 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 2024.³⁸ Perhaps, the problem arises not from outside but from within the city, within the individuals who swing like a pendulum between indifference and fear.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ This tension of upper and lower, or

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).

³⁸ 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>>.

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

⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.

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>.

⁴¹ 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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