

**Violent Spaces:
The Necessity of Alterity for the City**

by
Jordan Browning, B.A. (Hons)

**School of Philosophy and Religious Studies Programme,
University of Canterbury**

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Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
Introduction	3
1.....Babel: The Beginning of Beginnings	
Enoch and Babel	11
Necessity for Translation	21
City as Text	26
Le Corbusier's Violence against the <i>Saeculum</i>	29
Intermezzo: "The City Coat of Arms"	35
2.....Kierkegaard, Culture, and the Messianic Violence of Potentiality	
Culture(s)	38
Kierkegaard, Banksy, and the Messianic Potential of Religiousness B	40
Silence and the Possibilities of Potentiality without Relation to Being	51
Violence, Exile, and Architecture of Disjunction	57
Mythical, Divine, and Meaningless Violence	61
Intermezzo: "House of Asterion"	65
3.....The Suburb and the City-Centre	
The Importance of the Suburb and City-Centre Dialectic	69
The Necessity of Community and its Incompletion	76
<i>Homo Sacer</i> and the Structure of the Camp	77

Secular Cities	84
Intermezzo: <i>Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny</i>	91
4.....The Neighbour and Other Strangers	
Living with Difference	96
The Limits of Empathy	101
Justice and Suffering	104
Conclusion	113
Bibliography	121

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Abstract

The city is a complex space, comprised of a multitude of cultures, languages, and influences that interact, clash, and communicate, resulting in a space of dynamic violence. It is through this violent interaction of different forces that the city attains its potential as a space offering hope and opportunity. Such fragmentary and rapidly changing influences do, however, present problems for the investigation and interpretation of the city, in that conclusions seem only fleeting and provisional. For this reason, it is important to write towards a universal hope for the city; a hope that can never truly apply in practice, but nonetheless extends an inextinguishable hermeneutical possibility to all cities.

In the Western, Judeo-Christian framework, the intersection of universalism, hermeneutics, and the city begins with the collapse of the Tower of Babel. Through violent rupture, humanity's differences are revealed and thus a Fall into a schema of translation occurs, where humanity must exist side-by-side with each *other* in the absence of divine presence. Subsequently, cities are necessarily diverse and violent, for it is alterity that allows for cities to contain hope for something other than what is.

To prevent the city from becoming totalitarian and without hope, alterity must be consciously maintained in both the physical environments of the suburb and the city-centre, and in the idea of the city: what the city could be. Achieving alterity in the suburb and city-centre requires hospitality toward the other, an openness to the other that coincides with a schema of justice. The maintenance of alterity in the idea of the city requires a messianic conception of hope that cannot be called forth, and remains perpetually as a possibility that is no possibility, violently rupturing all claims of completion in the present. With the extension of hospitality and justice, combined with the conscious maintenance of alterity, the violence inherent in the interaction of different forces in the city is put to its most positive and regenerative applications.

Introduction

“The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an esthetic symbol of collective unity. On one hand it is a physical frame for the commonplace domestic and economic activities; on the other, it is a consciously dramatic setting for the more significant actions and the more sublimated urges of a human culture. The city fosters art and *is* art; the city creates theater and is the theater. It is in the city, the city as theater that man’s more purposive activities are formulated and worked out, through conflicting and co-operating personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations.”

Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*.¹

“This city never allowed itself to decay or degrade. It’s wildly, intensely growing. It’s a loud bright stinking mess. It takes strength from its thousands of cultures and the thousands more that grow anew each day. It isn’t perfect. It lies and cheats. It’s no utopia and it ain’t the mountain by a long shot—but it’s alive. I can’t argue that.”

Warren Ellis, *Transmetropolitan*.²

When one approaches the topic of the city, they quickly encounter the question of what exactly is meant by the term “city?” You almost certainly know when you are within a city, and you can be relatively certain as to when you are viewing a city - large structures and high population density are obvious indicators - but where does this certainty end? Where does the border of any particular city extend to? Outside of the city-planner’s drawing board, the city’s physical borders tend to be subjective, fluid, fragmentary, and prone to change. Approached from the statistical perspective of census data, the city can be defined by a particular population threshold, but this is rarely a satisfying gauge able to be applied universally. What is statistically termed a city here in New Zealand, 50,000 people, may not compare in terms of diversity, structure, or economic possibility to a settlement of 50,000 in Western Europe, and may not be regarded as a city.³ This is why such a definition is unsatisfying, and yet it remains important to arrive at least at a provisional definition of the city, so that discussions and conclusions may extend beyond a particularly closed milieu. From this definition it will be possible to engage with, and perhaps beyond, a Western context that arises out of relatively cohesive roots, such as Judeo-Christianity, the Enlightenment, and the continuation of Western capitalism. Once this definition has been broadly outlined, it can be used as a base

¹ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York, 1970), p. 480.

² Warren Ellis, “Summer of the Year”, *Transmetropolitan*, Vol. 1 (1997), p. 17.

³ In New Zealand, “[a] city, as defined in the Local Government Act 1974, must have a minimum population of 50,000, be predominantly urban in character, be a distinct entity and a major centre within the region.” <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census-information-about-data/2006-definitions-questionnaires/definitions/geographic-definitions.htm>.

from which to investigate the centrally important necessities of alterity and violence in the city, all the while the definition itself should be open to hermeneutics and necessarily be provisional.

In an attempt to provide a somewhat universal definition of the city, Max Weber writes: “[t]he many definitions of the city share the commonality of separate yet closely spaced dwellings.”⁴ This surely is the broadest of definitions, but within its simplicity are the key ingredients available to be extrapolated into a far more comprehensive expression. In the act of synthesising the definitions of the city, Weber correctly identifies the possibility of commonality between cities, thus providing a hope that as expressions, cities may be universal, and can potentially be experienced as such. Universalism is important for the city, both as physical structure and as idea, because it indicates freedom, the opportunity for all to enter the city and be able to share in the diverse, hopeful, and rupturing experience. However, universalism in practice does indicate totalitarian violence as it precludes alterity that is necessary for the functioning of a diverse city, which is why universalism should always be a negotiated offer rather than a concrete reality. Alterity must be carefully fostered in the city, because it is alterity that gives the city hope for that which is other to what is, a futurity. What is central is that the hope that is alterity must not be able to be expended or called-forth into being and thus lose its function as alterity, and so it must remain as a potentiality without the possibility of application. Cities are diverse spaces imbued with hope and have a centrifugal effect of bringing humanity into close proximity; as Robert Neuwirth writes: “[e]very day, close to two hundred thousand people leave their homes in rural regions and move to the cities.”⁵ This is what gives the city its universal quality: the possibility of hope and the freedom with which all people may enter the city and engage with each other in the understanding that the hope cannot be called-forth and extinguished. If the city remains as a city and extends the offer of hope and inclusion to all, it will be a space filled with opportunity and exchange, in which the maintenance of alterity guarantees that the temporal will never be ultimate and everything remains open to hermeneutics.

⁴ Max Weber, “The Nature of the City”, in, *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, Richard Sennett, ed. (New York, 1969), p. 23.

⁵ Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World* (New York and London, 2005), p. 9.

As Weber suggests, the city is made up of closely spaced dwellings, the creative products of humanity: *techne*. As *techne*, cities are culture, reflect culture, and contain culture; they are solely human creations built in the absence of presence. God is necessarily absent from the city, because the presence of God would deny humanity's full possibilities of creation and interpretation. Cities are not sacred spaces because this would indicate stasis and presence, places predicated on a particular interpretation, demanding a particular range of responses, whereas cities are dynamic, violent, and uncertain. To claim that a city is sacred is to prevent a city from functioning as a city, through the extrapolation of a particular idea of the sacred into the idea of the city, thus calling-forth alterity and extinguishing it in the temporal. Sacred spaces are exclusionary in the particular demands they place on reaction and interpretation, and so for the city to be free, it must not be sacred, nor can public expressions of the sacred be allowed to be elevated beyond the gaze of hermeneutics. The city is the place humanity builds to interact in without the certainty of presence and without the sacred, to engage with fellow humanity and to invite the other to enter into an exchange. As *techne*, provisional structures created by humanity, cities are always hermeneutical, uncertain in the sense of constantly negotiated provisionality; this is both a defining feature of the city and its most positive attribute. The city should always be a structure that contains the possibility of defying totalitarian expressions.

Contained within Weber's phrase, "separate yet closely spaced dwellings", is a key dialectic for the city: autonomy against community. The individual in the *techne* of the city is surrounded by humanity in close proximity, and with this comes the opportunity for community. However, the intense concentration of humanity in a space can be overwhelming, and it may provide the individual with a sense of alienation and impersonality. Upon entering the city, the individual may feel there is no community at all, as the violent pace of the city continues potentially oblivious to the individual's presence. The anonymity and alienation that one might experience in the city is not necessarily negative, it can emancipate the individual of old bonds, imbuing one with the characteristics of an exile, free to create a personal identity and remake oneself. This is the dialectic of city-life, the opportunity for community balanced against the opportunity to be anonymous. It is predominantly in the city that the balance between anonymity and community can be best achieved, because beyond the city experience tends to be polarised between complete anonymity and the overwhelming, claustrophobic surveillance of the close-knit community. A loose definition of the city can be, therefore, that they are spatial manifestations of a hope

for open, free, universalism that cannot be called-forth and extinguished; they are *techne*, humanity's manifestations of and as hermeneutics; and they contain a dialectic between autonomy and community.

Upon reaching a rather broad working definition of the city, it becomes important to contextualise the place of violence within this definition of the city. The term violence is associated with many negative connotations, including: the domination of another, a particularly unpleasant shock, the causation of suffering in another, extending to the taking of a life. These aspects should always remain within the discussion of violence, for paring them away would be an act of negative violence in itself, clouding the true possible impact of violence. There are positive aspects, however, as violence is a vital and dynamic force, changing individuals and the environment that surrounds them in ways that are not necessarily negative. Indeed, it is violence that adds the dynamic quality to the city and enables the hope of rapid change, upward mobility, and the possibility of remaking oneself. Due to its cosmopolitan, rapidly changing environment based on interaction, the city is an inherently violent milieu; it is unavoidably violent and this should not be flinched away from, nor should it be denied. The necessary step regarding violence in the city is to find ways in which to maximise the positive expressions of violence (and there are many), and reduce the negative expressions of violence. Of course, neither extreme of positive or negative can be reached in exclusion of the other, for they are antonymic subsets within the term, unable to be separated.

Violence arises in the interaction of two or more subjects or objects, so it is indelibly linked with communication. Whenever one interacts with another there is some level of violence involved, with the other disrupting interiority, introducing another set of needs, and the exigencies of translation. This is a positive function preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the anonymity of the city; the other is allowed for, and through this their violent alterity ruptures the inwardness of the lone individual. It is the responsibility of the individual to undertake this act of translation, this rupturing of both the self and the other, because the mere presence of the other, whilst disruptive and potentially violent, does not call or summon the individual forth to responsibility for the other. To engage violence in its most positive manifestations, the individual interacts with the other through the hermeneutics of translation: the attempt to understand the subjective other that can never be fully understood. The negligence of translation, with its inherent yet mostly positive violence, can lead to the

denial of alterity, whether through the objectifying ignorance of the other as fellow subjective other, by the radical attempt to overcome alterity through physical violence, or the retreat from the other into the solitude of interiority. For the city to remain as positive a space as possible the potential for violence should not be fled from; rather it should be approached knowingly, investigated and engaged with via the hermeneutics of translation and hospitality toward the other.

In engaging with and via these broad definitions of the city and violence, no particular city should be taken as the singularly universal and complete representation of the city, because this would preclude the possibility of alterity necessary for the maintenance of hope. Just as no singular should be vaunted as an ultimate expression of the city, no individual should approach their city life as complete or secure; one should never be totally 'at home' in the city. In order for the positive functions of violence (change, hope, dialogue, translation) to occur, one should adopt an approach to city-life similar to that of Christians as described by Nicholas Berdyaev:

“A Christian has no city – he is in quest of the City of God, which can never be the city of “this world”; whenever an earthly city is mistaken for the New Jerusalem, Christians cease to be pilgrims and the bourgeois spirit reigns supreme.”⁶

This approach should not be limited to the Christian community, and in fact, it should be secularised and embraced as the maxim for cosmopolitan city-life. Recognition is required that the city is a polyglot that is under the conditions of constant violent change and as such one cannot have “a city”; one cannot be attached to a singularity, because that would deny the real structure of the city. Hope may not necessarily be for the City of God, it can simply be for alterity at its most refined, a messianic hope for something other than what is, that cannot be called-forth from the temporal. Being that no particular city should be vaunted as complete and no individual can ever truly be home in the city, it is important to investigate cities in ways that speak towards a universal, whilst knowing the universal can never really be so.

Knowing that no one can ever truly be home in the liberating violence of the free city, there remains a desire for some stability within the bounds of the city, thus the dialectic of the suburb and the city-centre arises. This is an essential facet of the city, with the need for security balanced against the need for change, hope and vitality. The relationship between these spaces can be positive when the suburb maintains its links with the city-centre and

⁶ Nicholas Berdyaev, “The Bourgeois Spirit”, in, *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays* (London, 1934), p. 28.

engages in it, is a polyglot in its own right, whilst maintaining distance necessary to retain security. This distancing can go too far, however, when the suburb shuts itself off or others are shut off in a community of singularity: homogenous of race, income, religion, or introverted shared space. Gated communities and homogenous communities, which are exclusions by choice, and ghettos and tenements, which are imposed exclusions, are all destructive to the city space because they create zones without real interaction, denying the freedom and universalism that should be explicit in the city. The dialectic between home and the violence signified by the city-centre should be carefully investigated and kept in place, so that neither becomes ultimate and the city stays as a liveable yet hopeful space.

As spaces that should maintain a sense of universalism through the free offer of inclusion, the concept of the messianic - the rupture of alterity - is important to the city. The messianic is alterity, hoped for and maintained in the temporal that nonetheless remains beyond in exteriority, unable to be brought closer. It is a liminal concept, between the interiority of the maintenance and the exteriority of the hope, which ruptures both interiority and exteriority, denying either an absolute position. For the messianic to remain a universal claim, it must be secular like the city, available to all, beyond the totalitarian claim of a singular in the temporal. As the messianic is maintained in the temporal it is open to hermeneutics, is not absolute in any respect other than being inexhaustible, and as such the Messianic can never truly arrive. The messianic is the alterity central to city-life, maintaining the alterity in the temporal by rupturing critique of any claim of completion in the world as it is.

As a polyglot containing alterity, the city requires inhabitants to exercise a great deal of humility and hospitality. The city is a space where one should make space for the other, extend an offer of hospitality and in doing so be prepared to be less than one's own personal potential. Richard Sennett writes that, "[t]he humane is much *less* than what people are capable of. That is what we are struggling for • not fulfilment but to be less than we could be."⁷ In recognising the autonomy and significance of the other and subsequently making allowances for her or him, the possibility for justice arises, first in the self through an autonomous decision of responsibility, rupturing the self as egotistical interiority, and then extending this rupture as hospitality into exteriority toward the other. The need for both hospitality and justice in the city is made apparent by the city's violent nature, and without a

⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: 1990), p. 190.

full appreciation of these aspects the city pushes toward singularity and domination. Therefore, hospitality and justice need to be closely examined in relation to the city in order to minimise the totalitarian impulses that could otherwise go unchecked.

With the city relying on the continuance of alterity in order to remain free of totalitarianism, it is important in the discussion of the city to use a methodology that underscores this vital understanding. Therefore, in the interests of maintaining alterity throughout the text, the use of direct quotation and literary fragments are used, up and against each other and also against the text, to use conflicting voices to create new possibilities beyond the scope of the original authors. Scott Holland, discussing Dietrich Bonhoeffer in reference to the thought of Walter Benjamin, writes:

“...Benjamin would have likely told Bonhoeffer, “In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge exists only in lightening flashes. The text is the thunder rolling along afterward.” Like Benjamin, Bonhoeffer would later see that it was the literary fragment - - the letter, the paper, the poem, the story, not the systematic manuscript - - that best reflected traces of the lightening flash.”⁸

Through the use of fragments and direct quotations placed in conversation, it is hoped that new “lightening flashes” of knowledge will emerge and the text continually roll along with these.⁹ The same applies for the city, where fragments collide violently and are experienced, offering change, inspiration, and new ideas, whilst the city continues rolling along as a continually developing structure.

Containing the conflicting alterity of fragments, the city is a text, a collage of discourse and interpretation. The city is also encountered similarly to the way one encounters a text; as Kevin Hart writes regarding the position of a reader of a text: “A text may address you familiarly, in the second person singular, but this intimacy is conditioned by an impersonality to the extent that it addresses all readers this way.”¹⁰ Through the free offer of inclusion the city mirrors the text, it addresses one personally with the offer, but is conditioned by the fact that this offer is made to all, that no one is especially included. In Jay McInerney’s novel, *Bright Lights, Big City*, a young man, working in New York as a fact checker for a literary magazine modelled on *The New Yorker*, begins a downward spiral of personal crisis brought

⁸ Scott Holland, “First We Take Manhattan, Then We Take Berlin: Bonhoeffer’s New York, in, *Crosscurrents*, Vol. 50, Issue 3 (Fall 2000), p. 370.

⁹ This is similar to the notion of the “short-circuit” described by Slavoj Žižek, which will be discussed and expanded upon further in “Chapter 1: Babel The Beginning of Beginnings.

¹⁰ Kevin Hart, “Jacques Derrida: The God Effect”, in, *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, Phillip Blond, ed. (London and New York, 1998), p. 263.

on by an excessive lifestyle.¹¹ Through the use of a second person narrative address, McInerney gives the novel a distinctly urban atmosphere. For example, McInerney writes:

“You walk up Fifth Avenue along the park. On the steps of the Metropolitan Museum, a mime with a black-and-white face performs in front of a small crowd. As you pass you hear laughter and when you turn around the mime is imitating your walk.”¹²

This is how the city should address the individual - anonymously yet personally - one is singled-out in the offer of inclusion, but this offer is open to all and addresses all in the same way. It is this urban space, containing the dialectic of anonymity and community; city-centre and suburb; personal inclusion and universal indifference to the particular; that will be investigated, beginning with its Western Judeo-Christian roots, in order to understand and maintain alterity and maximise the positive opportunities of violence.

¹¹ Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (New York, 1984).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 152. Italo Calvino also uses the second person narrative in his influential novel *Invisible Cities*. For instance: “Your gaze scans the streets as if they are written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse...” Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, (New York and London, 1972), p. 14.

Babel: The Beginning of Beginnings

“A beginning is a displacement into the present; a place of beginning is where one can make this displacement happen.”

Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*.¹³

“To distinguish the other cities’ qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit...”

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.¹⁴

Enoch and Babel

To investigate the important fragmentary, dynamic, and violent tensions that exist within the modern city – a secular, cosmopolitan, free city - the Abrahamic roots of the city must be investigated.¹⁵ This is because the Abrahamic texts form the mythological dialectical roots of modern cities. The Judeo-Christian traditions especially, are of most significance because they offer an initial dialectic between the particular (Judaism) and the universal (the offer arising from the Christ-event).¹⁶ This dialectical tension is at the heart of the modern city, and it will be explored in various ways throughout this essay in order to develop an understanding of the importance of alterity and violence.

Cain’s city Enoch marks the starting point of the Abrahamic traditions’ urban history. The context of the city’s creation is of vital importance, as the city is an expression of sin, a fall out of relation to the divine. Fratricidal Cain, spurned by God for the jealous murder of Abel, is cursed to be hidden from the face of God, “a fugitive and a vagabond... in the earth.”¹⁷

¹³ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 195.

¹⁴ Calvino, p. 86.

¹⁵ The term “modern city is used here to denote a city that is secular, cosmopolitan, universal (in its openness and in its ability to be translated), but this does not sit in opposition to postmodern, and is not a call to return to a lost essential nature of the city. Modern is used here for its self-reflexive and open connotations, it contains the space to include the postmodern - that which challenges and moves beyond the modern – but to label a city “postmodern”, as entirety, would be to step beyond the bounds of what makes a city successful. The modern city contains the modern/postmodern dialectic; it constantly challenges and fragments itself, and is never an end-in-itself.

¹⁶ By focusing on the Judeo-Christian roots of the city, the modern city described is a modern, Western city, which, via the forces of globalisation, informs the reading of all other cities. This is not an effort of assimilation, but rather a clear statement of position, which opens the avenues of critique and conversation, rather than overcomes them.

¹⁷ *The Bible: Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha*, Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, intro. and notes, (Oxford, 1997), Gen 4:1-17. Quote from: Gen 4:12. The *Authorised King James Version* has been used because of its central role in Western culture and literature. In its central position in the Western cultural canon,

Cain then proceeds to create Enoch, a city that is hidden from God's face. The name itself bears a great deal of importance, named after Cain's son, Enoch means "initiation", "dedication", or "inaugurate".¹⁸ This dedication is not to God and the initiation is not into God's fold; rather the name is expressive of the beginning of humanity without God. Enoch is dedicated to the first generation born hidden from God's face; it is the initiation of humanity into a life with the possibility of being without God. The city is, therefore, immediately posited as the place where God is absent; the God that was once present is no longer and yet the world does not end - the city continues. God's beneficent gaze is no longer guaranteed and humanity must construct an existence as humanity alone. Enoch is the location of creation (spatial, cultural, and biological) separate from god, and as such the city is the space of a dual rejection; God rejects Cain and his children, and they in-turn reject God through their own creation and dedication. Yet, while God is not necessary for Enoch, God remains implicit in the city as that which is consciously negated. The city's origins arise from the punishment of Cain and so its subsequent creation expresses a relationship (albeit a damaged one) between humanity and God. Enoch, the first city, is necessarily a sin city, a fallen city, a singularly human reaction to being rejected.

Jacques Ellul contends that "with Cain's beginning... we have a sure starting plane for all of civilisation. Paradise becomes a legend and creation a myth."¹⁹ Cain marks the end of God's acts of creation in "the time that remains" and ushers in the era of humanity as creator and destroyer.²⁰ Through his actions Cain justifies and completes the exile from Eden, so humanity having the knowledge of good and evil, being creators and destroyers are *only* separated from the divine by their mortality.²¹ It is the mythical beginning point of a

the *King James Version* is important to the modern city, the hub of culture. All Biblical referencing from this point on can be assumed to be from this source.

¹⁸ "...*chanakh*: to dedicate inaugurate, initiate". Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, John Wilkinson, intro., John Pardee, trans. (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁰ The term "time that remains" has been borrowed from Giorgio Agamben's commentary on the "Letter to the Romans". Agamben uses the term in a messianic Christian context via the figure of Paul, but it should be noted that it is used in this work via Cain and Enoch and so is extended to further include the Jewish/pre-Christian context. Through the extension of this term, it becomes imbued with the dialectic of the particular (Jewish/pre-Christian) and the universal (Christian), thus aligning creation in the world (in the time that remains) with the dialectical space of the city. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, Patricia Dailey, trans. (Stanford, Calif., 2005).

²¹ After Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God declares, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also the tree of life,

materialist history and is in some ways the myth of both the fall into and out of myth. This relates to George Steiner's comment that "there was, presumably, no need of books or art in Eden", because in Eden, presence was immanent and everything was apparent.²² It is only with the distance created by the fall that mythologising becomes necessary, and this is clear in the (anti)myth of Enoch. The distance from God, the possibility of sin, and the birth of civilisation is mythologised in the absence of an apparent explanation. However, as Ellul hints, this is not the most significant aspect of Cain's beginning. The most important aspect is the beginning of civilisation, a starting point for humanity's material construction of the external world. It becomes the myth of the possibility of no longer needing myths, the potential to create and thus know the world. Humanity's creative potential is opened, allowing the transcendence from mere interpretation of surroundings to the creation of surroundings, and thus humanity truly becomes self-reflexive (interpretation-creation-interpretation-creation) leading to the possibility of full self-knowledge. This particular possibility of the end of myth is not the eschatological end of myth that otherwise exists in the Abrahamic traditions, but rather an immanent self-knowing that is opened as an alternative end to the time that remains. The alternative end is perpetually postponed by the irreconcilable differences that exist in humanity that challenge any particular creation or interpretation claiming to be comprehensively inclusive. As an endeavour, the city of Enoch is not hubris, it is not the will to become God, it is the acknowledgement that God is no longer present and understandable for Cain, thus his surroundings are no longer understandable.

Enoch is the place where the fall is expressed spatially, as the physical place where God is not to be encountered. The location of the Abrahamic God, the nomadic God, tends to be in the desert outside the city-limits. This is not to say that the city is the location of Baal, the immanent God of place; rather the city is place that exists as if the nomadic God is not there. Even Enoch is not precluded from the possibility of God's intervention or rupture, but the inhabitants are forced by God's rejection to exist *as if* the nomadic God is not present. Augustine noted the essential difference between Cain and Abel, in that:

and eat, and live for ever". Gen. 4:22. Through his evil action and subsequent creation hidden from God's presence, Cain makes true the claim that the tree of life is all that separates humanity and God.

²² George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago, 1989), p. 224.

“Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, a pilgrim did not found one. For the city of the saints is on high, although it produces citizens here below, in whose persons it is a pilgrim until the time of its kingdom shall come.”²³

The finger is not pointed at Cain for building the city as such, but instead for becoming static, with the city becoming an end-in-itself. It is one thing to create the city and attempt to spatially express that which is otherwise internal, but to lose any sense of alterity, any possibility of exteriority, is to become static, without hope.

The creation of Enoch may have been understandable in terms of Cain’s myth, but it serves as a warning against overwhelming singularity, the attempt to close the city-as-text. A city-as-text includes adequate space, for interpretation, for continued narrative, and for differing perspectives. In real terms, as a closed text Cain’s city was not really a city but monument, a secular Kingdom with nothing but self-reference; which is why it is best approached in metaphorical terms.²⁴ Enoch sits at the heart of the Abrahamic tradition as a beginning that is actually no beginning at all, an anti-myth that must be broken apart. Written, created as a retrospective solid beginning, Enoch is subsequently rejected as illegitimate, and so from the closed beginning the narrative possibilities are opened once more. Rejection of the closed and definitively located space is addressed with the argument that “Judeo-Christian culture is, at its very roots, about experiences of spiritual dislocation and homelessness... [the] faith began at odds with place, because our gods themselves were disposed to wander.”²⁵ The conflict that the Judeo-Christian tradition has with the city is its potential to negate the nomadic God by creating a ‘place’ that the ‘God of no-place’ cannot be ‘of’ until time reaches its conclusion. Cities must be spaces that contain the possibility of alterity, without becoming sacred spaces that God is *of*. To avoid becoming monuments (and thus stop being cities) cities must be resistant the part of the mythology that calls towards singularity, the self-

²³ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, R. W. Dyson, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, UK, 1998), p. 635. Richard Sennett argues that “Augustine’s book would lay the theological foundation for a city whose architecture and urban forms would give the restless spirit a home.” Richard Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 7. While this may seem antithetical to Augustine’s claim for a nomadic existence, there is truth in Sennett’s claim. Augustine did make parallels between earthly and heavenly cities, but an amendment that has to be made to Sennett’s quote is to pluralise the city into cities, thus encompassing a world where one can move and still feel at home (although never completely at home in this world).

²⁴ To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, the absence of monuments is a useful criterion for deciding as to whether a city is modern or not. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), p. 385. By asserting a sacred space, a monument is an attempt to deny the individual the opportunity to construct his or her own meaning in the city. Enoch was a monument in its entirety, an attempt to create a singular sense of identity following the dual rejections.

²⁵ Sennett, *Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 6.

defeating core expressed in Enoch, that attempts to break the dialectic with alterity and luxuriate in the safety of singularity. Cities must be spaces where both the particular and the universal are engaged with; as such they must be open to alterity and the hermeneutics of interpretation of the city-as-text.

The Judeo-Christian tradition is not in complete conflict with cities, however, and in fact eschatology reaches its conclusion with the heavenly city. As Graham Ward writes:

“The only city sanctioned is the heavenly city Jerusalem; the city of the resurrected and redeemed. This is the other city, what might be called, after the postmodern architect and architectural historian Charles Jencks, heteropolis – the Greek for other city – in contrast to metropolis – the Greek for mother-city, capital city.”²⁶

So the city as redemption is posited as beyond this world, or more precisely, other to this world, in opposition to the Metropolis.²⁷ Augustine broke down earthly cities into two simplistic categories: “...the earthly by love of self extending even to the contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to the contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord”.²⁸ By confining cities or the inhabitants of the cities to such unwavering, distinct boundaries, Augustine fails to address the true nature of cities. Timothy Gorringer redresses this:

“The city is both Babylon, the place of alienation, exile, estrangement and violence, and Jerusalem, the place where God dwells, sets God’s sign, and invites humankind to peace. This twofold imaging of the city calls for a dialectic... the danger with dialectics is that they tend to fall apart.”²⁹

The city is a dialectic containing both heteropolis and metropolis within it, thus resisting the violent reductionism committed by writers such as Jacques Ellul, who Graham Ward notes as having a profound distaste for cities.³⁰ The Judeo-Christian tradition is, therefore, highly ambivalent toward cities, with history beginning with a fallen city and ending with the redeeming Holy City; the space in between is just that - the dialectical space of conversation opened between these possibilities.

²⁶ Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London and New York, 2000), p. 33.

²⁷ The difference between the city of redemption being “beyond” this world and “other to” this world is that “beyond” signifies a city that is reached after the completion of this one, whereas “other” allows the dual existence of the heavenly and earthly city. By using the term “other”, the dialectic of universal and particular is opened as negotiation that continues, rather than one that must wait until the very end, the “beyond”.

²⁸ Augustine, p. 632.

²⁹ Timothy Gorringer, *Theology of the Built Environment* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 140.

³⁰ Ward, p. 49. The distaste arises from Ellul’s basic equation of technology and technique with sin and evil; as seen in works such as, Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*. Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. (Grand Rapids, 1990).

While Jacques Ellul recognises the dialectic in the Bible: “we must remember how often, throughout the Scriptures, Babylon and Jerusalem are connected, as inseparable as the two sides of a hill, as two forms of a single reality,” he unfortunately turns this into a characteristically negative reading of all cities by adding: “So all that is said about Babylon can be applied to every other city, to today’s cities even more than to any cities known by the seer.”³¹ By writing in this fashion, Ellul accentuates the negative aspects and removes hope from the city, thus shunning the redemptive possibilities of the other side of the dialectic. In negating one side of the dialectic, Ellul is an extreme antimodernist, refusing reflexivity and equating increased technology with increased evil.³² Ellul is guilty of essentialising the cities of today into almost purely negative terms and comes close to Gnosticism in finding no good in humanity’s constructions.³³ By focusing on the overwhelmingly negative Babylonian qualities from the Bible every city does not become negatively Babylonian, it becomes an Enoch - bearing the mark of Cain – one-sided hills with no hope of redemption. The cities become void of interpretation - only containing sin - and by shutting out the possibility of alterity, either from beyond or from within the city, hope is absent. The answer to this is to go back to Augustine’s dialectical reading of earthly cities and then move beyond the reading by allowing ambivalence - the insecurity and lack of definition that exists between Enoch and the end - to break down the radical polarity. This means that both sides of the hill exist together, inseparable, often indistinct, and unable to be cleaved apart in the time that remains.

To enter into the dialectic, the basis of the myth of the Tower of Babel needs to be investigated, for it is here that the earthly city is truly spawned. At the beginning of the Babel myth it is written that “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.”³⁴ The importance here is the later part of the sentence indicating the commonality of communication; they do not just share a language, they share an unhindered exchange of the

³¹ Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, p. 50.

³² Arthur Versluis aptly defines antimodernism as having, “...at its core the awareness of decline. If the essence of “modernism” is progress, a belief in technological development means socio-economic improvement, the heart of antimodernism is a realization that “progress” has an underbelly• that technological-industrial development has destructive consequences in three primary and intertwined areas: nature, culture, and religion.” Arthur Versluis, “Antimodernism”, in, *Telos*, No. 137 (Winter, 2006), p. 97. Where Ellul goes wrong is he monomaniacally excludes the positive aspects, rather than balancing them against the bad.

³³ Ellul comes close to Gnosticism in the sense that he equates humanity and their creations with evil, where the more that humanity creates, the more they move away from the good and purity. This comes close to the heresy that the body contains a pure spirit in an imperfect body, and that all that the impure body creates moves the spirit away from good and purity. A more helpful position would be to argue that in the knowledge of good and evil, humanity’s creation contain both good and evil in ambivalent measures.

³⁴ Gen. 11:1.

language. Importance lies in the communication of the language, not simply existing in commonality, but speaking and being understood completely. In the bounds of the completion of communication the people seek a location on which to actualise their unity. Thus it is written: “And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.”³⁵ So the people become placed like Cain, the first man of historical place and went against the nomadic God. The nomadic tribes settle and under Nimrod’s guidance begin to break the bond with the God that sets no place of rest in the world until the eschatological conclusion.

As the people settle the bond reaches a tenuous breaking point with: “Go to, let us build us a city and a tower whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”³⁶ The creation of the city is based on the fear of being dis-located; it is the compounding of the particular and the universal in such a way that leaves no room for alterity. Particular people and particular space, by abandonment of all other possibilities, simultaneously become universal people and universal space. By bringing the universal and particular together, the people under Nimrod’s guidance seek to bring about an immanent eschatology, an end of choice. In Jacques Derrida’s words, it is the attempt to:

“...give themselves the name, to construct for and by themselves their own name, to gather themselves there... as in the unity of a place which is at once a tongue and a tower, the one as well as the other, the one as the other.”³⁷

The creation is an act of hubris as it attempts to redefine the locus of existence, to reach to the heavens and extend down to the united people within and below. Babel is the self-glorification of humanity that extends beyond the realm of earthly existence. It is the self-naming of humanity claiming the role of divinity, of humanity as a *Baalim* - a God of place that is named, placed and available. Humanity fulfils the opposite role of the self-emptying kenotic God, by pouring their energies into the creation of their own name they become a self-consuming deity. Their efforts construct the name which names both themselves and their construction, becoming a solipsistic closed circuit of unwavering homogeneity that feeds on itself.

³⁵ Gen 11:2.

³⁶ Gen 11:4.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours De Babel”, in, *Acts of Religion*, G. I. Anidjar, ed. and intro. (London and New York, 2002), p. 107.

Next it is written that “the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded”, whereupon, “the Lord said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”³⁸ The issue here is not that they are becoming “gods” *alongside* the monotheistic God, but rather they are closing the door to alterity and so are becoming self-appointed *Baalim*, knowing only themselves as creators and destroyers. Babel is, therefore, a second Fall narrative, as humanity once again threatens to make God obsolete and God is compelled to intervene.³⁹ Babel is not a myth of humanity becoming limitless only to be hindered by God’s intervention; rather, humanity is precisely limited by their insularity and inability to introduce alterity into the milieu. In the Babel myth, God recognises that the people are putting themselves into self-bondage by building a world limited by what they already know. Just as the first Fall narrative was also a narrative of knowledge and freedom, Babel is also an emancipatory narrative in which God frees humanity from a tyranny of their own creation. The completion of the tower – the tower that is simultaneously a tower, a name and a people – would be the end of progress. In effect, the Tower of Babel would be an anti-eschatology where instead of time reaching completion, humanity remains without hope *in perpetua* – an end without any end. Part of the lesson for today’s cities is they must remain open to the possibility of alterity, not necessarily God, but simply that which is other to what is known.

God’s reaction against the tower is the most telling aspect of the myth and the whole understanding must hinge upon it.

“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.”⁴⁰

Before all else, God is that which is beyond the limits of language and can rupture that which was previously a self-contained, complete system of language. God ruptures the homogenous

³⁸ Gen 11:5-6. However, as Augustine makes clear, when God is said to “see” something he does not so much see it as make it be seen. “...He is said to see and to discover at a particular time anything which He causes to be seen and discovered.” Augustine, p. 704. This is in a very similar manner to the way in which God’s face was hidden from Cain; it is God choosing to remain hidden.

³⁹ Daniel Eilon, in his discussion of Jonathan Swift’s reading of Babel as confusion caused by tyranny, also makes the point of a second Fall occurring. Daniel Eilon, “Swift Burning the Library of Babel”, in, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (April, 1985), p. 271.

⁴⁰ Gen 11:7-8.

community, first by letting his alterity be seen and then confounding their language, making them ‘other’ to each other. Jacques Ellul writes:

“The emphasis is not on speaking as such, but on understanding... By the confusion of tongues, by non-communication, God keeps man from forming a truth that is valid for all men. Henceforth, man’s truth will only be partial and contested.”⁴¹

The passage provides an insightful cosmopolitan anti-myth in that understanding is posited as unattainable. The plethora of languages is not really the issue, it is the fallibility of communication, thus in this instance, requiring the external unification by God.⁴² Cities are subsequently framed as places of confusion and inalterably, destined to remain as incomplete unifications of humanity. So secularity, as the dialectical partner of religion, is also always incomplete, without unity – a temporal human construction in dialogue with the potentially singular religious. Secularity is predicated on self-limitation, so that no particular can be considered beyond critique and interpretation. Remaining completely in the realms of hermeneutics, secularity is always incomplete because communication is fallible, and thus it is imperative that it remains in place balancing those that would seek to compound the particular with the universal.

In being the story of the confounding of language, Babel is situated in opposition to Enoch. Babel is the myth that ends the possibility of living without myth, thus closing the window of possibility that Enoch opened. In the words of Jacques Derrida, Babel is:

“...the myth of the origin of myth... the translation of translation... It would not be the only structure hollowing itself out like that, but it would do so in its own way (itself almost untranslatable, like a proper name), and its idiom would have to be saved.”⁴³

Babel, like Enoch, began as a filling-in of identity, the creation of a singular definitive narrative. Humanity built the Tower up toward self-completion as a singular all-encompassing proper name, almost untranslatable and yet almost completely universal. Babel was an attempt to physically build secular time to a collective standstill and thus fall into sequence with the eternal, divine time. The Tower was, therefore, becoming a monument; a monolith that draws on a singular historical narrative and sits outside of time as an inalterable

⁴¹ Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, pp. 18-9.

⁴² Slavoj Žižek also writes of language being the first and greatest divider (although in this instance the focus is on the multitude of languages) writing: “So, perhaps, the fact that *reason* and *race* have the same root in Latin (*ratio*) tells us something: language, not primitive egotistic interest, is the first and greatest divider, it is because of language that we and our neighbours (can) live in different worlds even when we live on the same street.” Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London, 2008), pp. 56-7.

⁴³ Derrida, “Des Tours De Babel”, p. 104

sacred edifice, reducing all interpretation to the status of sacrilege. With the removal of humanity's ability to understand each other, interpretation and mythological language is needed in the gaping absence of direct understanding. Hermeneutics, mythology, literary invention, and interpretation take the place of the God who is now absent. So where the Fall narrative is the myth of the need for myth and the Enoch myth is the possibility of suturing the wound opened in the Fall, Babel is the mythological beginning of myth. It is the point of no return – the hollowing out of understanding, the birth of humanity as kenotic, emptying into the world through language. So the real Fall actually occurs with Babel, because before this there remained a chance of *human* unity. Babel's destruction demands art and books, it is the birth of cultures in the plural. Before Babel, humanity unified by language and understanding, interpreted the world together; after the Fall, the interpretation turns to the newly discovered multitude of others, those who now incompletely share the world.

Through the denial of the closed text (singular location and monumental, self-addressing Proper name) and opening of a space which precludes stasis (demands interpretation), Babel is the perverse mythological birth of the ideal earthly city. The ideal earthly city has the characteristics of the exile, of Abel the wandering pilgrim, never at rest in the world. An exilic city is at once a place, a home, a concrete location, and yet in the same moment it is transitory, never at rest, yearning to include more than it ever can. As open texts, caught in-between place and no-place, muddled with the restless and frustrated violence of incomplete communication, earthly cities are all progeny of Babel. By being incomplete and transitory, cities are open to the dialectic with the heteropolis, preventing the transitory violence of the city becoming endless nihilist movement without hope or purpose.

Babel is the story of the fracture of humanity, with the rupture coming from outside. Derrida writes that by confounding language, “[God] destines [humanity] to translation, he subjects them to the law of a translation both necessary and impossible...”⁴⁴ Humanity is faced by a gulf of difference and can only attempt to cross it through language, and thus it could be claimed to be crossed by the Word of God in Christ.⁴⁵ The dialectical gulf would be initially bridged in this case, but subsequently reopened in the time that remains, with the ascension of Christ. So the secular dialectical process is doomed to be incomplete, for humanity has been

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁵ This is the inherent genius of the universality of Christianity, the Logos underwrites and sits beneath all logos, thus comfortably insinuating itself into almost any other mythos.

revealed to be foreign to humanity, and thus the Tower is actually revealed to be a multiplicity in the false guise of singularity. God, as complete Other, is the paradoxical rupturing word revealing the false nature of Babel, so that after God's rupture, the more the Tower-as-logos is built up, the further it gets from singularity. Walter Benjamin quotes Mallarmè, writing: "the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody on earth from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would materialise as truth..."⁴⁶ In the face of such plurality, the answer is not to avoid language, but to be aware of its incompleteness, of the constant need for translation. As intensely textual sites, cities are always pushing toward both edges of the Babylon/Jerusalem dialectic. Engaging in language, they strive toward the capitalised Word - signifying at its most simple something complete and other to that which is.⁴⁷ The engagement has the effect of perpetuating both the quantity of translations and the task for humanity as translator. To not engage in language is to fall into nihilism and see nothing beyond the violence and incompleteness of the present. To blindly engage in translation is to blunder into hopeful mystification, the task of translation getting ever more complex with each attempt at understanding. This is not to say that one should not enter this task, but rather that it must be entered with an understanding of its increasing incompleteness, thus one can be somewhat insulated from the potential for despair in the task.

Necessity for Translation

The engagement with language is the engagement with translation - the attempt to make the other understandable - thus translation sits at the core of urban life. Translation is by nature a violent process; it shatters, rearranges, and remoulds language as a process of interpretation and yet also occurs before interpretation. But, the truly destructive violence occurs in the denial of translation, where there is no attempt to understand the other or understanding is prevented from occurring. This is not the same as the rupturing violence of God in the Babel myth, because that was wholly beyond language, rather than the rejection of it. Via the rejection of language, violence becomes an exclusionary and negative force that closes

⁴⁶ Mallarmè's quote asserts the idea that a singular language would by default be a "supreme one", in absence of otherness it would be "immortal word" that at present is "remaining silent" as thinking. This comes close to Gnosticism in arguing that all people contain a universal truth or essence, and like Ellul's Gnostic tendencies, should be avoided. Mallarmè, as quoted in, Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator: An introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*", in, *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, trans. and intro. (London, 1970), p. 77.

⁴⁷ The capitalised "Word" in this case is not the Christological Word as Logos; it is the secular hope for what yet is to occur.

borders and seeks to eliminate the other. Through translation, otherness undergoes a multilayered interpretative process; it violently confronts the self with alterity - engages with it rather than rejects it - before being interpreted and broken down into familiar symbols, all whilst being constantly reinterpreted and always haunting with a chasm of unknowable subjectivity. The main error made in translation does not arise from the radical otherness encountered; rather it occurs when the translator “preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be fully affected by the foreign tongue.”⁴⁸ So the most violent potential in translation is the colonialist assimilation of the foreign, turning one’s back on the chasm of difference.

Colonialist translation seeks to cover up the unknowable core of the other, rather than attempt to extend it beyond its original bounds by uncovering it more than the originator ever could. Seeking to put the other into familiar forms, colonialist translation is the attempt to domesticate that which cannot be domesticated and is, therefore, opposed to the dialogue of cosmopolitanism.⁴⁹ This is the fundamental difference between quoting an author and paraphrasing an author; to quote is to keep the original alterity whilst recontextualising and reinterpreting in a new context, whereas paraphrasing diminishes the otherness, making it hardly distinguishable from the colonialist’s text. In his discussion of citation, Giorgio Agamben attributes the following quote to Walter Benjamin: “[citation] summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin”; at the same time it “saves and punishes”.⁵⁰ In the acts of both citation and ideal translation, both the original and the new context are violently sustained. The colonialist translator, however, is fascistic in attempting to purify language – a violent conclusion that only sustains the new. Whilst the translator does seek purity, it is a purity that is never

⁴⁸ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator: An introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*”, p. 81.

⁴⁹ This was the case in nineteenth century India, where the British colonialists sought to produce “Indians in blood and in colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”, largely enacted through the strict control of the interpretation and criticism of English texts. Helen Tiffen, “Colonialist Pretexts and Rites of Reply”, in, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 27. *The Politics of Postcolonial Criticism* (1997), p. 220. Quote attributed to: Thomas B. Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education”, as cited in above source. Through the denial of the full potentiality of interpretation, the colonialists sought to overcome the otherness of the Indian people and limit their perception of the internal differences that existed within the English people. It was an attempt to create an idealised monoculture through strict control of hermeneutics.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 1927-1934, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds., Rodney Livingstone et al. trans. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), as quoted and cited in: Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, p. 139.

singular and sits in dialectic with the translator's own tongue.⁵¹ However, the other should not be idolised for simply being other, this would be a fetishistic desire for purity of the other, and so would be in a dangerous dialectic with fascism's concern for purity of self.

The translator ideally lets the two languages sit side-by-side in a dialectic that invariably produces the short-circuit that is the translation.⁵² This conceptualisation is partly borrowed from Žižek, who adopted the short-circuit in the following way:

“...to take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it... through the lens of a “minor” author, text, or conceptual apparatus (“minor” should be understood in Deleuze's sense... marginalised, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology, or dealing with a “lower,” less dignified topic”).⁵³

Translation performs a dual short-circuit, the first breaking the hegemony of the text in its original language, challenging any claims of sacredness. The second occurs in challenging the boundaries of the translator's language by introducing alterity that defies complete assimilation. By translating a text, the translator breaks the closed circuit of the original language. This circuit is then repaired (albeit in altered state) when the translation is finished and it itself enters into the realm of translation (short-circuit).⁵⁴

Translation hinges upon the idea that there is some commonality between languages, between people, and thus the act of translation engages with the idea of universalism. Derrida writes:

⁵¹ Benjamin writes of this purity in translation: “A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.” Benjamin, “Task of the Translator: An introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*”, p. 79.

⁵² Once again it seems necessary to quote Benjamin as an influence and echo: “Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth of its own.” *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵³ Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, 2006), p. IX. Žižek appears to have adapted the idea of the short-circuit from writings of Jacques Lacan, as Clayton Crockett's analysis of Lacan shows: “To open a door is to break the circuit, or short-circuit the current. Lacan refers to the use of digital numbers 1 and 0 to represent a closed (0) or (1) open door. Feedback is what allows the successive states of open and closed to affect each other in increasing layers of complexity, so that doors open and close in a sequence or meaningful operation.” In, Clayton Crockett, “Contact Epistemology for the Sites of Theology”, in, *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought*, Clayton Crockett, ed. (London and New York, 2001), p. 208.

⁵⁴ This idea runs in parallel with Crockett's writing on short-circuits: “Closing a door closes the circuit, allowing the current to flow. Opening a door is a short-circuit, which redirects the current but does not allow a circuit to form and a current to flow unless there exists a closed door further out to establish a new circuit.” Crockett, pp. 208-9.

“Translation promises a kingdom to the reconciliation of languages... appeals to a language of the truth... Not to a language that is true, adequate to some exterior content, but to... a language whose truth would be referred only to itself.”⁵⁵

The reconciliation of languages refers to a pre-Babel state, before the illusion of solidarity was shattered. Translation is, in effect, the mythological overcoming of Babel – the claim of a recoverable essence post-Babel. As Alain Badiou writes, “Every name from which a truth proceeds is a name from before the Tower of Babel. But it has to circulate in the Tower.”⁵⁶ Hope remains for the mythological unity of understanding and truth, the hope for an *a priori* transcendent language, but this is engaged with in the myriad of idioms. “Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages”, writes Benjamin.⁵⁷ Such a metaphysical expression can never be defined, because to do so would relativise the truth and degrade it to the wasteland of history, and so it remains as a necessarily unspoken possibility.

These ideas share many parallels with Jorge Luis Borges’ short-story “The Library of Babel”, in which the world is constituted of a series of hexagonal rooms, each containing the means for survival and four walls of five bookshelves, each containing thirty-five books.⁵⁸ Each book is of uniform format, with each containing a seemingly random arrangement of orthographic symbols. The library conceivably contains every book ever written, or that might ever be written, and whilst this gives no solace to the characters that despair and find the books useless to them, they surmise that:

“On some shelf in some hexagon (men reasoned) there must exist a book which is the formula and perfect compendium of *all the rest*: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god.”⁵⁹

So the book is conceived of as the hope of unification of language, the singular that completes all others and renders them unnecessary. The folly of the story is the violent search for the singular book to the detriment of all else, when the real object would be to recognise the unity underlying the individual texts: the library itself. Despair arises because the library is a closed system with nothing that is not already conceived, and so “each work within the literary array is unstable and relative; it exists only as a negligible fraction of an

⁵⁵ Derrida, “Des Tours De Babel”, p. 130.

⁵⁶ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Ray Brassier, trans. (Stanford, 2003), p.110.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator: An introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*”, p. 72.

⁵⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel”, in, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings* (Middlesex, 1970), pp. 78-86.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

unencompassable whole.”⁶⁰ Due to the existence of so many texts that are almost identical, one cannot even know whether one has read the authoritative text, leaving the task of finding it eternally incomplete. The perfect compendium thus can only ever exist as an ‘idea’ that gives a unifying meaning to all others by encompassing (though it can never be encompassed itself) them within a singularity. Cities, on this level, encompass a hope that they are universally readable as echoes of humanity, rather than being an overwhelming disunity.

In “The Library of Babel”, always and already containing all possibilities of language, “no one can articulate a syllable which is not filled with tenderness and fear, which is not in one of these languages, the powerful name of God. To speak is to fall into tautology.”⁶¹ Every word is filled with an excess of meaning, it overflows with the sacred, and translation is made impossible. A response to this is to make no word sacred, nothing able to be uttered that cannot be translated, and this is one of the key messages able to be extrapolated from the Tower of Babel myth. Babel is the rupture of the profane where the Tower, which would have been the link between sacred and profane, is destroyed revealing the multiplicity of humanity and language – a multiplicity that in accepting its vast differences can only be secular. The God who “imposes and opposes his name” is “pleading for translation... not only between the tongues that had suddenly become multiple, but first of his name, of the name he had proclaimed, given, and which should be translated as confusion to be understood”, writes Derrida.⁶² This is the first incarnation of God in the world - the God as name that must undergo the endless cycle of death and rebirth of secular translation, and yet remain as a possible mythological root of language itself. God’s name incarnated alongside all other words, translatable and yet not, like all language, it “hints at something else behind itself.”⁶³ It hints at the “signifier [that] does not have to answer for its existence in the name of some hypothetical signification.”⁶⁴ God enters into the realm of signification and pleads for translation, but offers no guarantee of response and no justification for the imposition of the word.

⁶⁰ Eilon, p. 271.

⁶¹ Borges, “The Library of Babel”, p. 85.

⁶² Derrida, “Des Tours De Babel”, pp. 111 & 118.

⁶³ Bernard Tschumi, “The Pleasure of Architecture”, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1994), p. 93.

⁶⁴ Tschumi, “De-, Dis-, Ex-”, *Architecture and Disjunction*, p. 221.

God entered into the world as language and demanded to be translated in an act that at once signalled the end of the city-that-is-no-city and ushered in the era of true cities, polyglots contending with a word whose attachment to its signifier is unknowable. Cities as spaces of language, of writing; paradoxical spaces where the absence of, and the potential engagement with, the God who must be translated is experienced.⁶⁵ For, as Graham Ward writes, “the city itself is a writing within which all other writings are circumscribed.”⁶⁶ The city necessarily contains God as logos, but this inclusion is limited in that the claim is made relative by its repeated translation, to impose the universal farther than this is to attempt to rebuild Babel. To assert a singular translation as finality would be the end of the city - the end of logos - an in-filling of a self-relating truth-claim. God is necessarily absent from the city because God’s presence would automatically preclude the existence of the city; the city-as-polyglot, secular multiplicity, would cease to exist under the gaze of the Singular. This is why cities are either secular or they are theocracies; the imposition of the universal negates any chance of a middle-ground between the two. The mere existence of cities is a sign of absence, which is not to say Ellul’s assertions should be followed and we desert them, rather they should be approached as necessary locations that in signalling absence also signal the maintenance of a future hope. Cities are texts that ideally signify future hope, a hope that can never be called forth, which must be engaged with as logos, hermeneutics of hope in this world that offers the possibility of alterity.

City as Text

After Babel, the city is a text able to be written, read, and experienced as an eminently malleable environment. This seems to be what Graeme Gilloch had in mind when he wrote: “It is under the mournful eyes of the allegorist that the modern city is transformed into a series of signs to be deciphered, a text to be read.”⁶⁷ With myth and allegory essential after the second fall, all human-endeavour becomes open to individual readings. Michel de Certeau continues the idea of the city-as-text with the addition of “walking as a space of enunciation”,

⁶⁵ With translation always comes interpretation; as Susan Sontag writes: “Interpretation thus presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. It seeks to resolve this discrepancy.” Translation and its partner interpretation seek to best overcome the discrepancy of meaning that exists in the continuing time that remains. Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” (orig. 1964), in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (New York, 1967), p. 6.

⁶⁶ Ward, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Graeme Gilloch, *Myth & Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge, UK, 1996), p. 171.

the ““wandering of the semantic” produced by the masses that make some parts of the city disappear and exaggerate others”.⁶⁸ The proposition is attractive, especially when appended with:

“To walk is to lack place. It is the indefinite process of being absent... exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be ultimately, the place but is only a name, the city.”⁶⁹

Such a conception echoes Augustine’s Abel, the eternal pilgrim whose footsteps echo with the promise of Jerusalem, the heteropolis. The idea of walking as that which gives the city its fluidity and dynamic qualities is excellent; problems arise, however, with walking as speech. “The idea of “speech” implies presence, whereas writing “writing” implies absence.”⁷⁰ Writing is, by necessity, the act of recording events, thoughts, experiences, that have already occurred and been deemed deserving of record. To walk in the city is not to engage with presence; it is to investigate and manipulate mythologies, the text of the built environment. Michel de Certeau is following the postmodern tradition of denying metaphysics thus insinuating presence into the horizontal plane of the everyday.

The bustle and flow of ambulatory travel is not a direct experience as it has no direct recipient; the only potential recipient of the oratory walkers would be one in an omniscient position observing the totality of the city. Graham Ward points out that such a position is partially afforded in de Certeau’s writing as he “likens the geometric space of city-planners and architects to the ‘literal meaning’ constructed by grammarians and linguists”.⁷¹ The “literal meaning” is an attempt to arrive at a singular purity, which is then dimly reflected in the speech (spatial habits) of the inhabitants. De Certeau understood the heterologia of speech and thus grappled with the legacy of Babel, but failed to appreciate it in its entirety by

⁶⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1984), pp. 98-102.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁷⁰ Ronald T. Michener, *Engaging Deconstructive Theology* (Burlington and Hampshire, 2007), p. 67. Conversely, Emmanuel Levinas interprets speech as an act of ignoring presence, by having spoken to another “I have overlooked the universal being he incarnates in order to confine myself to the particular being he is.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, Michael B. Smith & Barbara Harshaw, trans. (New York, 1998 (1991 orig.)), p. 7. This reflects the problem that de Certeau creates; whilst overlooking the universal and allowing the heterologia of conversation, there is still the idea that the Other is *present* and thus able to be overlooked. Reading de Certeau there is the sense that the walker chooses to engage with the city and inhabitants as an overtone to the presence which is otherwise there. The walker is in the critical position to *choose* to walk, to *choose* to be placed, and to *choose* whether or not to engage, but this should be coupled with the acceptance of absence or else the risk arises of reducing all other inhabitants into insignificance in comparison to one’s personal conversation with the present Other.

⁷¹ Ward, p. 232.

inserting glimpses of direct and untranslatable presence. Derrida, on-the-other-hand, understands the legacy of Babel perhaps best, and so for him, in Ronald Michener's analysis, "meaning cannot be final – if it was it would be a form of "presence".⁷² Whilst walking is the true experience of the city, it is not a proclamation, a speech act, and this is because (to use a cliché) when one is speaking they are not listening. While it is true that de Certeau intended the speech act to be part of a continual dialogue, the ebb and flow of conversation, there is still a troubling will to remake walking into a revolutionary proclamation. Speaking in this sense is a form of finality that includes a mirage of presence, thus denying the hope for the alterity by breaking down the dialectic, collapsing the Metropolis and Heteropolis.

The city is a place of absence, not in the Levinas/de Certeau sense of presence that is temporarily overlooked in the space of conversation, but in the sense of no presence, thus the city must be secular. It is in this capacity of absence that humanity comes together in the city, engaging in the incomplete, never to be completed. Lewis Mumford, one of the greatest writers on the social implications of cities, writes:

"Before man can be fully humanized, the social man must break up into a thousand parts: so that each grain of aptitude, each streak of intelligence, each fiber of special interest, may take a deeper color by mingling with other grains, streaks, and fibers of the same nature."⁷³

Cities at best are the challenging milieus that allow the modern man to break up and mingle with the diversity of humanity. The problem would be to expect modern man to be able to be made whole again, to be reconstituted as some kind of prototypic modern human. Modernity, the creation and milieu of modern man, is an obsessively ordered system which continues to seek finality at the same time that it punctuates history with a successive series of beginnings.⁷⁴ There is danger in the idea that one is fully-human when one is whole rather than when one is fractured. The danger being that completion is analogous to death, it is the end of modernity's task of self-reflexivity, and so too would the completed man be the death

⁷² Michener, p. 70.

⁷³ Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 481.

⁷⁴ The beginning-point of modernity is constantly argued and repositioned, with origins proposed such as the Industrial Revolution, French Revolution, Luther's Reformation, or in Žižek's case, Christianity in its capacity of the universal offer, as argued in: Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London, 2001). Perhaps the most notable example of a proposed finality is Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' which (misguidedly) proposes a finality consisting of the worldwide success of liberal democracy. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992).

of humanity.⁷⁵ To be fully-human is to be incomplete, an ongoing project that ends with death, not a project that will live to experience its own completion. This also goes for the city, for “it was early recognised that it was the community, and not the built environment, which makes the city.”⁷⁶ Cities are the reflections of fractured humanity and it is here in the city-ologos that humanity engages with the fully-human capacity of difference.

Le Corbusier’s Violence against the *Saeculum*

Swiss-born architect Le Corbusier could not stand the disordered and fractured nature of the modern city, and rallied against the conditions with a religious zeal. Streets filled with a cacophony of automobiles and unordered pedestrians gave Le Corbusier a “glimpse of purgatory”.⁷⁷ The proposed solution was the insistence on order, with life meaning “something brought to perfection... mastery, not abortive chaos.”⁷⁸ Such extreme ordering meant that Le Corbusier was a hyper-modernist who bordered on the violent revolutionary ideals of Futurism: focusing on straight-lines, order, and technology.⁷⁹ Being a revolutionary, Le Corbusier did not aim at reformation as much as revolution, cities were not to be remoulded and shaped for the better, but torn down, cleansed from memory.⁸⁰ So this becomes a modernist attempt to build a secular Tower of Babel, to tear down the disordered and replace them with a singular vision, which, because of its singularity, can never be truly secular, only profane. The singularity of vision that Le Corbusier dreamed of was megalomaniacal in presuming to be able to quell the unavoidable violence of cities, and

⁷⁵ The claim of Christianity in Christ would be that this death of humanity is the death of *old* humanity, followed by the birth of a *new* humanity. Secularity, because of its diversity and self limitation, cannot contain this claim as a totality and thus must approach it through translation, therefore denying its completion.

⁷⁶ Gorringe, p. 171.

⁷⁷ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilisation* (London, 1933), p. 91.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷⁹ Futurism’s violent focus on technology and order is particularly apparent in the writings of F. T. Marinetti. For instance: “Speed finally gives to human life one of the characteristics of divinity: *the straight line.*” In: “The New Religion-Morality of Speed” (1916 orig.), in, Marinetti, F. T., *Selected Writings*, R. W. Flint, intro and ed. R. W. Flint and Arthur Coppotelli, trans. (New York, 1972), p. 95.

⁸⁰ The proposed destruction of Paris led Tilman Buddensieg to compare Le Corbusier’s thought to that of Nietzsche: “Only thus could Nietzsche’s “burden of history,” the “historical disease,” “tumult of styles,” be laid rest. As Le Corbusier put it, “Eradicate the perversions of history.” Tilman Buddensieg, “Architecture as Empty Form: Nietzsche and the Art of Building”, in, *Nietzsche and “An Architecture of our Minds”*, Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth, eds. (Los Angeles, 1999), p. 273.

misguided in using a singular founding violence to quell a multitude of smaller violence.⁸¹ As James Donald argues:

“...those who fantasise about turning the city into an efficient machine, with all its component parts flawlessly engineered and geared, misrecognise the space of the city... This is the overweening dream of Enlightenment rationality...”⁸²

Whilst Le Corbusier should be commended for his dream of a humane city, it was simply not feasible in its singularity or method, the founding violence alone parallels the anti-humanism of Italian Futurist F. T. Marinetti. Either the city would slip back toward its chaotic nature or the violence needed to keep it in check would resemble that of a despotic state.

For Le Corbusier, the singular vision is the “city of light that will dispel the miasmas of anxiety now darkening our lives”.⁸³ This is strikingly similar to Calvin’s puritanical attempt to reform Geneva, and much of Le Corbusier’s writing echoes with Protestant values, albeit in secularised form. Le Corbusier was attempting to extend the proposed purity of Calvin’s Geneva to the world, thus collapsing the particular and the universal into a profane singularity. The modern, secular ideals of Le Corbusier are apparent in his reading of the airplane: “The airplane instils, above all a new conscience, the modern conscience. Cities, with their misery, must be torn down. They must be largely destroyed and fresh cities built.”⁸⁴ Humanity, via humanity’s creation – technology - assumes God’s position, the God’s eye view that allows a critical overview. Le Corbusier’s plan acts as a precursor counter to Lewis Mumford’s claim of the impotence arising from the claim that “no human eye can take in this metropolitan mass at a glance.”⁸⁵ Rather than instilling a sense of vertigo, the airplane gave Le Corbusier a sense of self-deification, where cities that offended his vision could be razed and replaced with radiant glass towers. Graham Ward correctly argued that Le

⁸¹ In a correspondence with Frank Lloyd Wright, Lewis Mumford wrote: “that Le Corbusier is obsessed with geometry and classicism, and imputes to the machine qualities that do not exist there, so would put modern architecture in what is essentially a static formula.” Le Corbusier was violently trying to assert a stasis into the world through means that did not support the end. Lewis Mumford (15th September 1931), in, Frank Lloyd Wright and Lewis Mumford, *Frank Lloyd Wright & Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence*, Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer and Robert Wojtowicz, eds. (New York, 2001), p. 116.

⁸² James Donald, “This, Here, Now: Imagining the Modern City”, in, Sally Westwood, and John Williams, eds., *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory* (London and New York, 1997), p. 182.

⁸³ Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilisation*, p. 94.

⁸⁴ Le Corbusier, “Frontispiece to Pictures of the Epic of the Air”, *Aircraft* (New York, 1935), pp. 11-12. As quoted in, Jean-Louis Cohen, “Le Corbusier’s Nietzschean Metaphors” in, *Nietzsche and “An Architecture of our Minds”*, Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth, eds. (Los Angeles, 1999), p. 322.

⁸⁵ Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 234.

Corbusier dreamed of creating the “godless, but nevertheless light-filled, spatially harmonious, timeless city” of Revelations.⁸⁶ For Le Corbusier, eschatology is transferred from the Bible to the sanitised drawing boards of architects and city-planners. The violence of Revelations is made to be an immanent human action, and therein resides the great inhumanity of Le Corbusier’s reformation; he used models that were never intended for humanity as it is. To plan to destroy homes and neighbourhoods in order to rid humanity of suffering is oxymoronic at best and calculatingly cruel at worst.

Le Corbusier’s proposed violent reforms deny the very structure set out in the Babel myth. The fall of the Tower of Babel did not only make myth a necessity, it also made the *saeculum* a permanent demand in the world.⁸⁷ “*Saeculum* with all the connotations evinced by this term: temporal (*siècle*) as well as spatial (world), as in “world without end.””⁸⁸ Le Corbusier’s proposal would be analogous with the completion of the Tower, almost the equivalent of eating from the tree of life. Time in its capacities of progression and decay would almost cease to be as all efforts become expended in the maintenance of the single vision. Translation and interpretation would be absent in Le Corbusier’s model because they are both symptoms and causes of the degradation he is seeking to purify. With the completion of the Tower, temporality would cease, rather than reaching completion. Through the confounding of language God submits humanity into the full grips of the *saeculum*, the world of shared human experience in which religion and secular exist together in time. Humanity is denied direct, unmediated access to the eternal and so out of necessity must engage with religion, the *logos* of faith for the eternal. And so the secular follows, as Vahanian writes, ““secular” was only the antonym of “religious,” not its antithesis: they formed a pair, never to be cleaved one from the other.”⁸⁹ Le Corbusier was compounding the pair into immanent singularity, leaving no space for both by removing time and creating a world-end. The impetuous rush to overcome the time remaining and create the heavenly city denied the

⁸⁶ Ward, p. 41. City as described in: Revelations 21:16-22.

⁸⁷ Gabriel Vahanian, having written some of the best work on the subject of the *saeculum*, gives a broad definition of term as meaning, “[this] present age, this world.” It is the world without end in which the eternal ruptures into time. Quote and discussion in: Gabriel Vahanian, “Theology and the Secular”, in *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought*, Clayton Crockett, ed. (London and New York, 2001), p. 23.

⁸⁸ Vahanian also notes that the “French *siècle* means of course century, but also points to the worldhood of the world as the German *Weltlichkeit* is often translated, though it also means secularity.” Quotes from: Vahanian, “The Otherness of Time: Secularisation as Worlding of the Word and the Hallowing of Time”, *JCRT*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Dec. 1999).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

dialectical structure of the city itself. Paradoxically, Le Corbusier was creating a purgatory that he had found so distasteful; a null-time beyond the *saeculum* dialectic of the heavenly and earthly city. Le Corbusier was nihilistic in his plan for a city where meaning is found in built presence, rather than humanity or God. The purgatory Le Corbusier would offer no expiation or hope, however, just an end to future sin in the capacity that there would be no future.

Secular and religious are temporal forms; the religious points to the eternal city and the completion of time, whilst the secular limits this by not allowing religion to be all-encompassing. The secular prevents the religious from becoming a Tower in itself, a singular language of memory that overwhelms all else, and it is the religious that prevents the secular from being a Tower with no memory at all. While religion derives from the Latin *religare*, to bind, it is the “secular - a language all the religions have in common” - that actually binds universally.⁹⁰ Religion without the secular can have no claim to be universal (and indeed cannot claim to be religion in the Judeo-Christian framework), and yet the secular must not be thought of as a kind of original form or essence, because “the secular as a domain had to be instituted or imagined, both in theory and in practice.”⁹¹ Secular is not an *a priori* form, it is a political construct of language, and is in dialectic with the religious. Language, binds the religious and the secular, but in the post-Babel world this is an incomplete, subjective unification because “no language was ever handed down from heaven”, no language is *a priori*.⁹²

Binding the secular and the religious, language must be regarded as the most important aspect of the city; the confusion of dialogues that remain in the same space despite, and indeed because, of their bewildering difference. As Vahanian notes:

“It is Nietzsche who points out that, after the collapse of Christian culture, what remains is the Bible. Not a book but a trace – the emblematic trace of a language, if not language *tout court*. What remains is a theology of language, the cutting edge of discourse reduced neither to the religious nor to the secular.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Quote taken from: *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹¹ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, 1990), p. 9.

⁹² Harvey E. Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London, 1965), p. 243.

⁹³ Vahanian, “Theology and the Secular”, p. 23.

The city is also a trace; not of the divine but of Babel before the fall, which if nothing else was language *tout court*. Cities contain and at once are the cutting edge of discourse; theologies of language, both secular and religious. It is essential that they are both religious and secular, so must therefore, retain the trace of a language, the common discourse. Larry Shiner argued that “the elimination of the Jewish-Christian God as the ground and the end of Western culture removes the transcendent limit that keeps secular society secular.”⁹⁴ In the death of God era, the religious language must remain as the trace, or otherwise the secular is no longer secular. In the absence of the secular, the religious would be undifferentiated from the political, leading to expressions of Volk, nationalism, and theocracy, and yet without a foil with which to limit them. Language must remain as the bond that strengthens both the religious and secular positions, keeping the violence of the city, the religious, and the secular in its most positive functions.

In this world, there is no city without the secular. The city must be secular to make space for the religious to be available in all its forms. Vahanian writes that the “world is what the city of God and the city of man have in common”.⁹⁵ This needs to be defined further, however, as it is more accurately *language* which the city of man and the city of God have in common. Vahanian writes:

“The secular is what outgrows religion; it looms on the incompressible horizon of memory as what’s left when religion is loosened from the fossilizing effects of memory and fades into hope.”⁹⁶

Out of the language of religion the secular emerges to encapsulate the political sphere, the day-to-day machinations, and the historical memory. The detachment from the daily machinations of the world allows religion the critical space for hope. That is not to say the religious is not engaged, but rather it is engaged from outside in a space of humility and compassion, through a shared mythical genus, and shares in the linguistic confusion. Writer Andrew Sullivan argues that:

“...secularism alone does justice to the profundity of the claims of religion... Humility requires relinquishing the impulse to force faith on others, to condemn those with different faiths, or to condescend to those who have sincerely concluded that there is no God at all.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Larry Shiner, “Toward a Theology of Secularization”, in *Journal of Religion*, Vol. XLV, No. 4 (October 1965), p. 287. Vahanian also echoes this point: “Remove the heart, or kill God, and the same finger is pointing at us: we have killed the secular or turned it into the parody of an obsolescent religion.” *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Vahanian, “Theology and the Secular”, p. 18

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁹⁷ Andrew Sullivan as quoted in, Daniel Radosh, *Rapture Ready: Adventures in the Parallel Universe of Christian Pop Culture* (New York, 2008), p. 293.

Cities are necessarily secular spaces that allow the space to interact with humility, granting the full profundity of religion and dialogue between faiths. The city is the critical space for language, as it is both an expression of language in its own right and also a space for sharing in the dialectic.

Intermezzo: “The City Coat of Arms”

Franz Kafka’s short story, “The City Coat of Arms”, retells the Tower of Babel myth, but the Tower is never actually built, rather it is the proposed culmination of a dream of peaceful unity.⁹⁸ As a European Jew living a semi-exilic existence in both Vienna and Prague, Kafka’s move to re-imagine the Babel narrative makes sense. His uneasy use of a language (German) that was not quite his own echoes the fractured and multilingual nature of Babel, the incompleteness of language. As George Steiner writes, “The translucency of Kafka’s German, its stainless quiet, suggests a process of borrowing at high, very intolerable interest.”⁹⁹ The reinterpretation of the myth, the change of narrative perspective, and the unresolved messianic ambiguity, all reflect the Jewish tradition. “The arcane wit, the delicacy of probing, the *finesse* of Talmudic, of Midrashic and Mishnaic commentaries... Franz Kafka was heir to this methodology and epistemology of commentary, of “unending analysis” (Freud’s phrase)”, writes Steiner.¹⁰⁰ Unending analysis is the task of the modern; the continual acts of translation and expression enable the individual to experience and express otherness in a world of vagary and absence. With this background Kafka presents Babel as a far more ambiguous place, where divine intervention is suspended, and the world exists already with the knowledge of difference.

In “The City Coat of Arms”, for those that came to the city, it was the *idea* of building a tower that reached to heaven that was essential, rather than the physical completion of the Tower itself. Inhabitants of the city exist in messianic time, because it is the messianic that can achieve that which no Tower can, true unity through a divine act, or rupture that overcomes. “The idea, once seized in its magnitude, can never vanish again; so long as there are men on earth there will be the irresistible desire to complete the building.”¹⁰¹ Alterity is created by humanity as the dream of perfect unity that will subsequently reach to heaven. There is little desire to build the Tower in the present because technology is increasing at such a rate that it is “...likely that the next generation with their perfected knowledge will find the work of their predecessors bad, and tear down what has been built so as to begin

⁹⁸ Franz Kafka, “The City Coat of Arms”, in, *The Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, Nahum N. Glatzer, ed. (London, 1992).

⁹⁹ Steiner, “Introduction” (1992 orig.), in, Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, Willa and Edwin Muir, trans., E. M. Butler, additional trans. (New York, 1995), p. x.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

¹⁰¹ Kafka, “The City Coat of Arms”, p. 433.

anew.”¹⁰² Under the cloud of this concern, the focus turns to the construction of the city to house the workers, with every nationality wanting “the finest quarter for itself”.¹⁰³ The varied people fight, postponing the building even further as they wait for a time when they have perfect unity. “City Coat of Arms” can, therefore, be interpreted as a critique of nationalism and sectarianism which ghettoises populations, defeating the opportunity to work cooperatively toward a meaningful objective. The narrative of the short story differs substantially from that of the Torah/Bible, as the people in Kafka’s story are aware of their differences and are in no need of God’s intervention in this way. They do not need to undergo a second fall, because they are already experiencing the trials of interpretation and translation, and yet they are not without hope. The inhabitants of the city live with messianic hope, the interpretable idea which, for Kafka as a European Jew, formed a base for interpretation in and of the *saeculum*.

The people living in Kafka’s Babylon do not spend their entire time in conflict; “the town was embellished in the intervals, and this unfortunately enough evoked fresh envy and fresh conflict.”¹⁰⁴ By ornamenting the city the inhabitants were illustrating their differences, mythologizing their separation from each other, and engaging in an action which irrevocably showed their increasing distance from the unifying task of the Tower. Ornamentation of the city meant that those living in the city were accepting the increasing futility of their proposed task and instead engaging with their surrounding inhabitants. The actions of the inhabitants of the city in Kafka’s short story, bear comparison to those in a scene described by Slavoj Žižek (in discussion of German writer and theatre director, Heiner Müller), in which those waiting for the trains in Communist Eastern Europe are continually announced but never come, thus fostering a messianic attitude. “The point of this Messianic attitude was not that hope was maintained, but that, because the Messiah did *not* arrive, people began to look around and take note of the inert materiality of their surroundings”, writes Žižek.¹⁰⁵ The hope of arrival begins to be abandoned and instead the people turn to the *saeculum* and the expression of cultures. There is unmistakable violence in this task, but it is less than the totalitarian violence involved in uniting all people, because the unification of all people can only occur through that which is other to *all* humanity. By moving away from the task of unification, the

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 433-4.

¹⁰⁵ Žižek, *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings*, Rex Butler and Scott Stephens, eds. (New York and London, 2006), p. 47.

city comes closer to the principles of secularity where differences are accepted and met with hermeneutics, without an assimilatory attempt to overcome them.

By the second or third generation, the inhabitants had realised “...the senselessness of building a heaven-reaching tower; but by that time everybody was too deeply involved to leave the city.”¹⁰⁶ Meaning becomes invested in the everyday as the inhabitants turn to the city itself, uniting people in their experience of absence in this world. A second Fall occurs in this narrative, not through God’s intervention and revealing of the differences of humanity, but instead through the abandonment of the hope of unity and acceptance of differences that are unable to be overcome. Kafka’s story is a secular myth of the chasm of difference that exists between humanity and the impossibility of Utopianism. The myth is not without a God-figure however, as “all the legends and songs that came to birth in that city are filled with longing for a prophesised day when the city would be destroyed by five successive blows from a gigantic fist.”¹⁰⁷ Linear time, which haunted the city-dwellers with the expectation of technological improvement, remains firmly in place, re-imagined as an apocalyptic expectation. They long for the day when they will be spared the difficulty of living amongst difference, the day when that which binds them is destroyed through the agency of complete alterity. In Kafka’s “The City Coat of Arms”, the inhabitants of Babylon never become one people and in the end do not desire to be so. Existence is emptied of both the hope of building to heaven - transcendence from this world by human agency - and also Utopianism - the overcoming of the forces of time and difference. In the space of the city, humanity remains existing side-by-side as different-yet-together, longing for respite. Kafka’s story shows the difficulty and necessity of engagement with difference in the face of an uncertain future that refuses to be called-forth; that turns us to the *saeculum* and keeps the city open to the possibility of alterity.

¹⁰⁶ Kafka, “The City Coat of Arms”, p. 434.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Kierkegaard, Culture, and the Messianic Violence of Potentiality

“Violence is undone, violence is easier now, it’s uprooted, out of control, it has no measure anymore, it has no level of values.”

Don DeLillo, *Underworld*¹⁰⁸

“For people who are really uprooted there remain only two possible sorts of behaviour: either fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death... or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted, or only partly so.”

Simone Weil, *The Need For Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind*¹⁰⁹

“Paul’s experience is that the new community arose from nothing. At the moment when legitimacy passes from an old community to a new one, justification is strictly speaking not possible.”

Marin Terpestra and Theo de Wit, ““No Spiritual Investment in the World As It Is”: Jacob Taubes’s Negative Political Theology”¹¹⁰

Culture(s)

Cities contain and are contained by culture, a word imbued with such a seemingly endless variety of meaning that it has lost the majority of its *avant garde* impact. To try and define the term seems to be a quixotic task, and yet also hugely popular if the continuing abundance of broad-outline cultural studies texts is anything to go by.¹¹¹ Despite the incredible breadth that the term culture spans, it is essential to engage with it in order to achieve a greater understanding of the city. And indeed, ‘culture’, in its popular usage is distinctly urban in its orientation and focus.¹¹² This being so, it is necessary to begin with at least a general working outline of the term, which is adequately and succinctly provided by theologian Sheila Davaney: “the notion of culture points simultaneously to the totality of relations and dynamics that constitute human life and to the specificity and concreteness of particular

¹⁰⁸ Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (London, 1998), p. 76.

¹⁰⁹ Simone Weil, *The Need For Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind* (London, 1952).

¹¹⁰ Marin Terpestra, and Theo de Wit, ““No Spiritual Investment in the World As It Is”: Jacob Taubes’s Negative Political Theology”, in, *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate, eds. (New York, 2000), p. 338.

¹¹¹ Texts such as: Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, foreword by Paul Willis, (Los Angeles and London, 2008). Simon During, *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York, 2005). Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, eds. *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (London, 2008). Jeff Lewis, *Cultural Studies: The Basics* (Los Angeles and London, 2008).

¹¹² Although “culture” is highly urban in its use and definitions, there is no need to strictly divide into sub-genres of culture and religion such as rural, urban, primitive or non-Western. Instead, “culture” should be approached with the understanding that it is a human creation, which, by virtue of population density and a multiplicity of exchange, tends to be most stressed and apparent in cities.

human historical configurations.”¹¹³ Culture contains both the universal and the particular of human relations and is, therefore, homologous with the *saeculum*. As totality, culture encompasses secular, religious, and all cities as humanity’s creations, and so in itself is relatively worthless as a critical term. When regarded solely in the particular sense, culture becomes meaningless again, because cultures:

“...are internally pluralistic, continually in process of being made and remade, conflictual and, importantly, lacking unifying unchanging cores, essences or centres that provide their inhabitants stable identities, roles, or direction.”¹¹⁴

Cities as lived-realities could be defined in an almost identical manner, reflecting that cities are cultures made manifest, always internally inconsistent, never existing as the singularity of vision that planners such as Le Corbusier suggested. The critical value of the analysis of culture, in its mirroring of the city, arises from the short-circuit between the singular and pluralistic conceptions of culture. With the city, like culture, the interest lies not in the particular city, but in the dialectical gap between the idea of the city and the city-itself.

Culture raises issues for Christianity and theology, most of which are far beyond the scope of this work, but a brief discussion is necessary to generally determine the role of theology in relation to culture. H. Richard Niebuhr writes that, “in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female; but in relation to other men a multitude of relative value considerations arise.”¹¹⁵ Christianity asserts the possibility of a singular culture, but must contend with the plethora of difference that exists in the world. The difficulty arises in relating to the differences without becoming just another relative cultural consideration. So theology of culture, by necessity, “must employ metacultural norms of judgement.”¹¹⁶ Whilst being metacultural, these norms of judgement must be open to cultural critique or else

¹¹³ Sheila Greeve Davaney, “Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis”, in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, Delwyn Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner, eds. (Oxford and New York, 2001), p. 5. Theologian Kathryn Tanner provides a similar definition: “First, and perhaps most basically, *culture is understood as a human universal*. All (and only) human beings have culture. Culture is the defining mark of human life... Though culture is universal in the sense that all people have one, the anthropological use of the term *highlights human diversity*.” Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 25-6.

¹¹⁴ Davaney, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, Evanston, and London, 1951), p. 237.

¹¹⁶ Julian N. Hartt, “The Philosopher, The Prophet, and the Church: Some Reflections on Their Roles as Critics of Culture”, in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. XXXV, No. 3 (July, 1955), p. 156. From the metacultural standpoint of the singular “theology of culture” opens a freedom to diverge into the pluralistic “theologies of culture” and “theology of cultures”. These possibilities stem from the original metacultural claim that could possibly include all.

theology dies through becoming a closed culture-sphere. Theological metacultural norms of judgement must also undergo rigorous internal, theological evaluation or risk voiding the theological, which is inherently hermeneutical, of its validity. “The promise of cultural studies for theology lies in its potential to break down the fairly rigid boundary that has demarcated religion from its surroundings”, writes Linell E. Cady.¹¹⁷ Cultural studies is the other in the conversation, it questions the legitimacy of theology’s metacultural norms and is likewise interrogated by theology. Through dialogue, cultural studies and theology are freed from their respective spheres and both can enter into a full discussion of the *saeculum*.

Kierkegaard, Banksy, and the Messianic Potential of Religiousness B

A critical figure in the discussion of culture and religion is the 19th Century Danish theologian (although he was uncomfortable with the term theology, it was theology he was writing) Søren Kierkegaard. The existence-spheres that Kierkegaard proposed (aesthetical, ethical, and religious) provide a valuable platform for analysing culture.¹¹⁸ An issue that must be immediately addressed at this point is whether or not existence or culture spheres are valid given the porous nature of a culture that has experienced the fragmentary process of postmodernity. Richard Rorty mused along such lines, that a “wrong turn was taken when Kant’s split between science, morals, and art was accepted as a *donné*, as *massgebliche Selbstauslegung der Moderne*.”¹¹⁹ As has previously been discussed, cultures have no core, no essence that can attribute identity; so do Kant’s or Kierkegaard’s descriptive structures actually describe anything? Or in fact, can we be certain that there are no essences to be found in cultures? To answer the first question, no they do not describe any *thing* that could be considered concrete; rather they are working models that, following the event of postmodernity, are open to even greater possibilities. Via critics such as Rorty, the models have been voided of their essential status and have been returned fully to the realm of hermeneutics. They are open-ended expressions of language that contain no consistency in actuality, but can point to what could be, and critique what is. In response to the second

¹¹⁷ Linell E. Cady, “Loosening the Category that Binds: Modern “Religion” and the Promise of Cultural Studies”, in, *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, Delwyn Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner, eds. (Oxford and New York, 2001), p. 36.

¹¹⁸ It has been noted by others that these bear some comparison to Kant’s culture spheres model of science, morals, and art. An especially competent analysis is provided in: Calvin O. Schrag, “The Kierkegaard-Effect in the Shaping of the Contours of Modernity”, in, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995), pp. 1-17.

¹¹⁹ Richard Rorty as quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 3.

question, we can be sure that there is no essence to be found insofar that the only complete consistency that could occur at a specific point in time would be in culture in the singular metacultural sense. Culture in the singular metacultural sense, includes everything, excludes nothing, and thus is functionally worthless. Kierkegaard's existence-spheres must be treated as hermeneutical constructs of critique rather than descriptive realities.

For the aesthete in the aesthetical sphere, "all that matters is the now as a potential erotic instant... there is recognition of the other but only as *other-for-me*; as an objectified and faceless other...".¹²⁰ The aesthetical sphere is a sphere of hedonism and would pose a great threat to the city, for it sees no future and reduces others to the status of consumables. This sphere concerned Kierkegaard most, because it was the one he perceived to be most prevalent in the emerging industrial/capitalist society that surrounded him. With no concept of a future, other than its waiting to be another consumable 'now', the aesthetical sphere has no frame of reference from which to judge the world, and so it slips toward equality without referent. "[B]ecause no events or ideas catch hold of the age", Kierkegaard argued, "the process of levelling (will) become a harmful pleasure, a form of sensual intoxication."¹²¹ The argument that Kierkegaard presents is not with the idea of equality that the age was bringing to the fore, but the idea of equality without referent, where no event is significant because it is completely devoid of transcendent meaning. Here Kierkegaard could be read as making a prescient argument against the excesses of postmodernity, where high and low culture are undifferentiated, and everything (and therefore nothing) is potentially imbued with transcendence. To exist in such a way in the aesthetical sphere is to exist violently; it is a sphere of consumption that cannot even be considered individualistic because individualism recognises others as individuals, the aesthete does not differentiate. As Hannah Arendt asserts, "the extreme form of violence is One against All."¹²² This violence is the result of the aesthetical sphere; it precludes community, communal meaning and the city itself; for the city is confusion, whereas the aesthete reduces the babble to a single other-for-me.

The ethical sphere is an improvement on the aesthetical sphere in that it acknowledges the three dimensions of time (past, present, and future) in a way that unifies them, "rendering

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

¹²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age and Two Minor Ethico-Religious Treatises*, Alexander Dru and Walter Lowrie, trans. (London, 1940), p. 43.

¹²² Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London, 1970), p. 42.

possible the integrity of an ethical existence.”¹²³ To exist in the ethical sphere is to have a view of history that informs the present and a concept of the future that imparts importance on actions in the present. It is a modern position of self-reflexive responsibility, a self-choice acknowledging the individual outside of the self. Calvin O. Schrag writes:

“The ethically chosen self finds that it has not only duties for and to itself but also duties for and to others as it is shaped by the concrete reciprocal relations with its natural and surroundings.”¹²⁴

This advancement is crucial for the city as the individual consciously engages with the plethora of others sharing the place and also the surrounding city itself. In comparison, the aesthetical person sees the surroundings as possibilities for personal use and gratification, a personal playground of *jouissance*.

Those who simply graffiti their names throughout the city could be regarded as existing in the aesthetical sphere, through the act of self-aggrandising themselves to a faceless world via another’s property.¹²⁵ Some could argue that self-aggrandisement indicates a view of the world that includes the future (i.e. the future viewing of the tag), however, this is not the case, as the *jouissance* occurs in the action and the immediate imagination of the faceless other’s response; the artist is rarely privy to the reaction of the general populous. In the case of one artist overwriting another’s tag, it is a classical act of one in the aesthetical sphere, the domination of the other - the removal of the name, the face – in aid of one’s own *jouissance*. This is not to say that all graffiti can be placed in the aesthetical sphere, and indeed it could be argued that some fits into the ethical sphere. For instance, the street artist who goes under the name Banksy tends to create pieces of work that consider a futurity, that convey social and political messages.¹²⁶ Three years after Hurricane Katrina, Banksy produced a series of murals throughout New Orleans depicting scenes:

¹²³ Schrag, p. 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁵ While it could be argued that graffiti artists actually target others in the small subculture, the meaning remains the same - the individual against faceless others.

¹²⁶ Examples of Banksy’s work – almost exclusively urban - which have been recorded and printed by Banksy, include: Banksy, *Banging Your Head against a Brick Wall* (Bristol, 2001), *Existencilism* (Bristol, 2001), *Cut It Out, Vol. 3* (Bristol, 2005), and, *Wall and Piece* (London, 2007). Collections of Banksy’s work, gathered and discussed by others, include: Martin Bull, *Banksy Locations & Tours: A Collection of Graffiti Locations & Photographs in London* (London, 2006), and, Steve Wright, *Banksy’s Bristol: Home Sweet Home*, Richard Jones, ed., Trevor Wyatt, illus. (Bristol, 2007).

“...including Abraham Lincoln as a homeless man pushing a basket, a marching band wearing gas masks, an old man in a rocking chair with an American flag below the words "No Loitering," and a boy on a swing made out of a life preserver.”¹²⁷

These works address political issues from an understanding of history and show compassion for other people. In a press release that coincided with the works, Banksy writes: “[t]hree years after Katrina I wanted to make a statement about the state of the clean up operation.”¹²⁸

Whilst there may be an element of personal gratification and reward in the productions, there is also a message that speaks beyond the aesthetical sphere. Conceivably it could be argued that Banksy is not a graffiti artist because he leaves readily identifiable images rather than wilfully ambiguous ciphers, but he does, however, use others property to convey the message. Banksy has, therefore, begun to move beyond the aesthetical sphere of the tagger who leaves cryptic signs and names, toward the ethical sphere, which in Banksy’s particular case, is conveyed using the commonality of image. The image is not beyond language in the sphere of destructive violence, but is in itself a language of social commentary that engages with the urban environment. In the particular case of his work in New Orleans, it could be argued that Banksy is engaging in the other-for-me of the aesthetical sphere; using the misfortune of others to build a profitable artistic impression. This is at least partially true and reinforces the need for Kierkegaard’s existence spheres to be critical modes of evaluation, rather than, solely as culture-spheres in the everyday sense that contain such internal inconsistency they are incapable of content.

Kierkegaard’s breakdown of the religious sphere into Religiousness A and Religiousness B offers an even greater schema of critique. Religiousness A operates as a sphere of immanence; a culture-sphere in a similar vein to the aesthetical and the ethical, which potentially fractures the individual away from civic society, but retains the inherent tendency of interiority present in the other spheres. As Schrag explains:

“The ethically existing subject in its baptism into Religiousness A becomes aware of being-guilty, of a profound dis-relationship with itself as a social and civic self... Proceeding in tandem... is a problematization of the moral self-assurance in the ethical sphere; a recognition of the subject’s moral efforts towards rectifying its misdeeds”.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Julie Bloom, “Banksy Hits New Orleans”, *The New York Times* (Late Edition (East Coast)), (New York: August 29, 2008), p. E3.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Schrag, pp. 8-9.

This sphere operates somewhere between Alcoholic Anonymous's recognition of one's powerlessness against vice and subsequent need for God, and Richard Rorty's self-aware irony. Religiousness A "can be understood to embody the fourth culture-sphere that has been glossed by the makers of modernity", writes Schrag.¹³⁰ It is the modern religious position, self-reflexive in its understanding of the world, and with its relativisation of values, it stands a step beyond the ethical existence sphere. The danger inherent in the move to relativise values is the potential loss of community and of humanity itself. There is a possibility of levelling, with the religious becoming the equivalent of all other culture, without alterity or a metacultural position from which critique can be engaged. The danger would be of Religiousness A moving back toward the aesthetical sphere, with the other so individually distinguished and catered-to that difference is rendered meaningless in its complete relativisation.

Care must be taken so that Religiousness A does not to become too much like the other culture-spheres, it must stake a claim of difference and yet must never become isolated as a sphere of pure interiority, only in-and-of itself. As Harvey Cox argued, "the church [religious/cultural edifice] is never the creator of reconciliation. It is the agent."¹³¹ The claim must be made for what would be a fourth culture-sphere in Kant's scheme, not as a strictly quantifiable sphere including particular denominations, but as a critique of the modernist drive toward singularity. Alain Finkielkraut describes the potential horror that lies within the drive to singularity in the modernist period:

"While rejecting all reference to religion, the modern period fulfils the biblical revelation: all humanity is one... In a world deserted by transcendence, fanatics no longer evoke the name of God to justify barbaric customs; they call on identity politics instead."¹³²

Clearly Finkielkraut is not advocating a return to religion as the way to solve the injustices of the world; rather it is the reference to religion that is needed. The dialectical partner of secular society must be returned at least as hermeneutics in order to return authenticity and legitimacy to secular modernity. Just as God can no longer be evoked to justify barbaric customs, God or the secular can no longer be used to critique them, unless the dialectic is restored.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³¹ Cox, p. 227.

¹³² Alain Finkielkraut, *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, Judith Friedlander, trans. (New York, 2000), pp. 104-6.

The religious and the secular must remain at odds with each other without losing the language which maintains their connection. Tanner writes:

“Christian language is, then, as Søren Kierkegaard would say, essentially transferred language. And the same holds as he thought, for all Christian practices... Christian practices are always the practices of others made odd.”¹³³

Christianity must maintain its links with secularity or else face the prospect of not knowing its own practices, its own language. The link between Christianity and secular culture must always be recognised. Religiousness A achieves this by being a separate, wilfully odd, culture-sphere that nonetheless is part of meta-culture. Although Religiousness A emerged from a Christian perspective, “as a conjugated “ethico-religious sphere” it can “exist quite happily in paganism as well as in Christianity.”¹³⁴ In actuality, Religiousness A is the ethical position extended and made odd, which in fact, does not need to refer to the particularities of religion at all.¹³⁵ Religiousness A can be secular, not just in the Vahanian sense of religious being inherently secular, but also as a hermeneutic of critical self-reflexivity that challenges the surrounding culture by being wilfully different. By engaging in self-reflexivity - the self made odd to itself and society - the individual creates a dis-relationship with the social and civic self, allowing for critical reflection in the present. The individual’s task is like that of theologians who,

“...operate by tying things together – the Latin meaning for *religare* after all, is to bind. And they do so by the way of an innumerable series of discrete disruptions and concrete balancing acts vis-à-vis sets of elements already in play, disruptions and balancing acts that eventually add-up to something surprising.”¹³⁶

These disruptions of the self and the world are crucial to the city, without them, real difference is not perceived and Finkelkraut’s statement becomes reality. When all humanity is one, there are no cities - no thriving centres of growth and exchange - all that remains of the city is the name, stripped of all referential meaning and content.

The truly valuable piece in Kierkegaard’s schema of existence-spheres is Religiousness B; the part that goes beyond the temporal and the immanent.

¹³³ Tanner, p. 113.

¹³⁴ Schrag, p. 8.

¹³⁵ Religiousness A is the ethical position “made odd” in that it is self-consciously aware of its dis-relationship with itself and civic self. The chasm of the dis-relationship is created, made, self-realised, thus extending the ethical sphere and moving beyond it.

¹³⁶ Tanner, p. 92.

“Religiousness B punctuates the decisive moment in the life of the existence-spheres by marking out the advent of an incursion of the eternal into the temporal, the descent of the divine into the historical, disclosing the ground of edification in a source other than of the self.”¹³⁷

So Religiousness B is the only aspect of complete exteriority, the only part of the schema that does not arrive out of inwardness. It remains indefinitely as exteriority because the exteriority cannot be actively sought or expected by any individual, thus denying any particular claim of situated preference. Kierkegaard did obviously conceive of this as an overtly Christian rupture, but in light of Vahanian’s discussion of Nietzsche’s reading of the Bible as trace, non-believers can use the concept as hermeneutic of critique, a signifier of future hope. The existence spheres, like the Bible, are extended beyond the initial bounds; they become truly self-reflexive critical tools as they are extended to all humanity, believers and non-believers alike. A trace that is open to the full dialectic of the secular and the religious is without essence or transcendence, it is a hermeneutic of critique that is able to be engaged with to challenge any particular cultural claims. By placing the hope effectively beyond the reach of culture, it cannot be consumed and made redundant, so remains as a possibility, continuing to cast a shadow of doubt over any claims of primacy of the contemporary. Of course, the notion itself is a part of culture itself, it arises out of a particular time and place just like all else, except that as a possibility that cannot be brought closer, it continues as a hermeneutic of critique in the present that acts to limit and challenge cultural claims in the present including, paradoxically, the claim of Religiousness B itself.

Religiousness B is the decisive move beyond the culture-spheres of Kant and the dialectics of Hegel. It is not a part of culture, nor is it subject to human rationality; it is a rupture of both that remains out of reach. In “broad terms” of Hegel’s dialectic, “the aesthetic stage is the in-itself moment of inwardness; the ethical is inwardness for-itself; and the religious stage (religiousness A) first appears as inwardness in-and-for itself.”¹³⁸ Religiousness B is the final piece in the schema, it transcends Hegel and gives meaning to the other existence-spheres. Kierkegaard’s dissatisfaction with Hegel is apparent in his ironic summation of the philosopher, as paraphrased by Walker Percy, “describing Hegel as the philosopher who lived in a shanty outside the palace of his own system and saying that Hegel knew everything and

¹³⁷ Schrag, p. 10.

¹³⁸ Stephen N. Dunning, “The Dialectic of Contradiction in Kierkegaard’s Aesthetic Stage”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (September, 1981), p. 386.

said everything, except what it is to be born and to live and to die.”¹³⁹ Religiousness B is the hope that gives meaning to the other existence-spheres, and moves beyond the realm of culture. Martin J. Matušík writes: “Kierkegaard’s individual both lives in the ethical-universal (this defies individualist atomism) and yet is not commensurate with it (this defies a Hegelian holism or any communitarian ethos).”¹⁴⁰ For Kierkegaard, a key example of this complex existence is found in the story of Abraham, where he is called to sacrifice his son. As John Milbank explains, “in the Abraham story one sees how the ultimate vertical rupture of faith is supposed transcendently to found and guarantee the continuity of ethical life, which is the life of the city.”¹⁴¹ The inexplicable act of sacrificial violence ruptures the ethical existence and yet guarantees its continuation. By being beyond language, the rupture of faith implicitly critiques the ethical claims of action and yet validates their continuity by the intervention of God that ultimately halts the unethical action.

Religiousness B is, essentially, the messianic because it is read out of the historical, through a future hope, into the present. It becomes a question of time, challenging all that would make claim to an immanent Real by speaking through the hermeneutics of the eternal. Language is the transformer of time, it ruptures the present. As Vahanian writes:

“Sublating rather than merely relating temporality, language turns time, not into memory, but into words; it is the verb of time: time begins with the word... that times with the creation as it will with the incarnation.”¹⁴²

Theological language becomes the trace that is necessarily read, thus defying a linear model of progressivism by situating time as an interpretative hermeneutic, language as the hermeneutic of time. Time enters the realm of the translation, open to short-circuit, provisionally united by the hope of mutual understanding. The messianic remains perpetually out of reach, provisionally uniting humanity with the hope of understanding that translation provides. For Christianity, the problem is that the Messiah is out of reach, not just in the future but also in the past, always a hermeneutical interpretation of past event or future hope. Franz Kafka (a Jew whose Messiah had not yet come) writes: “[t]he Messiah will only come

¹³⁹ Walker Percy, in, Bradley R. Dewey, “Walker Percy Talks about Kierkegaard: An Annotated Interview”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July, 1974), p. 281.

¹⁴⁰ Martin J. Matušík, “Kierkegaard’s Radical Existential Praxis, or: Why the Individual Defies Liberal, Communitarian, and Postmodern Categories”, in, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995), p. 249.

¹⁴¹ Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard”, in, *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, Phillip Blond, ed. (London and New York, 1998), p. 146.

¹⁴² Vahanian, “The Otherness of Time: Secularisation as Worlding of the Word and the Hallowing of Time”, section 11.

when he is no longer necessary, he will only come after his arrival, he will come not on the last day, but on the very last day.”¹⁴³ Time is open to the messianic rupture and life is lived in the hope of its arrival, not the expectation. Marin Terpestra and Theo de Wit write that “[m]essianic expectation accepts the Messiah’s absolute transcendence, implying that people cannot decide who or what will fulfil this expectation.”¹⁴⁴ The Messiah is pure exteriority and is thus stripped of any expectations in the temporal. In the present, the individual does not despair in the absence of the messianic, but busies themselves in preparing and progressing with time remaining open to rupture. Fundamentalism succumbs to a sense of despair in the present and so looks back to the past, not as a hermeneutic, but as an attempt to reclaim a perceived historical reality; the future is then read from this closed historical moment, rather than from a critical perspective in the present that encompasses subsequent development.

Religiousness B operates similarly to Augustine’s City of God; they both inform the world as it is and yet are distanced and unavailable. For the city, Religiousness B is the hope for something other than what is; a hope created by the break in time that occurred when God came down to Babel and confounded their language. With the second Fall, humanity is condemned to exist with myth and time, together in this world, yet separate as neighbours. Religiousness B sits as the idea of the city, the inexhaustible possibilities that potentially rupture the cities of the present. For Kierkegaard, “the neighbour from the perspective of religiousness B is the other with whom I share a common sin-consciousness, co-implicated in the travail of human suffering, and delivered through a free and forgiving act of God.”¹⁴⁵ Reimagining from a secular viewpoint, the neighbour is someone who shares in the imperfection of humanity, never to be completely overcome by humanity. This is not the same as the Feuerbachian ‘Religion as Projection’, where “man denies as to himself only what he attributes to God” and “the yearning after God is the yearning after pure unadulterated feeling.”¹⁴⁶ Religiousness B is only a matter of denial insofar as it is necessary

¹⁴³ Franz Kafka, *Notebooks*, as quoted in, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (Stanford, 1998), p. 57.

¹⁴⁴ Terpstra and De Wit, ““No Spiritual Investment in the World As It Is”: Jacob Taubes’s Negative Political Theology”, p. 343.

¹⁴⁵ Schrag, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, “Religion as Projection”, in, *The Philosophy of Religion Reader*, Chad Meister, ed. (London and New York 2008), pp. 341-4. In fact, the increase in urbanisation, cosmopolitanism, and communication has acted to erode the “religion as projection” worldview described by Feuerbach. As Andrew J. Weigert argues: “Mass communication, increased geographical and psychic mobility, and urbanism and cosmopolitanism as ways of life foster perspectival theories of truth that previously had been seen “naturally”. The sources of felt conflict are no longer projected onto non-human or super-natural causes, but seen as

to have the concept beyond the scope of culture, as a perpetual critique; it is not perfection as such, rather the challenge to all claims of perfection. Religiousness B is both the kingdom that is becoming and the kingdom that will never be, because actual being would be its self-defeat.

Waiting outside of the contemporary, Religiousness B questions all claims of the absolute in this world, not in a grand sweep that condemns all to subjectivity, but as a transcendent possibility that illuminates the insufficiency of the subjective and demands a shift towards an objective, inclusive view of humanity. Louis Dupré writes that:

“When Kierkegaard in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* describes Christianity as “essentially subjectivity,” he does not mean that the message of revelation is immanent in the mind itself, as some idealists claimed, but rather the opposite, namely, that this message is so transcendent that the mind cannot absorb it.”¹⁴⁷

For the secular, Religiousness B can be transcendence that cannot be absorbed or contained. It is hope, which ‘is the subjectivity proper to the continuation of the subjective process.’¹⁴⁸ This is a challenge to the postmodern tendency toward transcendence that is readily absorbable and accessible in the present, circumventing hermeneutics: the glimpse offered in the other-for-me aesthetical relationship that overcomes the subjective. Yet, transcendence must not be able to be absorbed, because then it would proceed into the realm of power, becoming selectively available, and able to be controlled. The claim of transcendence existing beyond the realm of hermeneutics is then able to be abused as its impact is decided by individuals, thus metamorphosing the metropolis into a theopolis.¹⁴⁹ All of these things are not conducive to equality and cooperation, which are essential characteristics of the city.

Not allowing Religiousness B to be centred mirrors the position of Paul’s action and thought in the Bible, as Alain Badiou argues:

conventional effects of human action.” Weigert, Andrew J., “Joyful Disaster: An Ambivalence-Religion Hypothesis”, in, *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 50, No. 1, (Spring, 1989), p. 78. Not only is Religiousness B not in adherence to Feuerbach’s “religion as projection”, it fits into an urban, cosmopolitan model where everything within the world is human in both cause and effect, and the limitless possibility of alterity remains suspended as exteriority, useful without being used-up.

¹⁴⁷ Louis Dupré, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2008), p. 109.

¹⁴⁸ Badiou, p. 93

¹⁴⁹ A “theopolis” is different to the models such as Calvin’s Geneva which aimed for a pure community, singularity based on religious principles. The theopolis, like the metropolis, includes difference, but the claim of absorbable transcendence imbues a select few with religio-authoritarian power over the masses without necessarily aiming to unite. Absorbable transcendence opens the possibility of nihilistic power structures that hinder the development of a free, open city.

“...the *ex-centered* dimension of Paul’s action is the practical sub-structure of his thought, which posits that all true universality is devoid of a center... Recall that Paul was born into a well-off family in Tarsus, that he was a man of the city rather than a man of the country.”¹⁵⁰

Paul was a self-chosen exile from both Judaism and Roman citizenship; by not centring himself in Jerusalem he showed an understanding for the universalism of the Christ event. The rupture that Paul claims to experience occurs outside of the city, with the return of the nomadic God, but this message is then extended to the city and is open to be interpreted within it. If the rupture were to occur in the city, the multiplicity of the inhabitants could diminish the singularity of the event, or vice-versa, and so it is fitting that the rupture, just like the crucifixion, occurred beyond the walls and subsequently extended as logos. It is essentially important that Paul was a man of the city, for the city offers the rupture of exile and the possibility of not being centred; the hope of universalism. The city demands that the inhabitant be an exile, because the city itself is not complete, can never be the ‘home’ that offers complete solace. So the city-dweller must first begin by being an internal exile, “a man who has taught himself to behave as if he had already crossed a frontier while refusing to leave his house.”¹⁵¹ The refusal to leave the house or the city is an unnecessary addition and counterintuitive because after having crossed the threshold as such, one is already a self-chosen exile, a status which will not be diminished or increased by distance travelled. Paul is the prototypical ideal city-dweller; self-reflexively shedding his bonds he was free to roam in the realm of the universal. As a figure, Paul must be taken as a metaphorical-construct at this point, a hermeneutical device, because to use him as a model would be to create a centre.¹⁵² Religiousness B must be decentred so that it remains universal and is the reflection of the practical considerations of the city-dweller. Rupture can only occur in the city as hermeneutical event, because after Babel, the singular Logos must always enter into the plurality of translation.

Paul as a hermeneutical embodiment of thought raises significant issues for a secular reading of Religiousness B because the secular does not necessarily acknowledge the Christ-Event, the rupture of the universal into the temporal. Considered this way, Religiousness B

¹⁵⁰ Badiou, pp. 19-21.

¹⁵¹ This quote refers to the particular case of Solzhenitsyn’s internal exile in Russia. Mary McCarthy, “A Guide To Exiles, Expatriates, and Internal Emigrè”, in, *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, Marc Robinson, ed. (San Diego, New York, and London, 1994), p. 58.

¹⁵² The difference between Paul as a figure and Paul as a model is that; as a figure Paul is a metaphorical construct alongside many other “figures”, able to be critiqued and discussed; whereas, Paul as a model would be an attempt to claim a perfect figure, recapture an historical moment, a centre.

undergoes a further decentralisation and is left without a founding event. As Badiou writes, “...Paul warns the philosopher that the conditions for the universal cannot be conceptual, either in origin, or in destination.”¹⁵³ Conceptual ideas are temporal and as such are able to be absorbed in the subjective; they are a centre in themselves. This is where the disagreement with Paul arises, because even with the Christ-rupture as an event, there are limitations on the universal. Žižek writes:

“What the Christian all-inclusive attitude (recall St Paul’s famous ‘there are no men or women, no Jews and Greeks’) involves is a thorough exclusion of those who do not accept inclusion into the Christian community.”¹⁵⁴

By not allowing for the truly other - those who do not accept the offer of inclusion into the community - the founding Event becomes one of radical division. As a universal offer based on the event it stands as the possibility of universality, but because it is an event, a break already-and-becoming, the division is made real. The event alienates those that do not recognise or share the event, so the world continues, and there are men, and there are women, and now there are Christians, who operate, therefore, as a type of embodied universal (yet particular) transcendence. Universality should be a possibility that is perpetually out of reach, because the radical pursuit of it results in violence ultimately ending in totalitarianism, the top-down exclusion of alternatives.

Silence and the Possibilities of Potentiality without Relation to Being

A potential solution to this division can be derived from an idea outlined by Giorgio Agamben:

“...one must think the existence of potentiality without any relation to Being in the form of actuality... This, however, implies nothing less than thinking ontology and politics beyond every figure of relation, beyond even the limit relation that is sovereign ban.”¹⁵⁵

This is the philosophical position taken to the extreme and so works perfectly as a foil to the exclusionary offer of Christianity. Agamben’s position even goes so far as to exclude even the possibility of non-actualising or actualising. Under these conditions, Religiousness B

¹⁵³ Badiou, p. 108.

¹⁵⁴ Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* p. 47. Defining the term “ban”, Agamben writes: “Taking up Jean-Luc Nancy’s suggestion, we shall give the name *ban* (from the old Germanic term that designates both exclusion from the community and the command and insignia of the sovereign) to this potentiality (In the proper sense of the Aristotelian *dynamis*, which is always also *dynamis m• energiein*, the potentiality not to pass into actuality) of the law to maintain itself in its own privation, to apply in no longer applying.” *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* p. 28.

fulfils the true messianic potential described by Kafka; in this case the messiah will not come when expected, nor will it not come when expected. The messianic is a critique that even extends to claims of the messianic, similar to Mark C. Taylor's description of thinking "not":

"In thinking not, thought approaches a limit that inhabits it *as if* from within. The exteriority which is interior, rends thought, leaving it forever incomplete... So understood, the not does not exist; nor does the not exist."¹⁵⁶

"Not" cannot be made an actuality, it is potentiality that cannot be completed that opens the chance of thinking beyond every figure of relation. Potentiality without the possibility of being is the foundation of cities; it is the dynamic that can never be dimmed by application. The city exists in parallel to the idea of the city, with the "city itself" being antonymic to the "city", rather than to the town, country, or rural. As such, the city exists in paradoxical tension to *both* experience and expectation. This distance, between "idea of the city" and the "city itself", is maintained and with it the pure potentiality of alterity as the messianic. Beyond every figure of relation, the "idea of the city" maintains as a possibility open to all, never diminished or actualised, not existing yet not, not existing.

Walter Benjamin had an idea akin to Agamben's, desiring "to produce an essay that is 'devoid of all theory'".¹⁵⁷ In being purely descriptive and excluding analysis and abstraction Benjamin's proposed essay could be described as concrete silence. The essay would be from the position of Benjamin's Angel of History, wings outstretched, surveying the debris of history in entirety as it is propelled forward.¹⁵⁸ As Benjamin writes, "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history... which is to say, only a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments."¹⁵⁹ Seemingly the opposite of Agamben's potentiality, Benjamin's concrete silence is actually on a Mobius strip with it, meeting at the same point from opposite approaches. By making no demands on the history presented and refusing to analyse it, there is only actuality, but an actuality that is beyond every form of relation. It is open to the potential of theory and abstraction, which necessarily stays as possibility, the product of unredeemed humanity and time. This reading of history is ideal for the city because it is universally open to all, it strips away any attempt at a particular transcendent meaning that could otherwise alienate or exclude.

¹⁵⁶ Mark C. Taylor, *Not* (Chicago and London, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Gilloch, p. 38.

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations*, pp. 259-60.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

Nietzsche had a similar idea for architecture, “a contemporary building to his own taste, one that “has no name” and is “suggestive of nothing”, one in which to find himself and think his own thoughts.”¹⁶⁰ Of course all architecture (and this is no exception) is at least partially realised potential. What this does offer, however, is the potential for all to enter and think their own thoughts, and is as such a universal gateway through which the individual can engage in potentiality without relation to being. The potential for one to think their own thoughts is almost entirely only a potential because we think in types of praxis, relational structures, both physical and conceptual. Architecture that is “suggestive of nothing” offers the possibility (only a possibility) of respite from the types of praxis and engaging in the silence of potentiality without any relation to being.

Interestingly, Buddensieg writes that “the architecture that will suit him [Nietzsche], one in which he can think *his* thoughts, is a religious architecture that he denudes by a mental process (and is momentarily tempted to “remodel” physically.)”¹⁶¹ The temptation to actualise the potentiality is clearly there, but is resisted because otherwise the work of “denuding” – removing any potentiality of being in actuality – would be undone. As to the fact that, for Nietzsche, it is religious architecture (Christian) that had the potentiality; this is because this embodies the offer of universality that, once rejected, empties such forms of the potentiality of being and opens them to thinking, void of potential.¹⁶² So in an unusual way, the Christian offer of universal inclusion actually does include all; in the space of the answer to the offer is a potentiality untainted by the possibility of being. The process of denuding can

¹⁶⁰ Buddensieg, “Architecture as Empty Form: Nietzsche and the Art of Building”, p. 260.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. As Buddensieg notes, this architecture is a precursor to futurism, the idea of the blank slate. The architecture is not a reflection of mental process, but a space where one can think. Where futurism goes wrong, however, is the elimination of the humanity from the space, so it becomes a pure space of technology which humanity has stripped of ornament, including humanity as ornament. Futurism always contains a strange self-eliminating logic, where after the creative act, the creator is destroyed as an unnecessary excess. This is an example of the worrying trend in which technology is expressed as a type of presence made manifest, such as is apparent in the rather haphazard book, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism in the Age of Information*: Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London, 2004).

¹⁶² In the modern world where churches are secularised spaces and school halls and stadiums can become churches, certainty as to what constitutes “religious architecture” is not easily reached. “Religious architecture” could simply be defined as an anachronistic memory made manifest, and in this way nearly all architecture is religious architecture. Most architectural works contain a plethora of images, associations, and contexts that break the viewer away from the present, lurching awkwardly through the viewer’s memory and references. Modern architecture was an attempt to create purity, an escape from endlessly anachronistic dredging of the past into the present, but of course after a time, to produce such works is to fall into anachronism once more. Nietzsche’s method of denuding is that which allows the individual to enter a space that is overflowing with meaning and praxis, and act to create space within which one can think, potentiality without the possibility of being, and thus be temporarily free from the endless recycling of anachronisms.

be performed on all religious architectures; all the spaces that are overburdened with preordained meaning can be hollowed with silence. Potentiality without being is not even able to be glimpsed in this world for that would an attempt to submit to a presence that cannot be; rather, it is the silence of absence, the lack of presence, of glimpse, of transcendence.

Architect Bernard Tschumi continues Nietzsche's line of thought by discussing the possibility that architecture's next logical step is its own destruction. Tschumi's reasoning behind this argument is that in terms of space, "architecture is both being and non-being. The only alternative to the paradox is silence, a final nihilistic statement that might provide modern architectural history with its ultimate punchline, its self-annihilation."¹⁶³ Silence overcomes the possibility of being and non-being, and architecture in its self-immolation is pure potentiality, theory at its purest. To push architecture to this limit creates the type of space that Nietzsche created from religious architecture. Claudia Lacour writes:

"At the moments of explanatory crisis and schematic exhaustion, the function of the art of architectural form within the discourse of knowing suggests a world that would contain the possibility of thinking, rather than one our thought contains."¹⁶⁴

The silence that leads to destruction is also inherently creative as it allows space for thinking, outside of interiority; offering the chance at something new, uncontained by previous thinking. Silence, for both architecture and the city, is the possibility that overcomes presence and denies anachronisms taking hold in present. As the limit beyond expression, silence is messianic, the dialectical counterpoint to the translation and hermeneutics of life in the city, rather than the negation of them.

The physical manifestation of this architecture is Tschumi's *folies* (*folie* meaning madness) at La Villette, Paris, that:

"...is laid out on a grid structure that connects fire-engine red architectural elements with a 'cinematic promenade' comprising a series of provocative, frameworked vistas that unroll as you walk through campus... The insides of structures are, in places, exposed as exteriors and used as decoration; and the result is profoundly disorientating, as the Parc emerges as a complex organisation of ambiguous spaces and shapes..."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Tschumi, "The Architectural Paradox", *Architecture and Disjunction*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁴ Claudia Brodsky Lacour, "Architecture in the Discourse of Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Nietzsche", in, *Nietzsche and "An Architecture of our Minds"*, Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth, eds. (Los Angeles, 1999), p. 28.

¹⁶⁵ Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester, 1999), p. 107.

Tschumi's initial reference point for the *folies* was Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, which revealed that the "word *madness* changed meaning on several occasions."¹⁶⁶ Louis Martin, writing about Derrida's response to Tschumi's *folies*, includes:

"To name *folie* a piece of architecture that openly had no meaning was basically to deconstruct the architectural sign. This act was, for Derrida, to decenter architecture and thus to free it from its metaphysical meaning."¹⁶⁷

The *folies* are a move toward architectural silence as they have no transcendent meaning that can be attributed; empty shapes whose naming is not a naming at all. They defy assimilation and language, although they are of course not silence, for that is unavailable. Tschumi's *folies* are the unreadable signposts in that they name, but what is named is not "there", nor can it be "read". Instead, via the *folies*, Tschumi alludes to the possibility of silence and the possibility of the end of architecture. As manifestations of such architecture, the *folies* are not nihilistic, but rather, as Neil Leach writes:

"The *folies* affirm, and engage affirmation beyond... ultimately annihilating, secretly nihilistic repetition of metaphysical architecture... They revive, perhaps, an energy which was infinitely anaesthetized, walled-in, buried in a common grave or sepulchral nostalgia."¹⁶⁸

Silence sweeps away the anachronisms and nostalgia that could otherwise exclude or prevent the hermeneutics of translation.

Further figures that can be included in this discussion of potentiality and nothingness are Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, both of whom share a similar philosophy in this regard. Their suggestion in response to power in the world is radical inaction, to do nothing in the face of the tumult of dialogue and exchange. Žižek quotes Badiou's thesis: "It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent."¹⁶⁹ The refusal to participate in this case is a political action, but can also be read as that which refuses being in any actuality. To do nothing is neither truly action nor inaction, to add meaning is to break it to turn it into something, a response. Theory is, therefore, the *response* of doing nothing as critique, the hermeneutics that follow the silence. Žižek uses the example of political abstention, which he describes as "a true

¹⁶⁶ Louis Martin, "Transpositions: On the Intellectual Origins of Tschumi's Architectural Theory", *Assemblage*, No. 11 (April 1990), p. 31.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York and London, 1997), p. 328.

¹⁶⁹ Alain Badiou, "Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art", *lacanian ink* 23 (Spring 2004), p. 119, as quoted in Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 183.

political *act*”, because it is not dialogue but is instead the negation of dialogue.¹⁷⁰ By doing nothing, one is not inserting the possibility of something else being or not being, but is simply stripping-away all that is. In a modernity that is extensively derived from Protestant capitalism, to do nothing is the ultimate transgressive critique as silence stems the flow and exchange that the system founds its strength upon. It is in the critical space that exists in the city, surrounded by the tumult and movement of the city, that the individual has the opportunity to do nothing. Doing nothing beyond the city is limited by the fact that there is less to respond to, raising the danger that in doing nothing surrounded by nothing, one becomes analogous with nothing. This is not to say that beyond the city there is strictly nothing, rather that silence is a reaction to culture - the creation and existence of humanity - which is most concentrated in cities, and as such the silence occurs against the clamour of Babel.

Silence, which is neither actualising nor non-actualising, is a deconstructive force of exteriority. It implicitly critiques the violence of metaphysics of presence, that which would try to “place the various complexities of the world into a unified, thematic, whole through language”.¹⁷¹ Metaphysics of presence are attempts to rebuild Towers of Babel, to forcibly construct a unification of humanity through language. The deconstructive process with the refusal of assimilation and the breaking of the foundations of metaphysics can be considered a ““constructive” therapy to overcome... tendencies of violence. Therapy is, however, often difficult as frequently it “cuts” through to one’s innermost being, thoughts, and emotions in order to bring healing.”¹⁷² This deconstruction is a therapeutic violence as it disrupts all claims of unification, and is as such, the ultimate act of violence. Silence of this kind is exteriority that exists beyond language and unites in a way that is unattainable in the present. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Christology*, it is written that, “teaching about Christ begins in silence. ‘Be silent, for that is the absolute’ (Kierkegaard).”¹⁷³ Theology is the deconstructive force that comes after the inexplicable silence, which is in itself neither action nor inaction. It is the necessary step that prevents the silence becoming prolepsis, the assumption of messianic presence. Silence cannot be expected, because that would place it as an expected

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Michener, p. 70.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology* (London and New York, 1971), p. 27.

response, a part of a dialogue. Instead, this silence is the messianic Religiousness B; that which disrupts as pure exteriority, rendering all language impotent.

Violence, Exile, and Architecture of Disjunction

Žižek postulates that “sometimes, doing nothing is the most violent thing to do.”¹⁷⁴ It is the ultimate violent action or non-action possible in the melee of modern life, of which violence is a constant and necessary part. Violence is at the very core of the city, the disruptions, movement, and collisions all create a friction that is essentially urban. Graeme Gilloch writes that “shock is the key metropolitan experience... shock is a category of awakening. It disrupts the cosy comfort of bourgeois life, a life wallowing in the complacent conviction of its own immortality.”¹⁷⁵ These disruptions are vital because they encourage growth, change, and insert a dynamism that shatters the presentist veil of immortality. This is not to say that the city should be a lawless, wild space, or that physical violence against the individual is acceptable; rather, it is recognition that some of the most positive, valued aspects of the city, such as hope, upward mobility, cosmopolitan cooperation, and the chance of reinvention, all necessitate some degree of conflict. Violence will always be present in the city because it is never universal in the sense of being complete, consistently totalitarian.

Change is by nature, at least to some degree, violent. Richard Sennett argues that “less conflicted spaces behind the borders are less active. The social center is at the physical edge.”¹⁷⁶ Spaces of interaction are spaces of conflict, which is a necessary for change and development. As spaces of interaction, cities are spaces of hope; hope of being understood and being able to understand that which is not already known. Borders are spaces of relational liminality, where even the observer is confronted by their own difference, by their otherness; and the city-centre is the greatest border of all, it is a space of concentrated interaction, where all can come and interact. Outside of the relational liminality is the possibility of silence that undermines the primacy of any particular expression or violence

¹⁷⁴ Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 183.

¹⁷⁵ Gilloch, p. 173. Gilloch also notes that Walter Benjamin, a key writer on the city, linked the shocks of the city with the shocks experienced by the gambler.

¹⁷⁶ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 197 Elizabeth Wilson seems to agree with this argument, writing: “Richard Sennett was right to grasp the nettle of disorder, and to grasp that the excitement of city life cannot be preserved if all conflict is eliminated.” Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1991), p. 156.

that exists in the world. Richard Sennett, writing about architecture, argued that “a condition of endless alteration or smeared use would soon become meaningless”.¹⁷⁷ This can also be applied to the dynamic interactions of city-life, because without the critical function of silence that acts as an alternative and a negation, meaning loses its potentiality and thus stops being an “event” able to be short-circuited further.

Existing in the confusion of a post-Babel world, cities defy attempts of unification and completion. They are inherently violent spaces and as such, they are ruptured and discontinuous. As Bernard Tschumi writes, “we inhabit a fractured space, made up of accidents, where figures are disintegrated, *dis-integrated*.”¹⁷⁸ These spatial qualities in turn fracture the lives of the inhabitants, changing the way one sees and thinks. Robert Alter identifies Gustave Flaubert as an author who understood the chaotic nature of cities and revealed the subsequent effects through his characters:

“The mind of this new urban man, grasping shards of sensory data and jagged ends of recollected images, becomes a maelstrom in which the centrifugal elements of experience are whirled together in dizzying combinations.”¹⁷⁹

An individual in the city becomes a pastiche of influences, ideas, and experiences, and as such could be considered as containing the hallmarks of a postmodern. These influences are not to be received in a passive manner, however, because the city obligates the reflexive inhabitant to (re)act. To be passive and merely become a receptacle for the city’s signs and signification is to be overwhelmed as an individual. City life demands both an ego - the sense of individual significance and autonomy – and a sense of self-reflexivity - an appreciation of irony that opens the individual to the possibilities provided by others. In its plurality, the city acts to violently break-up, dis-integrate the claim and expression of a singular, unified, complete, “modern” self, whilst also challenging the claim that the city represents a universality of modernity. Plurality in the city acts as a self-check to any claim of universality, whilst it maintains the tension between the “city” and the “city itself”.

To be in a city is to be an exile, fragmented from the safety of home, amid a sea of strangers in an ever-changing milieu. Joseph Brodsky writes: “[t]o become a needle in the proverbial haystack—but a needle somebody is looking for—that’s what exile is all about. Pull down your

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Tschumi, “De-, Dis-, Ex-”, p. 217.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven and London, 2005), p. 20.

vanity, it says, you are but a grain of sand in the desert.”¹⁸⁰ The city limits the individual, requiring an allowance for the other and detaching the individual from a totalitarianism of locality. This is a violent process for the individual, one that ultimately resides as a personal choice; the city violently expresses the ideals but is ultimately without agency. Simone Weil writes of the obligation of the exile to undergo this violent process:

“Such friendship [for a land not one’s own] cannot really germinate and spring up in their hearts unless they do themselves a sort of violence. But this violence is an obligation on their part.”¹⁸¹

The same obligation exists for those entering a city, as they must cleave themselves from their home and be open to a milieu that is inviting, yet can never be a static “home”. However, as Richard Sennett writes:

“...the body can follow this civic trajectory only if it acknowledges that there is no remedy for its sufferings in the contrivings of society, that its unhappiness has come from elsewhere, that its pain derives from God’s command to live together as exiles.”¹⁸²

In the post-Edenic world there is no real solution to the pain of exile, as reinforced by the myth of Babel and the experience of life today, where any offer of completion is hollow and any experience of home is incomplete. One may feel “at home” in a city, but they are also obligated to break themselves from the attachment in order to experience the fractured city and the community of exiles.

The architecture of cities is as disjointed as the nature and definition of the city itself. Even if the city could be said to have an overall unifying schema of design and interpretation, it is not experienced in such a way. Bernard Tschumi writes: “[f]ragments of architecture... are all one sees. These fragments are like beginnings without ends...they are relays rather than signs. They are traces.”¹⁸³ Rather than alluding to a whole, they are passages toward further traces; traces of the architect who is dead in much the same way God is dead - no longer necessary - their works opened up as hermeneutics. In terms of architecture, we are like Cain: hidden from the objective view of the creator, we in turn interpret and create a lived reality in the creation. Flaubert understood, as Alter expresses, that the city is a “social and spatial reality so vast and inchoately kinetic that it defied taxonomies and thematic definition.”¹⁸⁴ In purely

¹⁸⁰ Joseph Brodsky, “The Condition We Call Exile: An Address”, in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, Marc Robinson, ed. (San Diego, New York, and London, 1994), p. 5.

¹⁸¹ Weil, pp. 207-8.

¹⁸² Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation* (New York and London, 1994), p. 376.

¹⁸³ Tschumi, “The Pleasure of Architecture”, p. 95.

¹⁸⁴ Alter, p. 20.

architectural terms, Cain's city would have been a city (although, as previously discussed, the homogenous population precludes such a definition otherwise), because as soon as the construction began the city would enter into the fractured realm of hermeneutics and thus be thematically indefinable. Perhaps Babel can be read through this idea and as such, the Tower was unified because all spoke a singular hermeneutic and were conceivably all part of the construction, thus refining the social and spatial reality to a singularity. The destruction of the Tower was the rupturing insertion of hermeneutics in the plural and thus the reduction of the Tower to fragments. As such, the destruction of the Tower of Babel was the death of the architect, as singular voice and creative actor.

Architecture is violent and fragmentary, both to the viewer and the object. Reading through the concept of violence, Bernard Tschumi suggests "that the definition of architecture may lie at the intersection of logic and pain, rationality and anguish, concept and pleasure."¹⁸⁵ Architecture is the disjunction in the dialectics, both the break and the link between the unshareable and the shareable, and is, therefore, a liminal expression. Logic, rationality, and concepts are open to exchange in that they are bound in language as hermeneutics of sharing and relation, whereas:

"Whatever pain achieves, it achieves it in part through its unshareability, and it ensures this unshareability in part through its resistance to language... Prolonged pain does not resist language but actively destroys it".¹⁸⁶

This statement could also be extended to include pleasure and anguish. They are experiences that stretch language to breaking-point, seemingly universal yet inconclusively so. By destroying language they break through the barrier imposed in the confounding of languages, but by doing so they also are radically unshareable thus leaving them as radically alienating experiences. As a violent, liminal disjunction, architecture is both exteriority and interiority; it is a language and yet is also partly unshareable. Architecture is a language that seeks to transcend its own limits and perhaps even demand silence in response, but because it exists against a multiplicity of interpretation, the silence is never absolute. This reflects the nature of the city, as the city is also confrontational in the same manner, shareable yet intensely alienating and personal, silent yet multifarious and engaging.

¹⁸⁵ Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts*, first published 1981 (London, 1994), p. XXVIII.

¹⁸⁶ Elaine Scarry, as quoted in, Robert M. Cover, "Violence and the Word", in, *On Violence: A Reader*, Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, eds. (Durham and London, 2007), p. 293.

As a disjunction, architecture ruptures time by creating a present, a unity that is distinct from that which has come before. Yet, because of the gap between the conception of the architecture and the completion, architecture is always the past made physically manifest. Architecture is a prophetic violence that is always overcome in its fulfilment and its completion that opens it up to the plurality of translation in the present. Friedrich Schelling writes:

“There can in fact be no past without a powerful present, a present achieved by the disjunction [of our past] from ourselves. That person incapable of confronting his or her past antagonistically really can be said to have no past; or better still, he never gets out of his own past, and lives perpetually within it still.”¹⁸⁷

The present demands the radical self-violence of the exile that breaks from the past, and is open to the new possibilities; built architecture is a spatio-temporal expression of this. Indeed, “[a]rchitecture is interesting only when it masters the art of disturbing illusions, creating breaking points that can start and stop at any time.”¹⁸⁸ It breaks open time in unexpected ways, allowing the dialectic with hope for alterity. In an uncertain position between interiority and exteriority, architecture at its best ruptures the damaging tendencies that occur if either is singularly present; whether in the form of other-for-me exteriority or nihilistic interiority as with Sartre’s protagonist in *Nausea*.¹⁸⁹ In the novel, the periods of greatest interiority, uncertainty, and withdrawal are also often accompanied by a fog enveloping the city, which renders the architecture and other inhabitants insignificant. This emphasises that whilst architecture can rupture, the impetus is on the individual to be ready, but not expecting, change. The internal fracturing that occurs in *Nausea* is at the detriment of all else, because it breaks the individual from his past, without extending into exteriority and creating a strong present. Individuals that are responsible and reflexive beyond continual self-analysis, and allow themselves to be open to exteriority, reflect and enhance the positive qualities of the city as they continue to explore the possibilities of alterity.

Mythical, Divine, and Meaningless Violence

In any discussion of violence it is important to distinguish between types of violence, or face the risk of having potentially positive aspects and readings tarnished by the most cruel and

¹⁸⁷ Friedrich Schelling, as quoted in, Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York, 2002), pp. 24-25.

¹⁸⁸ Tschumi, “The Pleasure of Architecture”, p. 91.

¹⁸⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (orig. 1938) (London, 1965).

self-serving varieties. In his “Critique of Violence”, Benjamin differentiates between “mythical violence” and “divine violence, where “mythical violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake, divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice, the second accepts it.”¹⁹⁰ Divine violence is a rupture much akin to religiousness B, and this is why Žižek writes that “it is neither aesthetic, nor ethical, nor religious (a sacrifice to dark gods)” - that is an action stemming from human agency (religiousness A).¹⁹¹ It is violence that refuses to have meaning attributed to it, and for this reason divine violence “is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred execution”.¹⁹² It is the ideal form of violence because it ruptures and inserts change whilst defying any attempt to classify it, claim it, or particularise it within culture. Just as God in the Babel myth was beyond language, divine violence is without name, beyond the hermeneutical grasp of language. Anselm Haverkamp argues that “by naming it “divine violence” and thus calling this violence by its human, all-too-human name,” Benjamin has made it an ironic category, calling forth the discarded God(s).”¹⁹³ Thus Benjamin is being self-consciously aware of “the inordinately violent effects of its manifestation”, its worldly shock-value, the ambiguity “in which there is no readability, no trace of justice, meaning, or future.”¹⁹⁴ By virtue of its “divine” nature, one cannot ascertain if any particular violence is in fact pure, and so the event requires an act of faith, secular or otherwise, that does not claim the violence, but merely witnesses it.

Mythical violence is lawmaking violence and as such constitutes the “first function of violence”, second being the equally pernicious “law-preserving, administrative violence that serves it.”¹⁹⁵ Law is also a force, an expression of power, limits, and control that is itself outside of the realm of violence, or more exactly, violence is outside of law. Victor Hugo argues, in minimalist fashion, the same point:

“Whoever says law says force.

What then is outside of law?

¹⁹⁰ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence” (1927 orig.), in, *On Violence: A Reader*, Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, eds. (Durham and London, 2007), p. 283.

¹⁹¹ Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 168.

¹⁹² Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, p. 285.

¹⁹³ Anselm Haverkamp, “Anagrammatics of Violence: The Benjaminian Ground of *Homo Sacer*”, in, *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer*, Andrew Norris, ed. (Durham and London, 2005), p. 139.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-9.

¹⁹⁵ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, p. 274 & 285.

Violence.”¹⁹⁶

Mythical violence is a bloody violence, a punishment that is firmly rooted in the cultural spheres. It is married to earthly power, with the violent means of its maintenance being the opposite in the dialectic with power. “Where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent,” writes Hannah Arendt.¹⁹⁷ There should, however, be a consciousness of the “latent presence of violence” for law and power to be maintained, just as there should be latent power in violence, otherwise it is completely impotent.¹⁹⁸ The use of violence diminishes power; it exposes the limits and its own insufficiencies. Violence is unavoidable in the city as rapid changes occur and elements collide, but what should be avoided is mythic violence that demands sacrifice, blood, and attributes particular, divisive meaning to these changes.

An ethical way to approach the violence of the world – violence that is necessary but often excessive - is to find no transcendent meaning in it, no deeper level. In mind of this, Žižek postulates that:

“...perhaps this is all we can do today... reveal the failure of all attempts of redemption, the obscene travesty of every gesture of reconciling us with the violence we are forced to commit.”¹⁹⁹

This is also why Žižek proposes that Job is the proper hero today, the one who protests the “meaninglessness of his calamities”; a standpoint that is affirmed when finally God appears.²⁰⁰ One cannot expect affirmation, however; instead one carries on in the understanding that to expect is to have justification, which in turn bloodies the violence. Jacob Taubes seems to have a similar notion, in saying that “as apocalypticist I can imagine that the world will be destroyed. *I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is.*”²⁰¹ Painfully aware of the history and implications of the Holocaust, Taubes refuses to find transcendent meaning in it, or anything else. In other words, Taubes gives suffering and violence its full meaning – something akin to purity, without subtext or justification. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri raise the question of whether such a standpoint is actually achievable:

“Modern negativity is located not in any transcendent realm but in the hard reality before us: the fields of patriotic battles in the First and Second Wars, from the killing fields at Verdun to the Nazi furnaces

¹⁹⁶ Victor Hugo, “What Exile Is”, in, *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, Marc Robinson, ed. (San Diego, New York, and London, 1994), p. 67.

¹⁹⁷ Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁸ Quote from: Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, p. 276.

¹⁹⁹ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 346.

²⁰⁰ Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 152.

²⁰¹ Jacob Taubes, *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, as quoted in, Terpestra and de Wit, ““No Spiritual Investment in the World As It Is”: Jacob Taubes’s Negative Political Theology”, p. 336

and the swift annihilation of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the carpet bombings of Vietnam and Cambodia, the massacres from Setif and Soweto to Sabra and Shatila, the list goes on and on. There is no Job who can sustain such suffering!"²⁰²

Indeed, it is exactly because of these atrocities that we must find no transcendent meaning in those or any others that could otherwise justify or spur them on. To accept the full burden of this history, without meaning, is to accept the full mantle of humanity – humanity as humanity, responsible and alone. Perhaps no single person can sustain the suffering and achieve the position of the parabolical Job, but the task must remain as a constant challenge against the temptation of meaningful suffering. Thus the task is to attempt to be Job without God, buoyed only by the possibility of alterity, the messianic that cannot be expected. Just as one should not find transcendent meaning in any other violence in this world, one should also find no transcendent meaning in the exilic self-violence that one must perform; to do so would be to engage in irresponsible narcissism.

²⁰² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 46.

Intermezzo: “House of Asterion”

Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, “House of Asterion”, which retells the myth of the Minotaur, the labyrinth, and Theseus, from the Minotaur’s perspective, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the relation between the city-centre and suburbia.²⁰³ The labyrinth, described like a city-centre where “all the parts of the house are repeated many times, any place is another place... The house is the same size as the world; or rather it is the world...” is similar to Walter Benjamin’s description of the Parisian arcade as “a city, a world in miniature.”²⁰⁴ As Graeme Gilloch writes, “the city-as-labyrinth was the dreamscape of antiquity, the crowd-as-labyrinth that of the modern epoch.”²⁰⁵ Through postmodern pastiche that links antiquity and modernity through the labyrinthine model, the city and the crowd exist in unison offering the dizzying possibility of becoming lost, and yet also “the crowd is the dullness of the nothing-new, the ultimate locus of boredom.”²⁰⁶ Without the specific and purposeful action of the individual who can act as alterity the crowd is a faceless and homogenous mass, nihilistic in its stasis. The individual has the opportunity to find meaning in the city and in the crowd, just as Theseus enters the labyrinth, one must enter be open to the possibility of becoming lost and yet retain the Ariadne’s thread that links outside of the madness and the possibly overwhelming forces of the crowded city.

Read through “House of Asterion”, the labyrinth-as-city-centre also raises the idea of cities as a collective Babel, endlessly copying, mirroring: “Everything is repeated many times... but two things in the world seem to be only one: above, the intricate sun; below Asterion.”²⁰⁷ This retells Babel at the point of incompleteness, before God intervenes; the unique structure exists (the combined replication of cities/Tower of Babel) and yet the complete exteriority still remains as a possibility (the sun as natural, eternal antithesis to humanity’s temporal construction/Other/God). But as Elizabeth Wilson writes, the experience of the labyrinth is not about completion - the overcoming of space and difference – because:

²⁰³ Borges, “House of Asterion”, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, pp. 170-3.

²⁰⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 31.

²⁰⁵ Gilloch, p. 142.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁰⁷ Borges, “House of Asterion”, p. 171.

“Even if the labyrinth does have a centre... [it] is not so much finally reaching this centre, as of an endlessly circular journey, and of the retracing of the same pathways overtime... Yet one never retraces the same pathway twice, for a city is in a constant process of change...”²⁰⁸

One enters the city/crowd-as-labyrinth with the understanding that the completion of the journey is an act of assimilatory violence that is best left incomplete, because to overcome the Minotaur, the transgressive heart of the labyrinth/city-centre, would overcome the alterity and purpose that exists in the space, leaving only the nihilistic singularity of the conqueror. Without Ariadne’s thread with which to return, Theseus would take the place of the Minotaur, or perhaps worse, be completely without alterity in a way that would mirror the completion of the Tower.

In this interpretation, Ariadne represents the true messianic, the one temporarily beyond the grasp of both language and its refusal, who maintains the hope of return and provides the possibility that Theseus’ hermeneutics will not become endlessly and pointlessly closed and self-referential. Mark C. Taylor writes, “Ariadne’s lure is a line• a narrative thread that floats atop the “sea of ex” and appears to show a way to the exit from the labyrinth of time.”²⁰⁹ The thread links the temporal and the eternal as a hermeneutic that gives hope in the present. It gives Theseus’ journey a continuous narrative that can be traced as a history, one that can be retraced but never re-experienced as the same journey. By virtue of its finitude, the twine’s ends pulled farther and farther apart, thus history is opened to the possibility of the messianic that, paradoxically, cannot be expected, and cannot not be expected. The thread imbued with hope can be engaged with as a narrative, a hermeneutic that skewers interiority and exteriority.

The Minotaur represents the transgressive, dangerous heart of the city, who also gives the city-as-labyrinth meaning, and alterity against which Theseus is able to experience the space as purposeful. By itself, the Minotaur (the city-centre) is nihilistic, nearly suicidal in its self-harm:

“Of course, I am not without distractions. Like the ram about to charge, I run through the stone galleries until I fall dizzy to the floor... There are roofs from which I let myself fall until I am bloody.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Wilson, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago and London, 1984), p. 62. Taylor has taken the quote, “sea of ex”, from a poem by Wallace Stevens entitled “The Man with the Blue Guitar.”

²¹⁰ Borges, “House of Asterion”, p. 171.

It is an existence without meaning, pointless self-destruction and distraction, yet maintains a glimmer of hope because “of all the games, I [the Minotaur] prefer the one about the other Asterion”, the redeemer who comes from outside.²¹¹ When the redeemer does come, he is surprised that “the Minotaur scarcely defended himself.”²¹² The Minotaur, who can “no longer remember” is only superficially overcome by violence, and is really overcome by language.²¹³ It is the triumph of language and interpretation over the Minotaur, which is the embodiment of the refusal of translation, and who is “not interested in what one man may transmit to other men; like the philosopher, I think that nothing is communicable by the art of writing... A generous impatience has not permitted that I learn to read.”²¹⁴ John Stark writes: “the writer-hero must prove the minotaur wrong by communicating through language.”²¹⁵ The singular violence of the Minotaur, through Theseus’ engagement is not revealed as beyond interpretation, but rather as the nihilistic avoidance of the multiplicity of translation. Stark argues that because in order to complete a labyrinth, one must exhaust all possibilities, “the hidden key, then, is to make labyrinths instead of solving them.”²¹⁶ We must, therefore, engage in the creative act of city-making, city-living, and interact with cities through hermeneutics, not in order to overcome the transgression that exists, but rather to sustain it – that which gives the journey and experience meaning.

Outside of the labyrinth (suburbia) is where the people are, the undifferentiated people who inspire fear in that which is different. Their reaction to the transgressive is varied, ranging from prostration, fleeing, to threats of violence.²¹⁷ This is the reaction of a closed suburban community to disruptive forces. In “House of Asterion”, the community outside of the labyrinth is self-enclosed by xenophobia rather than by an actual physical enclosure, because as it is written, the doors of the labyrinth “are open day and night to men and animals as well. Anyone may enter.”²¹⁸ Every nine years, nine men enter as sacrifices to prevent violence from reaching the outside, although they die without the Minotaur bloodying its hands, for it is nihilistic violence that they enact on themselves in the transgressive area. By performing this suicidal violence, the nearly complete separation of city and suburb is sustained through

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., p. 172.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 171.

²¹⁵ John O. Stark, *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov, and Barth* (Durham, N. C., 1974), p. 50.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Borges, “House of Asterion”, p. 170.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

engagement with the violently nihilistic Minotaur on its own terms, rather than incompletely overcoming the distance via engagement with language. Theseus links the outside (suburb) and the labyrinth (city-centre) with Ariadne's string, but then seeks to fulfil the not/not not, thinkable possibility of overcoming and exhausting the possibilities; as such he seems to strive to complete the messianic. Or perhaps not, for Borges writes, "literature is not exhaustible, for the sufficient and simple reason that no single book is. A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable."²¹⁹ Via engagement with language, the Minotaur enters into hermeneutics and translation, remaining in the labyrinth in the telling and retelling, and also following Ariadne's string out with Theseus as logos, as continuing alterity.²²⁰

In his poem "The Labyrinth", Borges writes:

"I know that hidden in the shadows there
lurks another, whose task is to exhaust
the loneliness that braids and weaves this hell,
to carve my blood, and to fatten on my death.
We seek each other. Oh if only this
were the last day of our antithesis."²²¹

This is the situation of the city, a promise unfulfilled: the city remains inhabited by danger, narrative, and also hope. The labyrinth is not exhausted, text is not exhausted, and the dialectical distance is sustained, leaving space for rupture. If one does not sense the twine, the necessary, yet tenuous link between suburb and city in this text, there is a despair of being cut off from the outside. Ariadne allows for the continuance of alterity, with the thread physically linking the city-centre and suburb, providing hope for both. This is why the city-centre must remain linked to the suburb, because otherwise the city merely becomes a transgressive playground for personal transcendence; so the doors must remain open and the string must remain in Ariadne's hands or the city becomes a camp.

²¹⁹ Borges, "A Note on (towards) Bernard Shaw", *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, pp. 248-9.

²²⁰ Julio Cortazar also links writing with Theseus entering the labyrinth connected to Ariadne's string. "By the time I realize it, the story is already in progress, the ball of thread quivers once again in the hands of Ariadne." Julio Cortazar, in, Julio Cortazar, Lucille Kerr, Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, David I. Grossvogel, and Jonathan Tittler, authors, "Interview: Julio Cortazar", *Diacritics*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1974), p. 35.

²²¹ Borges, "The Labyrinth", John Updike, trans., in, *In Praise of Darkness*, Norman Thomas di Giovanni, trans. (New York, 1974), p. 37.

The Suburb and the City-Centre

“People living in cities and large towns must submit to some inconvenience, to some annoyance, to some discomforts, to some injury and damage...”

H. G. Wood, “A Practical Treatise on Law of Nuisance in Their Various Forms: Including Remedies Therefor [sic] at Law and in Equity” (1883)²²²

“The spectacular view always made Laing aware of his ambivalent feelings for this concrete landscape. Part of its appeal lay all too clearly in the fact that this was an environment built, not for man, but for man’s absence.”

J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise* (1977)²²³

The Importance of the Suburb and City-Centre Dialectic

The dialectic between the city-centre and the suburb is one of the most significant relationships within the city. City-centres are spaces of movement, upheaval, and violence and as such they are the heart of the city; they are what make a city a city. It is the centre that draws the humanity into the city, as its dynamism offers the hope of change and the chance to create a better life. The city, by virtue of the city-centre, offers what the rural, village, and even town is less able to – the chance of rapid change and reinvention. This is evident in *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, in which Suketu Mehta writes: “what makes Bombay overpopulated is the impoverishment of the countryside, so that a young man with dreams in his head will take the first train to Bombay to live on the footpath.”²²⁴ In the city there is hope, the city-centre is a repository of dreams and desire. No matter how desperate the situation may seem, the opportunity for change exists. Of course the young man who arrives in Bombay cannot (nor wishes to) live forever on the footpath, constantly exposed to the full violence of the city, because the individual exposed to the full force of the city-centre would invariably be overwhelmed, and so arises a desire for stability in the city. This search for stability led to the creation of the suburb – a ring of relative calm encircling the chaos of the city. Suburbs can often be problematic because in the search for stability individuals residents may seek to exclude difference. The city must negotiate this difficult dialectic,

²²² H. G. Wood, “A Practical Treatise on Law of Nuisance in Their Various Forms: Including Remedies Therefor (sic) at Law and in Equity” (Albany, 1883), p. 11, as quoted in, Robert M. Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870-1930* (New Haven, 2005), p. 39.

²²³ J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise* (London, 1977), p. 25.

²²⁴ Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (New Delhi, 2006), p. 18.

between the unbridled creative violence of the city-centre and the exclusionary violence of exclusive suburb.

Suburbs have the potential to prevent a city from being a city, or more exactly, they can riddle the city with spaces that can no longer be considered as part of the city. The reason for this is, as Lewis Mumford argues, that “the mark of city is its purposive social complexity” and “the suburb was a pharisaic way of passing by on the other side: leaving the civic organism in the gutter.”²²⁵ In reaction to the violence and perceived threat of the inner city, suburbs were created as an escape that nonetheless remained in proximity of the centre leaving it available for use when convenient. This immediately creates wealth-based divisions, where the poor are left in the full violence of the centre and in being in the turbulent environs continue to add to the creative dynamism of the city, whilst the rich are spared the full brunt of the violence and are free to experience it at their whim. Or, as occurs later, the poor are excluded to ‘poor suburbs’, whilst the wealthy gentrify the city-centre. Such separation is problematic and undermines the social complexity of the city, thus leaving void spaces in the city. As Mumford argues:

“Except for a small detail of tradesmen and handymen, the suburb was a one-class community: it boasted, in fact, of its “exclusiveness” – which means, sociologically speaking, of the fact that it was not and could not become a city.”²²⁶

As gated and homogenous communities, both the first suburbs and their modern, gated simulacra are attempts to exist as a horizontal Tower of Babel, where acceptance into the community is offered as immanent transcendence from the world beyond the gates. At their worst, suburbs destroy the social fabric of the city by deciding not only where the wealthy will reside, but also by virtue of exclusion where the “other” will reside. The city becomes a series of villages, economically stratified, and closed to the level of interaction that defines a city.

²²⁵ Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 6 & 216. Mumford is alluding to the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” from the New Testament (Luke 10:25-37) which arises when a lawyer asks Jesus, “...who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29) Jesus responds by telling a parable in which a man is attacked by robbers, beaten and left naked on the side of the road. A priest and a Levite travelling separately down the road both pass by on the other side of the road. A Samaritan travelling along the road takes pity on the man, bandages him, and pays for innkeeper to look after him. In Mumford’s allusion to the parable, the Good Samaritan is the one who stays in the city-centre, or at least engages with the civic-centre, rather than turning away. The Good Samaritan is the person who does not turn his back on the neighbour or the degradation and violence that exists.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

The segregation that can occur in suburbs is a violent process, but not in the manner of the short-circuits and friction that occur in the freer city-centre; rather it is a top-down exertion of controlling forces, a preemptive violence that seeks to block out violence of chance. The most prevalent expression of this preemptive violence in the last century is the use of covenants that restrict the type, use, and aesthetics of property, and historically, also restrict the race of the inhabitants of property. Whilst the use of restrictive covenants began more than a century ago, they are often still used largely due to fear. Robert Fogelson writes:

“That so many people have been willing to submit to so many restrictions for so many years is the most telling sign of the deep-seated fears of unwanted change that have plagued Americans since the mid-nineteenth century”.²²⁷

The unwanted change arises out of the violence of the city-centre, so that those with the necessary means often seek to distance themselves and subsequently block unwanted others from following. This preemptive violence is far more insidious than the dynamic violence of the city-centre because it excludes those that would insert change. Simone Weil suggests that “crime alone should place the individual who has committed it outside the social, and punishment should bring him back again inside it.”²²⁸ Restrictive covenants create Enochs: ends in themselves where the exclusive (self-excluded) people can exist without interruption of any kind, and without reintegration.

Gated communities are the most insidious form of this self-exclusion because not only do they exclude particular others, but by virtue of their walls they also cement their introspection. Metaphorically speaking, these communities no longer face toward the city-centre; instead, they turn in upon themselves in an endless self-referential state. This is aided by the inclusion of shopping areas within the community which accommodate the exclusion. Setha Low interviewed residents of gated communities in America and their responses were telling; “Felicia” offered the following concerning shopping in her gated community:

“...if you go to any store, you will look around and most of the clientele will be middle class as you are yourself. So you’re somewhat insulated. But if you go downtown, which is much more mixed, where everybody goes, I feel much more threatened.”²²⁹

²²⁷ Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870-1930*, p. 212. Here Fogelson is making specific comments about Americans, but given the central position of America in Western capitalism and globalisation, and the trend of gated communities throughout the Western world, it is possible to extend the bounds of critique in parallel with globalisation, beyond America into a less contextualised Western urban modernity.

²²⁸ Weil, p. 20.

²²⁹ Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (New York and London, 2003), p. 9.

Driven by fear from where “everybody” goes, Felicia retreats into a static homogenous community. This retreat from everybody is a retreat from fears that the short-circuiting violence of the city-centre will become very real physical violence. Unfortunately, the retreat creates an unintentional casualty - the hope that the city can offer. As Elizabeth Wilson writes, fear must be overcome so the offer of freedom that the city extends is available to all:

“We will never solve the problems of living in cities until we welcome and maximise the freedom and autonomy they offer and make these available to all classes and groups. We must cease to perceive the city as a dangerous and disorderly zone from which women – and others – must be largely excluded for their own protection.”²³⁰

Cities should include all in their freedom and whilst this freedom will occasionally result in traumatic experiences of violence, it will also offer hope and positive change through interaction. Violence is inescapable, but in the relatively free heart of the city it can be put to its most progressive uses: in the mingling of people, ideas, and spatial constructions.

Almost as destructive to the social fabric of the city are tenements, estates, slums, and ghettos, where the poor or those deemed socially unacceptable are segregated. Often these start with the best of intentions, such as aiming to adequately house those with less means or to protect those who could be aggressively targeted. There are sinister undertones (sometimes overtones) of purity in this move, however, as the undesired are eventually singled out and contained, often reduced to a state of introspection. In regard to tenements, Richard Sennett writes:

“In retrospect we see the tenement as a devil’s construction. As these apartments were abandoned to the poor, each railroad flat became like a city of its own. The corridor became an internal street; families crowded into the individual rooms.”²³¹

This punches holes in the fabric of the city as areas become *like* cities of their own, yet they are not cities because they lack the fundamental heterogeneity that define cities, thus they are situated as the anti-city. An aspect that makes the tenement and ghetto slightly better than the gated community is the fact that often they are usually not completely self-contained resulting in the inhabitants regularly moving beyond the boundaries. Also, there is very little internal surveillance in the tenement and the ghetto, whereas if there was it would be more

²³⁰ Wilson, p. 9.

²³¹ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 27.

akin to a camp.²³² The lack of internal surveillance allows a certain degree of freedom and self-expression, thus tenements may harbour the possibility of alterity, and of future hope.

Constructed as self-contained communities, undergoing rigorous internal surveillance, and centred on the idea of purity, the gated community is an obscene parody of a camp. Low writes that “gating exacerbates this tendency to monitor and be concerned about “marked” intruders by creating a kind of “pure space” for residents.”²³³ Spaces within the city-limits that become almost exclusively introspective, whether by choice or circumstance, are detrimental to the functioning of the city. They are mono-tonous spaces that by facing inwards do not demand responses, but rather they are oblivious to response. Silence, the final act of critique would go unnoticed in these places that place no emphasis on dialogue, and so the answer to them is to follow Elizabeth Wilson’s advice and make the city as free as possible, thus highlighting the grotesque camp-like structure of the exclusive community.

The desire for a secure home within the city should be not abandoned completely however; it simply needs to be re-evaluated in terms of the nature of the city. The suburb and the home should be oriented toward the city-centre, offering a degree of refuge from the dynamic violence of the city yet never becoming closed-off finalities. As James Donald writes:

“This urgent desire for home is real enough, and should not be dismissed as hopeless nostalgia. Equally, though, we have to admit that, in the end, no such place exists outside of the grave. That is why Le Corbusier’s Radiant City has the chill of the necropolis about it”.²³⁴

Cities should follow the model of Abel, never still and content in this world, or indeed that of Jacob Taubes, never invested in the world as it is. The desire for home must be tempered by the acknowledgement that it does not really exist; it is a feeling that must continually be overcome in order to continue living as humans in our greatest capacities - creative and communicative.

In a confessional-style journalistic piece concerning suburbia in Auckland, New Zealand, Warwick Roger writes the following:

²³² Writing about the 17th Century Jewish Ghetto in Venice, Richard Sennett wrote: “...in the Jewish Ghetto there was to be no *internal* surveillance.” Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation*, p. 234. This shows the fundamental difference between the camp and the ghetto; the ghetto is autonomous within its own borders.

²³³ Low, p. 143.

²³⁴ Donald, “This, Here, Now: Imagining the Modern City”, p. 200.

“In the suburbs we talk to our neighbours over the back fence, hold street parties, stroll around the leafy streets after dinner... We find our security and our happiness in backyards and bungalows... We’ve come here in search of the golden dream, and most of us have found it in suburbia.”²³⁵

It is hard to fault the sentiment of this piece, although it does seem to be an overly optimistic assessment of New Zealand suburban life, one that falls into a self-satisfied complacency. The passage expresses a profoundly middle-class viewpoint with such a nostalgic air of dream-realised finality that it also has the chill of the necropolis, or in this suburban case, the closed confines of a mausoleum may be a more appropriate approximation. There is a sense of contentment and even though a degree of exclusion is acknowledged, this casual excluding violence must be avoided. The “golden dream” is a highly nostalgic dream that locates itself, at least partially, outside or beyond the city. As Richard Sennett writes, “[n]ostalgia is the mirror opposite of Le Corbusier’s *now*”; both nostalgia and Le Corbusier’s *now* are attempts to create static and complete visions, eschatologies in the present.²³⁶ In attempting to rekindle a sense of community that never really existed, the “most of us” exclude the ‘few of us’ (and perhaps all of ‘them’) that do not find completion in the community. This is why the “golden dream” should be engaged with as a hermeneutic, and as such it is a constant negotiation, rather than something to be found by a particular group that may then seek to erect boundaries to protect their sense of realised nostalgia.

Suburbs should have weak boundaries, open to the city-centre and reflecting the values of the city. An impression of security should be maintained, but this should not be at the expense of engagement and interaction. An understanding is required that risk cannot be eliminated and instead should be celebrated as a defining and positive mark of living in the city. As Simone Weil argues, risk encourages growth because it “is a form of danger which provokes a deliberate reaction... it doesn’t go beyond the soul’s resources to the point of crushing the soul beneath a load of fear.”²³⁷ Creating firm boundaries limits the development of the individual as risk is eliminated in preference of safety or fear. Richard Sennett writes that for people in sealed communities, “the wounds of past experience, the stereotypes which have become rooted in memory, are not confronted.”²³⁸ Such boundaries are dangerous because violence is made to be their *raison d’être*, where the violence of the external world is deemed

²³⁵ Warwick Roger, “In Suburbia” (March 1988), *Places in the Heart: The Best of Warwick Roger* (Auckland, 1989), p. 215.

²³⁶ Quote taken from: Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 175.

²³⁷ Weil, p. 34.

²³⁸ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 201.

unsuitable for a particular group of people and so obtains a negative transcendent and defining value. Any area within the walls becomes hallowed ground supposedly absent of the violence outside, and so any violence that does occur obtains heightened value. Boundaries are also a rejection of the example of Job who placed no reason or blame on the violence he encountered, and so boundaries are also, therefore, signifiers and manifestations of a lack of faith, hope, and trust.

Cities are spaces of risk and violence, but this must not be vaunted as a transcendent experience, nor avoided through the imposition of boundaries that puncture the city with null-zones. City living is an ambivalent experience that defies strict definition, and the city space itself should reflect the porous and indistinct nature of this experience. Graeme Gilloch argues that “porosity refers to a lack of clear boundaries between phenomena, a permeation of one thing by another, a merger of, for example, old and new, public and private, sacred and profane.”²³⁹ This is an apt description of the open, dialectical nature of the city, where various forces come into contact, merging, short-circuiting and becoming indistinct. It also offers a guide for city-planners, those who draw the lines, the semi-permanent bounds of the cityscape exerting tremendous influence on the city-dweller. Richard Sennett offers the following advice that proceeds along similar lines:

“The planner of the modern, humane city will overlay differences rather than segment them... Overlays are also a way to form complex, open borders. Displacement rather than linearity is a humane prescription.”²⁴⁰

By designing spaces that purposively engage with difference, the planner also opens the space to change, whereas “the life of the enclosed space ends when the designer lays down his or her pen.”²⁴¹ Enclosed spaces are dead spaces, offering no hope of change and having no concept of time, with the interior becoming a frozen historical moment. Conversely, weak borders allow time to continue to accumulate through the interactions and movements of the inhabitants and visitors of the spaces.

²³⁹ Gilloch, *Myth & Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, p. 25.

²⁴⁰ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 202.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

The Necessity of Community and its Incompletion

In a post-Babel world where translation is a necessity in the time that remains, community is an incomplete process, and so the idea of a fully serviced, contained and “planned-community” is a misnomer. We should not expect or even entertain the thought that community can be immanently realised, for that has the air of a George A. Romero movie sans the flesh-eating. Realised community would turn give city the air of necropolis or the mausoleum, with the inhabitants little more than walking dead, depleted of hope, and of alterity. Timothy Gorringer, reading through “the texts of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Revelation”, argues that the full realisation of community is eschatological and because of this, “[f]ailure’ is something we must expect, and some failures will, perhaps, teach us nothing, but this is not a cause for cultural pessimism... Because community is an eschatological reality it is founded on faith and hope, and therefore born afresh each generation.”²⁴² Spaces with firm boundaries are without hope because they deny that which hope is founded upon – a future that is other to what is. Cities and communities require faith and openness to alterity, not necessarily in Gorringer’s eschatological prescription, but certainly in a present that is by necessity incomplete and a future containing the possibility of alterity.

Certainty and completion are exclusionary concepts not in fitting with the relational mode of living with humanity within a city environment. Concepts such as certainty and completion are not truly ethical in their approach because that which the person in the gated community chooses for themselves, they potentially deny for the other through the interruption of barriers. Certainty and completion create an immanent false eschatology that is believed to be concluded in the present and yet fails to be a full realisation of community because it allows those exposed to the perceived danger outside to be excluded. Richard Sennett postulates that “perhaps a more truly uncomfortable idea is that difference, discontinuity, and disorientation ought to be ethical forces which connect people to one another.”²⁴³ This idea should be embraced in the modern city because it is precisely the desire for completion and singularity that has degraded the modern city. Rather than creating communities, the push for singularity has precluded them and negatively impacted the free and imperfect community of the city. Graham Ward asserts that “in the collapse of the modern city what takes over is imagined

²⁴² Gorringer, p. 192.

²⁴³ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 226.

communities which you belong to by buying into what's on offer for you... In the collapse of the modern city, Disneyland simulacra take over."²⁴⁴ The effort and subsequent failure to reach a complete community in the present has led the city to atomise in fear into distorted reflections of a frightened, shattered dream. These boundaries must be broken down, not to be replaced by a unified community, but rather with the understanding that community is a continual process requiring faith and interaction.

Therefore, community should be embraced in its true sense, a way that understands its own frailties and does not completely shelter any one person. Like culture, community does not describe anything consistently real and any attempt to complete or define it reveals gaping instances of exclusion or at least incomplete inclusion. Andy Martin's response to this is:

“...the very notion of inclusivity needs to be ventilated by the reference to the notion of the autistic outsider, who is already inside the group. The group always tends to overestimate commonalities, and to converge on oneness; the existential attitude, in contrast, asserts the limits of empathy and the scope of discord, incoherence, and “structural holes” in any network.”²⁴⁵

Martin's idea of the autistic outsider is a useful companion to Sennett's ethical differences, discontinuity, and disorientation, as it adds a second level of deconstruction.²⁴⁶ Sennett's proposal reverses the idea that singularity and complete community are the ethical forces that bind, and Martin would continue that with the figure of the autistic outsider – the included outsider who prevents difference from becoming fetishised, becoming a type of totality via idolatry. The autistic outsider can neither be reduced to the individual as alone without commonality, nor can they be reduced to a figure analogous with the community. By virtue of being an included outsider, the autistic outsider inserts a demand for ethics through difference, and discontinuity, which can never be overcome (included or excluded in entirety), only engaged with.

Homo Sacer and the Structure of the Camp

The idea of the included exclusion, a liminal figure of humanity, bears a close resemblance to *homo sacer*, bare life caught in a state of exception. Giorgio Agamben has performed the

²⁴⁴ Ward, p. 68.

²⁴⁵ Andy Martin, “Autism, Empathy, and Existentialism”, in, *Raritan*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (Winter 2008), p. 111.

²⁴⁶ The autistic outsider is an individual who is included within a group, and yet incompletely shares in the group. He/she reveals the limits of the inclusion, empathy, and communication within the group and in doing so also reveals the impossibility of creating a Tower, a singular community.

most rigorous investigation of this figure, drawing on the work of figures such as Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault.²⁴⁷ As a concept at its most bare, *homo sacer* refers to the condition of life “situated at the intersection of a capacity to be killed and yet not sacrificed, outside both human and divine law”.²⁴⁸ The sovereign, who decides on the exception that makes bare life possible, is also a liminal figure, at “the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence.”²⁴⁹ As Agamben explains:

“In Benjamin’s Critique of Violence, the State of Exception is “...a zone of absolute indeterminacy between anomie and law, in which the sphere of creatures and the juridical order are caught up in a single catastrophe.””²⁵⁰

Biological life and political life become indistinguishable with the sovereign deciding on the exception, thus revealing the *homo sacer* who is almost the equivalent of Job, with no transcendent meaning to be found in their suffering. Difference lies in the fact that the *homo sacer* is reduced to this by administrative function; they are told their mere life is without transcendent meaning, and exist as the negation of existential autonomy. Conversely, Job had the autonomous space with which to decide and deny those who would place sacrificial meaning on his life.

There are essential differences between the various liminal figures, the autistic outsider, the *homo sacer*, and the sovereign, most of which centre around power. The sovereign has power to exercise the state of exception and thus make others *homini sacer*, but this act is itself a kenotic act that empties the sovereign of power. Once the decision is made, the sovereign is bereft of the power, as he who decides, until the state of exception is over. The *homo sacer*, who experiences the sovereign’s power, is without any real power at all other than not being able to be sacrificed, so exists as life at its most bare, without signification. Being without

²⁴⁷ As part of his continuing series on the subject of the state of exception and *homo sacer*, Agamben’s works include: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*; and: *State of Exception*, Kevin Attel, trans. (Chicago and London, 2005). Less explicitly linked, yet containing many of the same themes are: *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (New York, 1999); and: *The Open: Man and Animal*, Kevin Attel, trans. (Stanford, Calif., 2004). Adam Kotsko accurately criticises Agamben for reading Benjamin almost solely through Schmitt’s concept of the sovereign, rather than through Benjamin’s own conceptual framework. In light of this, care has been taken to reread Agamben back through Benjamin’s concept of the sovereign as described in “Critique of Violence” and balance it with Schmitt’s as described in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Adam Kotsko, “On Agamben’s Use of Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence”, in, *Telos*, No. 145 (Winter, 2008), pp. 119-29.

²⁴⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 73.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵⁰ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 57.

power, the *homo sacer*'s fate is decided by the sovereign, whereas the autistic outsider requires autonomy, the power to enact a self-exclusion, to be one's own sovereign. *Homo sacer*, as the excluded and silenced figure, lacks the essential freedom that is required in the city.

The figure of the *homo sacer* is important in the discussion of the city because it is the city that is both the centre of the concentration of political power (the sovereign), and the physical space where bare life was made material. Lewis Mumford, discussing the growth of industrial urbanism in the nineteenth Century, wrote that it, "...worked out a minimum of life... The quintessence of this minimum life was achieved in the prison... The speculative spread of the industrial town meant the growth and spread of a dreary prison environment."²⁵¹ This stark, industrial creation reached its zenith in the extermination camps of World War Two, thus for Agamben "it is not the city but rather the camp that is the biopolitical paradigm of the west."²⁵² Agamben is not arguing that prison-like characteristics have been eliminated from the city, but instead that the city itself has become the location of the camp. The city becomes the space where biological life and political life blur into each other, and he argues: "the camp, which is now securely lodged within the city's interior, is the new biopolitical nomos of the planet."²⁵³ This bold claim must be fleshed-out in order to ascertain the future of the city and to then plot ways forward.

For the city to be like a camp it requires intense internal surveillance; the complete eradication of privacy, and a level of personal scrutiny that leaves all bare and homogenous. Lewis Mumford was clearly aware of this danger, arguing that "the home without such cells [areas of personal privacy] is but a barracks: the city that does not possess them is but a camp."²⁵⁴ By this definition, which is an accurate one, the areas that come closest to the physical reality of the camp are gated communities, and of course prisons. Internal surveillance creates the conditions of a camp; bare life was not found in the ghetto, because there was a clear sense of interiority – a lack of surveillance.²⁵⁵ Writing about the camp,

²⁵¹ Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, pp. 179-80.

²⁵² Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 181.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁵⁴ Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 29.

²⁵⁵ This is not to argue that the ghetto is an ideal or even acceptable form of settlement, but rather it serves to further underline the problematic structure of the exclusive, internally monitored community. The issue that ghettos are externally enforced is also of high importance and is damaging for the structure of the city and the

Agamben could easily be describing the gated community: “Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule...”²⁵⁶ Surveillance is the key to the creation of the physical conditions of the camp, the liminality of the state of exception. This is why CCTV and the lack of public spaces are detrimental to functioning of a city at its most free, hopeful, and generally city-like. The problem that arises especially with CCTV is that it denies the city public space; a space which Jonathan Franzen defines as “a place where every citizen is welcome to be present and where the purely private is excluded or restricted.”²⁵⁷ Clear definition between public and private, exterior and interior, prevent the indecipherable state of exception and also provide the space for individual transformative acts such as Nietzsche’s denuding of the interior of the church.

CCTV cameras seem as if they allow time to progress in the city and not allow the timeless nullity of the gated community, but unfortunately this is achieved by virtue of an expected violent narrative. Joe Moran writes:

“...we tend to read CCTV pictures in the anticipation of an unfolding narrative... the telltale digits in the corner of the screen revealing the date and time convey not the reality of the round-the-clock surveillance but the specific moment at which an extraordinary event happened or was about to happen.”²⁵⁸

The limited exposure to the CCTV footage has a dual negative impact on the city; firstly, the shock and violence disguises the timeless null reality of the continued surveillance (it even reinforces it); secondly, the *expectation* of violence decreases its impact, so rather than being a disruption of a complete narrative, it is a lone fragment able to be digested into the whole. CCTV deprives violence of its shock because it is devoid of comparison – all CCTV is shock, and therefore none is shocking. Most CCTV is also viewed as a past event made present, which provides distantiation, thus lessening the impact in the present. Violence in this case is not a dynamic force, because it is expected in the same way it is expected in the gated community, so that when it does arrive it offers no interruption to the structure. Thus, through false shock it provides a structure that can easily reside in a state of exception, where the interior and exterior are indistinguishable. Conversely, the city must continue as if violence

lives of those within them. The ghetto was essentially the step between the industrial tenements and prisons, in a continuum that leads with devastating logic to the camp.

²⁵⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 170.

²⁵⁷ Jonathan Franzen, “Imperial Bedroom” (1998), *How to Be Alone: Essays* (London, 2002), p. 50. Although it can most likely be assumed that Franzen was not intentionally excluding non-citizens, it should be emphasised that the freedom be extended to all, or risk tainting the public space with the state of exception.

²⁵⁸ Joe Moran, *Reading the Everyday* (New York, 2005), p. 86.

will not occur, and so must be kept as free as possible. When violence does inevitably arrive in the free city, it contains its full significance, creating disjunctions, and if the violence is in a negative form, it is accurately shocking and aberrant. This approach gives full justice to victims as the violence they encounter is recognised in its singularity, and in its full non-transcendent, this-wordly horror.

Andreas Kalyvas argues that Agamben's State of Exception does not allow room for time, for "the camp, by fusing the exception and the rule into a permanent state of emergency, halts time", because "what is the exception turned into a rule if not the negation of its temporal singularity as an event?"²⁵⁹ By negating time, the state of exception-made-rule destroys the city as it hollows out its interior, leaving the liminal conditions of a camp. Kalyvas levels a charge against Agamben, claiming that "[i]t is if there is no room for alterity and the event in Agamben's historical reconstruction of sovereign power... He proposes a theory of history that does not seem to bring forth anything new."²⁶⁰ This criticism of Agamben, is not entirely fair because he is not gleefully proposing that history cannot contain alterity (Agamben's conceptualization of time is best described in the messianic work *The Time That Remains*), but rather through the history of Western metaphysics there has been a continuing move toward biopolitics and the timelessness that comes with it.²⁶¹ Even in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben presents alterity:

"...the "juridically empty" space of the state of the exception... has transgressed its spatiotemporal boundaries and now, overflowing outside them, is starting to *coincide* with the normal order, in which everything again becomes possible."²⁶² (Italics mine)

The normal order and the state of exception are coinciding rather than being the same and as such they can be considered as a meeting of dialectical ends, rather than a singular expression. Therefore, vigilance is needed to combat the forces that would turn the city into

²⁵⁹ Andreas Kalyvas, "The Sovereign Weaver: Beyond the Camp", in *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer*, Andrew Norris, ed. (Durham and London, 2005), p. 113. Quotes are in reverse order in the Kalyvas' text, the sequence has been altered to enhance narrative flow.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 110-1. Kalyvas argues this further by restating Agamben's claim that "the dormant seed of the camp was always already present in the ancient Greek politics and archaic Roman law, although in modern times it becomes more securely lodged in the city's interior." Ibid., p. 112.

²⁶¹ Reading Agamben it can seem as if he makes little distinction between past and present, but this is because he reads time through the Messianic, in which it is "operational time pressing within the chronological time, working and transforming it from within; it is the time we need to make time end." Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, p. 68.

²⁶² Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 38.

the camp, such as the continuing prevalence of gated communities and the degradation of the public; for these are spaces that deny that a normal order ever existed.

Kalyvas *is* correct, however, in identifying time as a major issue for the state of exception, because as an exception it necessitates a dialectical experience of time, between the normal and the exceptional. The sovereign decides on the exception and in creating this event-rupture, suspends normal order and normal time. Time continues in the state of exception, but it is closed to the possibility of further event-ruptures as the exceptional is already the order. As Agamben reveals, problems arise when there is no end to the state of exception and the exception and the normal order coincide; time is left open in the normal order, but this is unavailable as the state of exception takes precedence. When this occurs, everything becomes possible always already, leaving no space for silence, for the act of deconstruction; time is left barren. Michael Ignatieff, writing with particular regard to the endless State of Exception provided in the United States Terrorism Act, argues that “[s]unset clauses – setting time limits to extraordinary powers – seem an essential way to reconcile security and liberty.”²⁶³ Housing must also follow this prescription, with any barriers made malleable and adjustable, so that in the absence of *real* danger they are withdrawn, allowing normal time and hope to resume.

The space that truly coincides with the state of exception at present is the United States military prison compound in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. As a space it is an included exception; the indefinite lease from Cuba by the United States “has produced a place that belongs to the United States”, yet is not actually part of the United States nor is it included in the normal order.²⁶⁴ Major General Geoffrey D. Miller conceptualised Guantánamo as the “interrogation lab in the war against terror”, which “seems to have translated Guantánamo from its actual location and history to the place where, in the eyes of Bush and his supporters, “terror” originates.”²⁶⁵ Guantánamo is a non-place where bare life and political life are indistinguishable, where source, reaction, and result are simultaneous. By virtue of this indistinction Guantánamo is the place where the unlocalisable is localised, a process that in

²⁶³ Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton and Oxford, 2004), p. 39.

²⁶⁴ Justice Anthony Kennedy as quoted in: William Keach, “Guantánamo, Empire, and the “War on Terror””, *Raritan*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (Winter 2008), p. 136.

²⁶⁵ Initial quote from Major General Geoffrey D. Miller, as in: *Ibid.*, p. 137. Latter quote from: *Ibid.*, pp. 137-8.

the past has, as Agamben points out, resulted in the concentration camp.²⁶⁶ With the election of Barack Obama as United States President and his subsequent plan to close Guantánamo and “to ship dozens of terrorist suspects from the camp to face criminal trial in the US,” the hope is that the state of exception will not be transferred to the cities of the mainland.²⁶⁷ In bringing the suspects to trial, the suspects must not be relocated to another liminal space, whereby they remain *homini sacer*. Every effort is needed to bring about the trials, thus reintroducing the suspects into the normal order.²⁶⁸

The city must also not become the space where the universal offer of free interaction is predicated on a base line of simply being human. As Agamben reveals with the figure of the *homo sacer*, we must not follow Ignatieff’s reduction that “humans have human rights simply because they are humans.”²⁶⁹ Universalism based on such a bare premise removes the demand of localisation, and as Elazar Barkan writes, “the discrepancy between having rights, even specific rights and having nowhere to claim them is the “abstract nakedness of being human.”²⁷⁰ Any subsequent attempt to localise this bare politics results in the camp - the localisation of the unlocalisable. Jacques Rancière argues that the assertion of human rights has achieved a negative definition, only noticed in their absence and in doing so:

“...those rights appear actually empty. They seem to be of no use. And when they are of no use, you do the same as charitable persons do with their old clothes. You give them to the poor... It is in this way, as a result of this process, that the Rights of Man became the rights of those who have no rights, the rights of bare human beings subjected to inhuman repression and inhuman conditions of existence.”²⁷¹

In the free space of the city, the offer of inclusion and of rights must be re-negotiated with each and every exchange, rather than give rise to indifference. This may localise the rights, but the city unlike the camp, by virtue of its free public space, offers the chance of negotiation, of refusal of the offer, and of silence. The opportunity for silence is important

²⁶⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 20

²⁶⁷ Quote taken from: Tim Reid, “Barack Obama Plans Quick Transfer of Guantanamo Suspects to US”, *The Times*, (November 11, 2008).

²⁶⁸ If the suspects remain in a liminal location as *homo sacer* and they are brought to trial, found guilty and sentenced to death, some may interpret them to be sacrifices. That would be an incorrect interpretation, however, because there needs to be sacrificial intent on the part of the one sentencing or killing. An observer cannot attribute sacrificial meaning to the death - it must be the one who commits the act that decides the sacrifice. This is not to say that the suspects should be put to death, but rather they should be removed from the current structure that strips their lives of meaning, and placed into an ethical system of justice.

²⁶⁹ Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*, p. 34.

²⁷⁰ Elazar Barkan, “Can Human Rights Be Local?”, *Raritan*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1 (Summer 2008), p. 146.

²⁷¹ Jacques Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”, in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103:2/3 (Spring/Summer 2004), p. 307.

because rather than denoting a bare level of rights, it moves the individual away from the conversation regarding rights altogether, denying those who would denote he/she as the base measure of human indignity. Human rights are localised in the universal space of the free city because they are negotiated in the temporal and concretely-situated realm. The negotiation is rescued from complete subjectivisation by the self-limiting allowances of hospitality that each makes coming into free space, the demand of the continuance of the space as such.

The camp, the gated-community, and the state of exception – spaces that closely coincide - share the same motivation: purity. They are spaces and modes that push toward the singular, excluding difference and defining a homogeneity that by virtue of presentist singularity, strips history and the future of alterity, denying the city its dialectical hope. Agamben notes this particular modern tendency that “...our age is nothing but the implacable and methodical attempt to overcome the division dividing the people, to eliminate radically the people that is excluded.”²⁷² Discussing the garden suburb, Jonathan Franzen writes:

“In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs observed that garden suburbs, since they have neither the street life of real cities nor the privacy of real suburbs, succeed only if their residents are homogenous and relatively affluent.”²⁷³

The surveilled suburb (gated community/garden suburb) obtains purity through the exclusion of the poor and dissimilar; difference is excluded from sight. In the camp, difference is excluded, surveilled, and eliminated in methods which underscore the bare frailty of life. States of exception are the *modus operandi* of these spaces, where all can be reduced to *homo sacer*, singled-out in the glare of modernity, able to be killed but not sacrificed.

Secular Cities

Despairingly, Las Vegas seems to be the prototypical city of the future as its hyper-technological, hyperreal, city interior decays and its public space dwindles. Roberta Low writes:

“The astronomical growth of gated communities surrounding the deteriorating and underutilized city of Las Vegas is prophetic of the future. Abandoned cities will be encircled by suburban rings of gated communities, many of them privately controlled and governed by homeowners associations.”²⁷⁴

²⁷² Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 179

²⁷³ Franzen, “First City” (1995), *How to Be Alone: Essays*, pp. 185-6.

²⁷⁴ Low, p. 228.

Enclaves of privately managed communities surround the perceived dangerous centre that first attracted and now must be kept at bay. The truly damaging aspect of Las Vegas is that it never really had any public spaces; it is a city of private interest and desire that forms an interior without shelter. Public landmarks from around the world, such as Giza's pyramids and the Eiffel Tower, are homogenised, scaled-to-fit, and remade with an almost singular voice of private consumer spectacle, and are left void of their original's public function. Whilst functioning as a world in itself, Las Vegas "has virtually no commons at all: just a skin-flint 1.4 acres per thousand residents, compared with the recommended national minimum of 10 acres", writes Mike Davis.²⁷⁵ The city-centre stagnates because it is not free and public, with those coming into the city moving to the circumference, shutting themselves off in their own privacy. The creation of such a hyperreal space is an attempt to control, interiorise, and make static that which would otherwise be exterior, and so the hyperreal city of simulacra is not really a city at all; it also has the chill of the necropolis about it.

In his book, *About Religion: Economies of Faith in a Virtual Culture*, postmodern thinker Mark C. Taylor writes: "Las Vegas is where the death of God is staged as the spectacle of the kingdom of God on earth."²⁷⁶ A pivotal issue for the death of God is creation, where humanity takes God's mantle as creator leaving God as unnecessary. Las Vegas relies on an order of simulacra, the reproduction of humanity's creation, which prompted *Preservation* magazine to ask, "Is Las Vegas so fake it's real?"²⁷⁷ By circumventing the creative act and supplanting it with the simulacra, Las Vegas begins to enter timelessness where nothing new arises and the death of humanity is staged as meaningless spectacle. Mike Davis points out the realities of Vegas and the problem with Taylor's claim:

"Although postmodern philosophers (who don't have to live there) delight in the Strip's "virtuality" and "hyperreality", most of Clark County is stamped from monotonously and familiar mold. Las Vegas, in essence, is a hyperbolic Los Angeles, the land of Sunshine on fast-forward."²⁷⁸

Rather than being an isolated spectacle of the kingdom of God, Las Vegas is simply an accelerated version of the surrounding culture, not an end as Taylor implies. The problem is that Las Vegas is starved of the creativity of a real city, and instead it borrows prefabricated visions that, by virtue of their exactness, have strong borders. Las Vegas is a space largely

²⁷⁵ Mike Davis, *Dead Cities And Other Tales* (New York, 2002), p. 94.

²⁷⁶ Taylor, *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture*, (Chicago and London, 1999), p. 170.

²⁷⁷ As quoted in: David G. Schwartz, *Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond* (New York and London, 2003), p. 203.

²⁷⁸ Davis, *Dead Cities And Other Tales*, p. 91.

absent of original creativity and increasingly absent of even the possibility of new creation. To be a real liveable city, Las Vegas must provide genuinely public space that will allow real creativity to flourish.

If Las Vegas can be said to be prophetic of the future, then Dubai could be said to be completing the prophecy – not as an abandoned inner city, but as a freshly-completed, always already dead city. Dubai is a city that is recreating the worst aspects of the myths of Enoch and Babel, as best illustrated by the building of the Burj Dubai Tower, currently the world's tallest structure. The marketing “vision” of the structure as “an unprecedented example of International cooperation – and a symbol – a beacon of progress for the entire world”, makes the comparison with Babel easy. Dubai is becoming a Babel anti-myth where people from all cultures mingle, overcoming the confounding of languages with another lexicon of signs and symbols: the market.²⁷⁹ But rather than including all, the Burj Dubai is tinged with closed-exclusivity as it is boasted: “Burj Dubai. Monument. Jewel. Icon... will be known by many names. But only a privileged group of people will call it home.”²⁸⁰ The Burj Dubai is Enoch staged as the spectacle of Babel; rather than attempting to unite through the shared name, it is closed-off, internally repeating its own name. Burj Dubai is walled-off by financial excess, offering no interaction, no sharing. It is a self-described monument and this seems to be the future of the city of Dubai, where excess is celebrated by those few privileged enough to be able to enjoy it, and others are excluded.

An extra dimension of complexity exists with the Dubai situation, in that it is a predominantly Muslim city witnessing an influx of Western Christian influences. This is evident in the adoption of aspects of Christmas, “where many residents revel in the commercial hype of the Christian holiday.”²⁸¹ With the focus on the commercial aspect, the holiday has been de-Christianised to fit the Muslim environment, reconfiguring it as an almost solely capitalist expression. Allowing the influence of other cultural expressions is a positive sign of secularity, necessary for a city, as evident in the words of Muslim resident al-Khalifa, “I'm very proud of our traditions but happy that my son is growing up in such a

²⁷⁹ Quote from: <http://www.burjdubai.com>. It is of little surprise that Mark C. Taylor, in one of his more recent books, chose to write about the ontology of the market. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (Chicago, 2004).

²⁸⁰ <http://www.burjdubai.com>

²⁸¹ Nadia Abou El-Magd, “Christmas All the Rage in Muslim Dubai”, *The Associated Press* (December 24, 2006). <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/24/AR2006122400567.html>.

cosmopolitan city.”²⁸² The influx of Western capital, culture, and persons has seemed to have secularised some of the day-to-day life of Dubai, but it remains governed by Islamic law. As such Dubai exists in a strange dichotomy, between internationalist, capitalist-cosmopolitanism, and Islamic tradition and law. Whilst capitalism does seem to lend well to cosmopolitan, free cities, it also can lend itself to the exclusivity and economic stratification typified by gated communities and the Burj Dubai. Now, as the current world economic crisis begins to affect Dubai, the cosmopolitan veil is slipping because for years it has (successfully) depended on giving itself “a real economy based on free trade, tourism and its position as a hub for shipping, airlines, communications and media.”²⁸³ But Dubai, without a strong self-reliant economy of its own, may slip away from its current cosmopolitan ideals that rely on external capital, and shift toward being a theocracy.

In critiquing cities such as Las Vegas and Dubai it is important to provide alternatives, cities that are closer to fulfilling the prescription of a free city. New York stands out as an alternative, a city that has fought back from inner-city neglect and now stands closer to being an ideal city. Elizabeth Wilson proposes New York and Chicago as near-mythic Babylonian centres containing vibrant dialectics, writing:

“Babylon lives on as the supreme –almost mythical example of cosmopolitan wealth, beauty and refinement... In no city in the Western world were beauty and cruelty, hope and despair so closely associated as in the ‘Babylons’ of New York and Chicago.”²⁸⁴

Wilson writes in the past tense, which may reflect the deterioration of the inner-cities leading up to her writing in the early nineties. Focusing on the case of New York, there was a subsequent revival of the city stemming from increased crime prevention and general inner-city gentrification. As Jonathan Franzen writes, “for better or worse, the most reliable measure of a city’s vitality is whether rich people are willing to live in the center of it.”²⁸⁵ The problem with making the city safer and appealing to the rich is that it is possible to make the city *too* safe by erecting too many boundaries, destroying true public space with CCTV cameras. Cities such as New York must tread the fine line between safety and vibrant desirability, because the rich’s presence in the city is only the final outcome of a chain of

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Christopher Dickey, “Financial Paradise Becomes a Mirage: The World’s Economic Woes Have Finally Reached the Nation-State of Dubai, and Fortunes are Crumbling”, *Newsweek*, Vol. 152, Issue 24 (New York: December 15, 2008).

²⁸⁴ Wilson, pp. 18 & 65.

²⁸⁵ Franzen, “First City”, p. 192.

causes “which begins with a city’s ability to attract young people.”²⁸⁶ A truly free city should have poor, rich, and middle-class all living in relatively close proximity, critically engaging with the stratification that exists in society.

Writing with architecture particularly in mind, Bernard Tschumi also appreciates New York as a useful source of inspiration, also including Tokyo in the same category:

“Tokyo and New York only appear chaotic... [t]heir confrontations and combinations of elements may provide us with the event, the shock, that I hope will make the architecture of our cities a turning point in culture and society.”²⁸⁷

The interactions and disjunctions of modern cities such as New York provide the possibility of the event, whether that be rupture or the silence of the anti-event, they provide the hope of alterity. Tschumi’s statement is distinctly Benjaminian in its approach, in that:

“The fragmentary style pursued by Benjamin in his writings on the city is in keeping with his understanding of the modern urban complex as the locus of disintegration of experience and with his recognition of the need to salvage the disregarded debris of contemporary society.”²⁸⁸

Cities that include genuinely free areas do not discard the debris of society because their open borders do not exclude. By including all, the city is given a certain degree of unity and as such only appears chaotic. A state of exception is detrimental to the free city because the exception withholds, discards, and asserts order in the present, excluding both known and unknown quantities. The exception-made-rule ruins the fragmentary style of the city as it suspends the boundaries that define public and private. It is therefore necessary that care be taken not to idealise a particular city, because as Adam Zachary Newton writes, “idealism surrenders to ideology, and in a debased form of spiritual election thereby risks idolatry.”²⁸⁹ This is true of the city, the step from ideal form to idolatry is a small one, that once made freezes the city’s development, ruining its function. Idolatry is the presentation of the present as able to be attained and completed, violently dominated into a static form such as “the golden dream”. Neither the suburb nor the city should submit to notions of idolatry that seek to deny alterity, the future possibilities of humanity.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Tschumi, “Six Concepts”, *Architecture and Disjunction*, p. 259.

²⁸⁸ Gilloch, *Myth & Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, p. 23.

²⁸⁹ Although Newton was referring to a Levinasian conceptualisation of ethics, it does lend itself to extension beyond the original bounds of context. Adam Zachary Newton, *The Fence and the Neighbor: Emmanuel Levinas, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Israel Among the Nations* (Albany, 2001), p. 149.

After dealing with particular expressions of city-life, it is useful to return to the general in order to consider the possible extension of the examples beyond the particular. Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* provides a lens with which to ground the arguments surrounding the idea of a generalised secular city. Cox argues that "the syntax of the secular city is identical" to that of the Kingdom of God, as it "renders former ways of thinking and doing wholly obsolete..." summoning man to action.²⁹⁰ Boosted by the optimism of early-mid 1960s high Modernity, there is an overwhelming feeling of utopianism in Cox's writing, although to his credit he maintains it as a becoming, a work in progress requiring action. Cox also understood one of the crucial elements of the city, writing: "urban man, in contrast [to small town/semi-urban man], wants to maintain a clear distinction between private and public. Otherwise public life would overwhelm and dehumanize him."²⁹¹ Whilst being correct, Cox emphasises the wrong side of the separation, because it is the maintenance of public space that denies the dehumanising conditions of the state of exception.

The Secular City was essentially a boosterist myth for post-war America, "a call to look at the city in a new way... to cease using it metaphorically as an enemy and to regard it (for once) as a friend."²⁹² James Hitchcock argues that this approach had a high cost, "[i]n its enthusiastic approval of urban technological twentieth-century American society... the secular city theologians abandon this pregnant ideal, seldom realised, of Christian universalism."²⁹³ Michael Novak counters this with the argument that the secular view had to be "taken seriously and appropriated deep in one's own guts and imagination" so that society could assess its limitations and move on.²⁹⁴ This is a valid argument and outlines an important step for the modern city as its dialectical, Babylonian nature was opened to investigation in the modern, technological era. Just as the secular is primarily Western in its application, *The Secular City* is also Western in its background and expression, particularly post-Christian in context. Thus the limitations that were, and continue to be, assessed through the secular are the claims of the religious. Through the prevalence of public secularity the religious is discharged of the possibility of idolatry and is open to the continuing possibilities of alterity.

²⁹⁰ Cox, pp. 116-7.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁹² Michael Novak, "The Secular City as Fantasy and Festivity: Response to James Hitchcock", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring 1969), p. 227.

²⁹³ James Hitchcock, "The New Class and the Secular City", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring 1969), p. 222.

²⁹⁴ Novak, "The Secular City as Fantasy and Festivity: Response to James Hitchcock", p. 229.

However, some could not share such enthusiasm for *The Secular City*, as the biopolitical potential was already apparent to thinkers such as Richard Rubenstein, who writes:

“Then as now, I saw Auschwitz as an intrinsic expression of what Harvey Cox called technopolis in *The Sacred City*. That conviction prevented me from joining Cox in identifying the secular city with the “self-realizing kingdom of God.”²⁹⁵

Rubenstein recognised the possible foundations for the creation of bare life and the technological means with which to dispatch it. This is the burden which we in the modern city must accept, recognising that we live in dialectical and inconsistent Babylons, and part of this responsibility is to engage with them vigilantly. As modern Jobs we must accept the burden of history, engage with the city in the absence of transcendent meaning, and accept that by virtue of the free nature of the city, it harbours the future possibility of these horrors. Hiding oneself from the violence and potential horror, seeking purity and security in a gated-community only exacerbates the problem; it separates, demarcates, and leaves the other’s life bare, vulnerable, and exterminable.

²⁹⁵ “Then” refers to Rubenstein’s visit to Auschwitz on October 22, 1965. It is assumed that Rubenstein is in fact referring to *The Secular City* as no work titled *The Sacred City* is apparent. Richard L. Rubenstein, “Radical Theology and the Holocaust”, in, *The Death of God Movement and the Holocaust: Radical Theological Encounters the Shoah*, Stephen R. Haynes and John K. Roth, eds. (Westport, Connecticut and London, 1999), p. 45. Rubenstein uses the term “self-realizing kingdom of God”, which links to Mark C. Taylor’s writings depicting Las Vegas as “the death of God is staged as the spectacle of the kingdom of God on earth.” Taylor, reading through *The Secular City*, takes the enthusiasm of Cox and turns it toward an immanent secular eschatology. As Rubenstein alludes, care must be taken because within both the secular city and the hyperreal city is the dark possibilities of the state of exception and all it entails.

Intermezzo: Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny

Bertolt Brecht's opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* describes the creation by three fugitives, Leokadia Begbick, Trinity Moses, and Willy the Chief Clerk, of a paradise city that ultimately succumbs to the baser instincts of humanity.²⁹⁶ The three founding creators set out to create a "Network city" - a "Golden city" - and yet have it "far from the bustle of the world", separate from the Megalopolis where "there's too much noise; nothing but unrest and discord; and nothing you can hold onto."²⁹⁷ It is an attempt to create an elitist Babel based, in a similar fashion to Dubai, on the language of capitalism, where all are united by the logos of exchangeable currency. Mahagonny is a place absent of an obvious moral code, filled with drinking and prostitution, although, strangely, certain modicums of restriction apply to behaviours such as the singing of bawdy songs. It is into this milieu that the central protagonist Paul Ackerman, a man who has spent the previous seven years as a lumberjack in Alaska, enters with his three friends, Jakob, Joseph, and Heinrich (introduced as Harry). Initially the attraction of the city is well received by this quartet, but quickly Paul becomes despondent and has to be dissuaded from leaving. Not long after, Paul makes clear to the founders the reasons for his discontent:

"In your highfalutin Mahagonny
Mankind will never be happy
As it's too quiet here
There's too much concord
And as there's too much
For us to hold on to here."²⁹⁸

By inverting the charges against the Megalopolis, Paul outlines why Mahagonny is not really a city - there is no tension, difference, or real exchange. As a Marxist, Brecht is using the dialectically inverted claims levelled at the two cities to portray urban capitalism as ultimately inhumane. Mahagonny, like Babel, is held together by a singular concordant purpose that is ultimately incomplete as evidenced by Paul's speech signalling the beginning of the Fall. Paul is a messianic figure, prophetically showing the inhabitants that their unity is false.

²⁹⁶ Bertolt Brecht, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, Steve Giles, trans. and ed. (London, 2007). The opera was originally written between 1927 and 1930.

²⁹⁷ The latter three quotes are spoken by Willy, the former is spoken by Begbick. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The Babelesque parallel is continued when the violent intervention of a hurricane threatens to destroy Mahagonny and all those within it. Under the threatening shadow of the hurricane, Paul assumes a messianic mantle in an even more explicit fashion, proclaiming:

“Why build towers as high as the Himalayas
 If you cannot knock them over...
 Listen! You have put up placards
 Upon which it is written:
 This is forbidden...
 Now you shall see
 Nothing is forbidden!
 ...What’s left to terrify you
 You die like all God’s creatures
 And there is no hereafter.”²⁹⁹

In this Babel narrative, man becomes both creator and destroyer, with the assertion “nothing is forbidden” closely paralleling the Biblical passage concerning Babel: “...now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”³⁰⁰ In *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* humanity is still fallen in that they will die, but they are now made aware of the near limitless possibilities available. When the hurricane miraculously misses Mahagonny, the Chorus proclaims: “O wondrous resolution; The Joyful City has been spared.”³⁰¹ It is then written that “[f]rom now on, the motto of the people of Mahagonny was ‘You’re allowed to’, as they had learned during the night of dread.”³⁰² The story can then be read as a realist parable of life in a world where the Tower has been reconstructed and without an act of God to intervene, it seems fated to continue without limitations or restraint. Brecht is critiquing unchecked capitalism, implying it will destroy itself by creating a new, ultimately self-destructive Tower of Babel that is a God unto itself and is, therefore, idolatrous.

So Mahagonny, where “all morals are permitted”, begins to decline as the inhabitants succumb to their own excessive desires.³⁰³ Jakob (by this point known as Jake) dies through gluttony and Joseph (known as Joe) dies in an organised boxing match with Trinity Moses, on which Paul was wagered all his money.³⁰⁴ Jakob and Joseph have become *homo sacer*,

²⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 27-9

³⁰⁰ Gen. 11:6.

³⁰¹ Brecht, p. 32.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁰⁴ The shortening of the names (Jakob to Jake, and Joseph to Joe) removes direct Biblical allusions and indicates that the men have entered a fallen state after God did not or could not intervene. In the absence of any

they are able to be killed (either by their own or another's action) but not sacrificed; their lives are able to be extinguished without any attachment of meaning or consequence. After the boxing match Paul buys drinks for others that he cannot pay for, once this is realised he is arrested and shackled to await trial.³⁰⁵ So it is revealed that this place where everything is allowed actually contains the unspoken exception of being without money. Trinity Moses acts as the judge in the proceedings and before Paul takes the stand it is made clear through the judging of a prior case that through bribery a person can be acquitted of murder charges. Paul, however, without the means to bribe is condemned to die:

“For having no money
Which is the most heinous crime that
We can encounter in our world.”³⁰⁶

The inhabitants of Mahagonny in their quest for unity, with an underlying selfish drive for personal gratification, preclude any sense of true hospitality and in doing so are without a basis for a truly sustainable city. The offer of acceptance is false because it comes with the unspoken condition of being wealthy. In the Babel of unfettered capitalism, the inhabitants begin to be consumed, especially the poor who as embodiments of absence of money, are also the embodiment of absence of meaning. As soon as this silent condition of wealth is broken, the action that is beyond language is performed, the violent exclusion from the community, which for the community that allows all else, is inevitably death.

Faced with the prospect of his death, Paul challenges his (per/pro)secutors with the existence of God – an alterity which would judge and undermine their own corrupt alterity. The three founder's response is to stage a play (which occurs as a play-within-a-play) titled *God in Mahagonny*, in which God (played by Trinity Moses) makes himself visible in Mahagonny and condemns the inhabitants to “March into hell with you, you scoundrels!”³⁰⁷ So as a self-

meaning beyond self-satisfaction in the present, Jake and Joe become nihilistic and self destructive, reduced to *homo sacer*.

³⁰⁵ By being poor in a society where everything is possible to those who have money, Paul is a transgressive figure who must be eliminated. This situation is similar to the totalitarian Nazi regime described by Theo W. A. de Wit who, in discussion of the thought of Alain Finkielkraut, writes: ““Everything is possible” was the creed of Hitler's radical volunteerism, and every setback was sure to be the work of the enemy, an enemy who is coincidentally the enemy of mankind.” Theo W. A. de Wit, “Scum of the Earth: Alain Finkielkraut on the Political Risks of a Humanism without Transcendence”, in *Telos*, No. 142 (Spring, 2008), p. 171. In similar fashion, Paul becomes the enemy of mankind that must be eliminated in an act of totalitarian purity. The society has a veneer of complete voluntary freedom, but this is stripped away when one steps beyond the bounds of the totalitarian ontology and thus become the exception that must be eliminated.

³⁰⁶ Spoken by Begbick, Trinity, and Willy. Brecht, p. 33.

³⁰⁷ Spoken by Trinity Moses. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

conscious device, God appears in Brecht's opera, making himself visible and showing his displeasure as with Babel. But the response of the men in the play is to deny God by stating:

“We're all on strike. You cannot drag
Us all the way to hell against our will
Because we have been in hell forever.”³⁰⁸

Faced with this display, Paul realises his fate is sealed and in doing so assumes the persona of a Christ-like figure, stating: “The joy I bought was no joy at all, the freedom that comes with money was no freedom at all. I ate and was not fed, I drank and was still thirsty.”³⁰⁹ Through his realisation and messianic condemnation, Paul transcends *homo sacer* and becomes the sacrificial alterity that breaks up the static would-be utopia. He is not a Messiah without sin, but rather one who fully experienced humanity in all its transgressions. Paul's alterity occurs in a moment of personal realisation via hermeneutics, the catalyst for which being his imminent death, spurred on by the logic he had previously espoused, thus revealing both the repressive violence and the possibility of alterity that exists beneath the veneer of calm singularity. Mahagonny makes no space for alterity, and as such extinguishes its own power through the violent suppression of the other – the destitute. The Megalopolis, for all its visible degradation, is actually the more positive existence as it self-consciously struggles to include all classes, all cultures, allowing the positive possibility of alterity; thus *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* is a parable against all utopias and the totalitarian violence at their heart.

Mahagonny, which metaphorically denies alterity via the death of Paul, the one who embodies alterity, and the play-within-a-play, begins to enter into its own destruction as it struggles to in the glare of revealed alterity to deal with alterity. So the inhabitants are now found marching in columns as Mahagonny burns behind them, holding placards on which slogans as: “FOR INFLATION”, “FOR THE STRUGGLE OF ALL AGAINST ALL”, FOR THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE GOLDEN AGE,” are written.³¹⁰ The people are divided and realise their situation but do not attempt to engage in translation, instead resorting to divisive proclamations and violence. Therefore, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* takes a step further than Babel and depicts both the destruction of the Tower and

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., Steve Giles draws the parallel between Paul and Christ; writing: “...Paul's complaint that he was provided with inadequate food and drink parallels Christ's critique of the unrighteous during his discourse on the Last Judgement: ‘For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink’ (Matthew, 25:42).” Steve Giles, “Introduction”, in, Ibid., p. xxviii.

³¹⁰ Brecht, p. 58.

of the hope of a Babylon remaining after. It serves as warning not to be presumptuous in the overcoming of alterity and also serves as a brutal critique on the possibility of utopia, which is either false, relying on a brutal repressive violence for maintenance, or acts as a death, void of possibility. Cities must include alterity and as such are sites that cannot be emptied of violence; however, if engaged with on the level of including difference rather than focusing on the quixotic task of its obscuration or elimination, violence can be harnessed toward its most positive and creative cultural functions, so we are not left with a society that “can’t help us or you or anybody.”³¹¹

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

The Neighbour and Other Strangers

“It was early recognised that it was the community, and not the built environment, which makes the city.”

Timothy Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment*.³¹²

Living with Difference

The city takes its physical shape from architecture - humanity's creation - but it is the people that lend the content and stress. Through the Augustinian tradition, the city has been approached via interiority and measured detachment, the space read via an inward sense of forthcoming kingdom. But as Richard Sennett writes, this approach comes with difficulty, because it deprives humanity of the ability to make sense of the outside world, as “sheer exposure to difference is no corrective to the Christian ills of inwardness.”³¹³ Nihilism suffers in a similar manner as it finds little meaning outside in the world already prepared and turns back in on itself. This is why Gorringer writes of Nietzsche in the following way:

“Nietzsche is the avowed prophet of postmodernity, but he is also the prophet of the lonely individual, the man of ‘azure isolation’, at home only with the eagles and the strong winds.”³¹⁴

The key difference point is that Nietzsche engaged with the world and, as with the church, stripped it of symbolism; he engaged with culture but ultimately rejected it. It is the initial engagement which is of significance to living in the city because this evaluates the other, the exteriority, and thus places the individual in relation with humanity.

Those who live in cities must by necessity engage with the cosmopolitan nature of the city. In the aftermath of Babel and the plethora of Babylons that followed, humanity must engage with the neighbour as other in order to understand, not just humanity, but the exteriority of the city itself (in the same way that the city as a malleable architectural structure should be engaged with to better understand humanity). The culture of the city is fundamental to the cosmopolitan nature of the city because, as Richard A. Cohen writes in reference to the thought of Cassirer, “humanity is cosmopolitan not because it is alienated but precisely

³¹² Gorringer, p. 171.

³¹³ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 129. Timothy Gorringer also references Sennett regarding this point, levelling the charge particularly against the Augustinian tradition. *Ibid*, p. 10.

³¹⁴ Gorringer, pp. 184-5.

because it is cultured, and necessarily so.”³¹⁵ Cosmopolitanism is the engagement with difference, not as an overcoming but as an understanding, and as such it is suited to, and necessitated by, close-quarters city life. It should be made explicitly clear here that cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism are not equable; they stem from different ontological roots, or to be more exact, multiculturalism claims an ontology that is becoming complete, whereas cosmopolitanism does not. Cosmopolitanism is an incomplete sharing with recognition that the chasm of difference will not be overcome; it mirrors the social structure of humanity after the second fall at Babel.

Multiculturalism is the claim of a remaining ontological sameness, with difference regarded as ultimately unimportant. For this reason Alain Finkielkraut writes that multiculturalism and communities of *Volksgeist* “have conflicting credos but the same vision of the world. In both cases they see cultures as all-encompassing entities, distinctly different to each other.”³¹⁶ Rather than trying to fence-off or retreat from difference (as in the case of *Volksgeist*), multiculturalism presents a façade of inclusivity without a universal basis, thus sanctioning all expressions of culture without a grounds for critique. It is an insidious claim because it potentially reduces all of humanity to *homo sacer*, imbued with a bare, essential humanity and covered with meaningless differences able to be stripped away under the convergence of biological life and politics.

Cosmopolitanism and city life both contain difference as an ontological reality, rather than as a superficial obstacle on the path to purity. Cox’s secular city with its reference to a kingdom-of-God-becoming, reflects a multicultural view that ultimately refuses to acknowledge the true depth of difference that exists and as such is rightly criticised for coming close to echoing the structures of *Volk* and purity in the extermination camps. Timothy Gorringer writes, and includes a passage by I. M. Young, a beautiful summation of the culture of cities and the necessary relation to difference:

“City life is the being together of strangers characterised by the celebration of difference, an ambivalence in which deviant and minority groups can flourish under the cover of anonymity, diverse activities, ‘eroticism’— the enjoyment of other’s difference —and the provision of public where ‘people

³¹⁵ Richard A. Cohen, “Introduction”, in, Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, Nidra Poller, trans. (Urbana and Chicago, 2003), p. xxiv.

³¹⁶ Finkielkraut, *The Defeat of the Mind*, Judith Friedlander, trans. and intro. (New York, 1995), p. 92.

stand and sit together, interact and mingle, or simply witness one another, without becoming unified in a community of shared final ends.”³¹⁷

A community of shared final ends is a community of death, a necropolis that fails to allow for alterity. The public space where one can be observed but not known, interact with and as strangers, defeats expressions of multiculturalism or *Volk* that would reduce mutual alterity, strip space of ambivalence, enjoy the other but in the same process name and extinguish alterity.

The question of the enjoyment of the other, of bearing witness to the stranger, also raises the question of power. Timothy Gorringer writes that “the built environment is the orthography of power and class.”³¹⁸ Cities are built by those with the greater economical means and can, therefore, exclude those without the same level of means, or relegate them to the ghetto-like structure of the tenement. Graeme Gilloch writes that within the modern city the “poor are situated out of sight and out of mind... The modern city is not only the site of the disappearance of the poor in the present, but also the space in which they become imperceptible in the past.”³¹⁹ This is where Benjamin’s historical materialism intersects with ethics; by including every aspect of history and refusing to forget any moment, there can be no forgotten people, no “purification” of space or time. Historical materialism should be the ethical boundaries of the city, refusing a retreat into ahistorical presentism, whilst maintaining that no other can be excluded from space or history. What must be avoided is disgust at, and subsequent flight from, the other, as apparent in the words of the developer of Sanctuary Cove, Australia’s first gated community:

“The streets these days are full of cockroaches and most of them are human. Every man has a right to protect his family, himself and his possessions, to live in peace and safety.”³²⁰

To identify the other as non- or sub- human and to proceed to systematically exclude them is a profoundly destructive act that seeks a paradoxical unity by exclusion and the redrafting of the ‘world’s’ boundaries. The building of weak boundaries and the expansion of the world to include more is the ethical city experience. Alterity is born in the interaction with the other,

³¹⁷ Gorringer, p. 175. Gorringer references Young as: I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³¹⁹ Gilloch, *Myth & Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, pp. 91-2.

³²⁰ Low, p. 139. The promotional website for Sanctuary Cove opens with the words “Live happily ever after”, simultaneously conjuring a childlike fairytale view of the world and an ahistorical stasis where nothing changes or challenges. <http://www.sanctuarycove.com/>. Parallels can be drawn between the developer’s disgust of the other coupled with fantasy escapism, and the covert anti-Semitism of Walt Disney described in: Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney: Hollywood’s Dark Prince; A Biography* (London, 2003).

not as an end, but as a new possibility of continuing. Power should not be used to exclude, it should be used to break down the boundaries created by inequality, knowing that ultimately difference cannot be escaped or overcome.

The option of anonymity is a necessity in the city because it allows the other to be other – a stranger - thus imbuing the city with life and vitality. Anonymity also plays an important role in the Christian tradition, in the post-resurrection in particular, where upon rising from the dead Jesus is not recognised by his own followers: “But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.”³²¹ This is an important step because he becomes ‘he who is not able to be witnessed’ in the properly named sense. Thus a space of alterity is created between Jesus pre- and post- resurrection, emphasising the transformation that has occurred and also the distance between man and God. A distance that is briefly overcome again through his revelation of identity, reinforcing God’s offer of hospitality extended to humanity. Of hospitality, Jacques Derrida writes:

“...*one the one hand*, hospitality must wait, extend itself toward the other, extend to the other the gifts, the site, the shelter and the cover; it must be ready to welcome, to host and shelter... But, *on the other hand*, the opposite is also nevertheless true...to be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken, to not even *let* oneself be overtaken, to be surprised, in a fashion almost violent, violated and raped, stolen... If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome... there is no hospitality.”³²²

To be sacrificed is not a type of hospitality, however, because hospitality is an exchange where both parties attach meaning after the interaction, whereas a sacrifice is only decided by the one who performs the sacrifice. In exchanges where alterity is exhausted there is no hospitality, it is also exhausted. Hospitality requires alterity, a differentiation between self and other, as well as the space to be hospitable in. One extends a welcome that precedes itself, just as the Christian offer of forgiveness and community extends ontologically either side of the rupture-event of Christ. This adds the true weight of violence to the rupture that occurs as God is laid open to the violent acceptance of hospitality, potentially prior to the extension of the offer. Cosmopolitan city-life places a stringent demand of alterity, extends hospitality, and often accepts a welcome before a welcome is ready to be offered. The space where one only welcomes what one is ready to welcome is the gated community - it offers no hospitality, nor welcomes any - whereas the free space of the city does and as such can be violent and distressing, but in its alterity it can also be hopeful, ethical, and truly welcoming.

³²¹ St. Luke 24:16. It should be noted that whilst Jesus is a stranger in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, he is not in the gospel of Matthew and is recognised upon first sight.

³²² Derrida, “Hospitality”, *Acts of Religion*, pp. 360-1.

Jews - those that have been subjected to the greatest of excessive biopolitical horrors in Twentieth century - have a history of maintaining their alterity, the chasm of difference that makes them other. As Yuri Slezkine writes:

“What seems clear is that when service nomads possessed no vernaculars foreign to their hosts, they created new ones in ways that resembled neither genetic change... nor pidginization... Their *raison d’être* is the maintenance of difference, the conscious preservation of the self and thus of strangeness.”³²³

By virtue of this self-maintenance, historically Jews have been adept city-dwellers, engaging with the inhabitants and space of the city, without the detriment that would arise if one was to become homogenous. This is also an insight into why the Jews have a history of being victimised and oppressed; as an excess that refuses to amalgamate they are always other, and in modernity they can be that which thwarts the violent, totalitarian claims for purity and order. They maintain their strangeness, like the city-dweller should, as Žižek reinforces, “...Judaism opens up a tradition in which an alien traumatic kernel forever persists in my Neighbor – the Neighbor remains an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence which hystericizes me.”³²⁴ The neighbour is the one whose alterity cannot be overcome, whose existence disrupts one’s own, and yet by ethical and spatial necessity must be engaged with.

In opposition to the city-dweller as stranger is the reduction of the other to a bare life that removes strangeness, illusion, and excess. Others must be allowed to be strangers, to create afresh a sense of alterity and self-definition that in the public space of the city results in alterity being born through interaction. The other/stranger should never be characterised as an absolute other who cannot be included at all, because that denies the humanity of the other and fails to extend the offer of hospitality. This is the charge Rubenstein levels at Thomas Altizer, claiming that “...in characterising the Jew as the “absolute Other,” Altizer comes close to Gnosticism, if he does not actively embrace it.”³²⁵ As Rubenstein argues, Altizer is denying the teleological roots of Christianity, but even in a political/secular sense the radical

³²³ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton and Oxford, 2004), p. 19.

³²⁴ Žižek, “From Politics to Biopolitics... and Back”, in, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103:2/3 (Spring/ Summer 2004), pp. 501-2.

³²⁵ Rubenstein, “Radical Theology and the Holocaust”, p. 48. Paul van Buren also argues that Christians must acknowledge the prior claim to the stories. “For Christians this continuity or connection will require absolutely their recognition of the prior Jewish claim to these stories, so that any claim on them for ourselves has to be built on the legitimacy of their claim.” Paul M. Van Buren, “From the Secular Gospel to the Scriptural Gospel”, in, *The Death of God Movement and the Holocaust: Radical Theological Encounters the Shoah*, Stephen R. Haynes and John K. Roth, eds. (Westport, Connecticut and London, 1999), p. 40.

“othering” of specific set of people is the equivalent to ghettoisation, self or otherwise. Mahmoud Shukair levels a similar charge against the current city-space of Jerusalem, writing: “I said the Judaization of Jerusalem is against the heritage of the city, a heritage derived from many cultures and molded through the centuries into a complex shape.”³²⁶ Jerusalem is increasingly becoming less of a city as it refuses to integrate and accept the other, and is in fact, somewhat paradoxically making Altizer’s claim a reality by self-demarcating the Jew as the absolute Other. A major problem for Jerusalem is the geographical proximity of Hamas which denies the right of Israel and Jews to exist, seeking their eradication. Unfortunately, the erection of strong barriers makes the task easier, it barricades and ghettoises both the land and its inhabitants, demarcating them as the absolute Other beyond the interaction of translation. The offer of inclusion must be extended the includable other (in the case of Jerusalem this cannot include Hamas the self-appointed complete exclusion) so it can necessarily be partially declined or even accepted before the offer is made, like the action of the autistic outsider who oversteps the bounds of community yet remains within, rupturing and offering hope.

The Limits of Empathy

To live in the city is to be orientated toward the other, to extend the welcome of hospitality beyond what is expected, to welcome some degree of violence without the expectation of recognition. “This obligation has no foundation, but only verification in the common consent accorded by the universal conscience,” writes Simone Weil.³²⁷ However, obligation is a difficult term because it strips away the ego leaving the individual without a base for interaction. Jean-Francois Lyotard writes that, “obligation alienates the ego, it becomes the you of an absolutely unknowable other.”³²⁸ There must be autonomy and self-choice in the

³²⁶ Mahmoud Shukair, “Jerusalem: My First City, My Last City: An Album of Memories”, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. XLVI, No. 3 (Summer 2007), p. 432.

³²⁷ Weil, p. 5.

³²⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, Georges Van Den Abbeele, trans. (Minneapolis, 1988), p. 115. Reading via the figure of St. Paul, Alain Badiou makes the argument that “Paul is in no way a theoretician of oblatory love, through which one would forget oneself in devotion to the Other. This false love, which claims that the self annihilates himself in a direct relation to the transcendence of the Other, is nothing more than narcissistic pretension.” Badiou, pp. 89-90. Emmanuel Levinas offers a partial counter to this, writing: “The uniqueness of the Ego is the fact that no one can answer in my stead.” Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, p. 33. Whilst Levinas’ claim may be true, the uniqueness is lost in the overwhelming obligation to attend the unknowable; upon answering, one is lost.

extension of hospitality; otherwise it is *only* violence, rape, void of the possibility of the offer. Obligation only exists in the past and present, removing Derrida's first possibility of hospitality that is extended in the present and accepted in the future, therefore precluding hospitality in general. Often in contemporary society, the reaction to demands of hospitality has been to flee from both those that would impose obligations and those that would seek and extend true hospitality. Slavoj Žižek argues that "this is emerging as the central "human right" in late-capitalist society: *the right not to be harassed*, to be kept at a safe distance from others."³²⁹ Whilst Žižek is prone to overstating the case against post-capitalist society, he is correct in identifying a worrying tendency toward the situation he outlines, where the fundamental right is to be inhospitable. The other is made absolutely so by lack of interaction thus one stops being cosmopolitan because one stops being cultured. For hospitality is inextricably linked to culture, as Derrida writes: "all cultures compete in this regard and present themselves as more hospitable than others. Hospitality• this is culture itself."³³⁰ Those that stop being hospitable are no longer cultured, no longer cosmopolitan, no longer urban, and no longer truly fully human. To be fully human is to exist in relation to humanity which is other, and engage in dialogue which brings the individual outside of narcissistic self-relation.

Another significant figure in the discussion of the other is Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who has written extensively and intelligently on the subject, and whose thought, on occasion, coincides closely with that of Jacques Derrida. Levinas writes:

"Knowledge would be the relation of man to exteriority, the relation of the Same to the Other, in which the other finally finds itself stripped of its alterity, in which it becomes interior to my knowledge, in which transcendence makes itself immanence."³³¹

This is the inverse of the interiority of Augustine, in which knowledge is self-knowing and interiority becomes reflected in the exterior that becomes in time with the kingdom of God. There is also a dangerous undercurrent of consumption in Levinas' thought, where the other is potentially stripped of alterity - that which makes the other other, an autonomous individual - for the self's benefit. In a discussion of Derrida and Levinas, Kevin Hart summarises the exteriority of Levinas' thought:

³²⁹ Žižek, "From Politics to Biopolitics... and Back", p. 508.

³³⁰ Derrida, "Hospitality", p. 361.

³³¹ Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, p. 180.

“In acknowledging that the other person is always in principle closer to God than I am, and in acting upon the precept that meeting his or her material needs will satisfy my spiritual hungers, I draw closer to the deity. In short, God appears within the horizon of ethics, not religion or metaphysics.”³³²

This is problematic because in finding the other closer to the God, the other becomes little more than a gateway in an act of cynical piety where good deeds are traded for transcendent rewards and the other is an idol able to be consumed and stripped of alterity. Levinas’ thought is superficially helpful in placing the other first, and thus positing a primary humanitarian ethic in the relations of humanity, but in doing so it defeats itself. Defeat occurs because there is a self-limiting construct that finds transcendence in the act of meeting the other’s needs and so necessarily needs the other to have needs to fill.³³³ Ultimately, this philosophy has the potential to be the sadist humanitarianism of bare life, where those suffering the greatest indignity offer the greatest spiritual satisfaction for those who are not.

In the city it is important to empathise with the other, but this should be limited by the understanding that it is an incomplete process that at no stage offers a glimpse of transcendence. The alterity and hope that arises through the interactions and violence of the city are of just that, hope and alterity, they never overflow their bounds into transcendence or knowledge. Extrapolating Sartre’s phrase, “the de-totalised totality”, Andy Martin postulates it as “...a semi-autistic warning against over empathy and premature, self-deluded understanding of the other.”³³⁴ Sartre, like Levinas, understood that the other can never be fully known, but ultimately concludes differently to Levinas, seeing that the folly in dedicating oneself to an unknowable other is destructive to both the self and the other. In *The Conscience of the Eye*, Richard Sennett conceptualises the experience of difference in a way that parallels city space:

“...non-linear experience of difference might be thought of as an *émigration extériure*. One goes to the edge of oneself. But precisely at that edge, one cannot represent oneself to oneself. Instead one sees, talks, or thinks about what is outside, beyond the boundary...”³³⁵

At the edge, one is beyond the Augustinian interiority, not by simple virtue of exposure to difference, but by a self-exilic choice that engages the other. The *émigration extériure* is not without bounds, like the city it has permeable boundaries that nonetheless remain providing structure. Experiencing this, the individual is unshackled from the infinite loop of self-

³³² Hart, p. 271.

³³³ It is necessarily self-defeating, even from Levinas’ perspective, who understood that the other can never be fully known.

³³⁴ Martin, “Autism, Empathy, and Existentialism”, p. 110.

³³⁵ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 148.

definition and yet remains free of the custodian care of an overly empathic other. Like the free space of the city, the *émigration extériure* is a liminal experience that explores the bounds of interaction without succumbing to alienating extremes.

Levinas writes of the face of the other as that which signals the journey to the edge of oneself, or in his particular case, beyond the edge. He writes that “the face *enters* our world from an absolutely foreign sphere, that is, precisely from an absolute, which is in fact the name of the completely foreign.”³³⁶ The face becomes that which threatens to overwhelm the individual; in Lyotard’s words, the face is a landscape, “an excess of presence” which “wreaks a very different desolation. You are no longer simply its hostage, but its lost traveller.”³³⁷ By virtue of its signification of complete alterity, the face threatens to overwhelm as it draws the viewer to their limits of self-definition. The face threatens to turn the *émigration extériure* into banishment, but if the other is approached within the bounds of hospitality it does not need to be so. If the other’s radical alterity is welcomed, even accepted before the extension of welcome, then self-autonomy is retained. Even in the event of the violent interruption that precedes the offer, the welcome maintains that the self is being independently hospitable, maintaining the liminal space within which mutual interaction can occur.

Justice and Suffering

In Levinas’ work there is still an explicit hesitancy to *completely* abandon oneself in the other’s vulnerability; for a check is placed on the relationship: justice. Levinas writes:

“If there were no order of Justice, there would be no limit to my responsibility. There is a certain measure of violence necessary in terms of justice; but, if one speaks of justice, it is necessary to allow judges, it is necessary to allow institutions and the state; to live in a world of citizens, and not only in the order of the Face to Face.”³³⁸

Justice, both in the complete exteriority sense potentially involving divine violence and in the sense of everyday systems of justice, allows the individual a sense of space away from the other, maintaining the alterity. As violence performed on-behalf-of, justice ruptures the space

³³⁶ Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, p. 32.

³³⁷ Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, trans. (Stanford, Calif., 1991), pp. 187 & 190.

³³⁸ Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, p. 105.

between the self and the other.³³⁹ It creates the liminal space necessary for the *émigration extériure*, where both the self and the other are called out of themselves, yet remain autonomous in their own right. Of course, the application of justice has the potential to remove autonomy and to assert the grounds of exception where the individual no longer remains in equitable and open relation to the other. The liminal space that justice opens becomes, for Levinas, that which allows the Face to Face to overcome the bounds of the world by giving this relation an alterity to the normal order. But this approach too easily becomes a mere distancing from violence as a means for the self to have access to the other who in Levinas' terms is closer to God and as such provides the possibility of transcendental glimpses. Transcendence does not privilege and cannot be discerned in others; it is an event-rupture rather than inherent in the world. To truly have justice the other must be engaged with on the plane of justice, necessarily distanced, but none-the-closer to transcendence.

By placing the ethical call of the singular in exteriority and then allowing cultural forms to maintain a certain degree of justice around him, Levinas' call to ethics becomes akin to a personal call to transcendence with the other as consumable mediator. He is correct to avoid the swamping effects of unlimited responsibility, but by placing the call in the exterior he performs a dual unburdening, thus reducing what should be a universal ethical claim to an individual's relation to, and quest for, personal transcendence. Richard Rorty also does not agree that "...the ethical call of the singular comes to us in the form of a quasi-transcendental 'imperative'... we are not called to justice by anything exterior, transcendental, or trace-like."³⁴⁰ There is no calling-forth of justice; the face does not summon a sense of justice, it merely signals the justice that is necessarily already available via the offer of hospitality. Exteriority as described by Levinas would signal an obligation, and just as obligation is the death of true hospitality, it equally destroys justice. Justice is a decision made and extended forth, and although on occasion it may be accepted before it is offered, it must never reside primarily in the realm of exteriority.

³³⁹ Although both forms of justice (exteriority and everyday) involve a degree of advocacy, we can only really speak of justice in an analytical everyday sense as the justice of exteriority, like Divine violence, is beyond verification. The world must be open to the rupture of the justice of exteriority, but in the everyday there is only the secular offer of universal justice. It is secular not by virtue of its agents, but by virtue of universalism, once again echoing Vahanian's claim that secular is the language all religions share. Vahanian, "The Otherness of Time: Secularisation as Worlding of the Word and the Hallowing of Time", p. 12.

³⁴⁰ Richard Rorty, as quoted in: Michener, *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*, p. 128.

Levinas also allows for the overcoming of choice, writing that “to be dominated by the Good is precisely to exclude the possibility of choice, of co-existence in the present.”³⁴¹ This is a way of externalising and ignoring the most difficult aspects of being human, the trauma of finite resources and the decisions it necessitates. John D. Caputo explains the reason why Derrida finds the story of Abraham so relevant today:

“If I help to feed and clothe *this* other, I abandon the other others to their nakedness and starvation. If I attend to my children, I sacrifice the children of other men. Ours is a world built on the sacrifice of others, the faces of whom we daily see on the evening news.”³⁴²

Abraham encountered God through a rupture of Religiousness B and was given a *choice*, one that was not able to be translated externally, but it was a choice nonetheless. To claim to be overwhelmed by “the Good” is to abdicate responsibility, whereas Abraham accepted complete responsibility in his action that ruptured the bounds of translation. While choice is often unexplainable it will still enter into the sphere of justice, whereas the possibility of its complete absence should never be accepted because its denial completes an equivalent denial of humanity.

To primarily place justice in the realm of exteriority is an attempt to call forth the action of Religiousness B - exteriority rupturing interiority - which by definition cannot be called forth; and so one must act on the plane of Religiousness A, waiting but never expecting, extending hospitality, and allowing for the silence necessary for the rupture that may or may not come. As Merold Westphal outlines, this is the crux of the chasm between Levinas and Kierkegaard:

“For [Levinas] ethics is first, then religion, and the neighbor always stands between me and God, while for Kierkegaard religion is first, then ethics, and God always stands between me and my neighbor.”³⁴³

Kierkegaard places religion first but has Religiousness B – exteriority that cannot be called forth - to prevent cultural forms becoming absolute. God is between the neighbour and the self in the understanding that the self, like Abraham, could sacrifice the other in an untranslatable act beyond reason. This is not necessarily an act without justice because the

³⁴¹ Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, p. 53.

³⁴² John D. Caputo, “Instants, Secrets, and Singularities: Dealing Death in Kierkegaard and Derrida”, in, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995), p. 224. Actually, our world is built on the bare life of others more than the sacrifice of others; it is the faces of bare life that we see on the evening news. We are not sacrificing these lives, because in the impersonality and fleeting presence they are almost meaningless. Responsibility must be taken, not to give these faces sacrificial value, but rather to give them the full weight and significance of their pointless suffering.

³⁴³ Merold Westphal, “The Transparent Shadow: Kierkegaard and Levinas in Dialogue”, in, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995), p. 274.

individual, who commits the act, in absence of reasoning, is open to the full recourse of justice and possible justice as complete exteriority. Kierkegaard is merely expressing the possibility of an individual's relation with complete exteriority; a relation that does not reduce the neighbour to *homo sacer* – he who cannot be sacrificed – and is ultimately personal before all else. As the act is untranslatable it maintains the complete tragedy of suffering, as no life can be *described* as discardable, meaningless, and no death caused by human agency can be regarded as a necessity.

Levinas positions the human neighbour between God and religious self because “he believes this is the only protection against religion becoming ideology, the ally of dehumanizing violence that desecrates in one and the same moment the infinity of both divine and human persons”.³⁴⁴ Levinas is writing from a post-Holocaust position, which arose from the ability of humanity to rationally dehumanise the other, but the answer is not to place all neighbours first, before the self, in recognition of a perceived divine essence that unites all. For the perception of essences and essential humanity was to a large degree the source of the problems of the Twentieth Century. An answer to the problem is found in the words of Richard Rorty, who argues that importance does not reside in the recognition of essences, but in the ability to see more and more differences “as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation”.³⁴⁵ This allows for cosmopolitanism, where difference is perceived, exchanged, evaluated, and remains in place, whilst being relegated to a secondary function in the face of suffering. In an effort to defeat the forces that led to the Holocaust, Levinas ultimately argues for an essence that links all humanity, thereby going some way to depriving humanity of what it is to be human. Difference and the real interaction with difference is that which makes both humanity and their created space - the city - dynamic, changing, and worth living amongst.

Cox's *The Secular City* almost falters along the same lines of exteriority, by placing the Utopian city as that which calls the individual to action. He writes:

“There is no neutral ground. Man either masters and manages his environment or he is mastered and managed by it. The call to freedom is a call to responsibility.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 192.

³⁴⁶ Cox, p. 129.

There is a large degree of Manichaeian dualism in Cox's writing as the middle-ground is cleaved away, leaving a survivalist adapt or die, utopia or bust mentality. Cox does, however, retain a positive message in arguing that humanity must create spaces that positively relate to the rest of humanity and promote ideal relations, but there is a violent totalitarian taint as the secular is demanded rather than presented as a negotiated praxis. This problem is extended with the externalisation of the source of responsibility, called forth through the aggressive domination of space, which reaffirms Rubenstein's linkage of the camp and the technopolis. But this is not to say that Cox lacked compassion, as he writes that "man is summoned to be concerned, first of all, for his neighbour."³⁴⁷ It is simply recognition that there is an element of brutality in his utopic vision and that in being "summoned" to be concerned, first of all, for the neighbour, there is an abjuration of hospitality. One must extend hospitality to the other from a personal sense of freedom; to speak of summoning is to enter the hermeneutics of domination. The other cannot summon responsibility in the self, but can only accept or decline its arrival when offered; justice is that which may or may not follow the interaction. Justice ruptures the self first, and the extension of this rupture to the other maintains the possibility of hospitality.

Through the application of justice the other is the subject of violence, but this violence can obviously also appear without the mantle of justice. Purposive violence against the other that arrives before the extension of justice is the opposite of hospitality as it closes the relation, negating alterity. Justice restores alterity by asserting its own violence, restoring the distance that was temporarily overcome in the initial act of aggression. Levinas makes the spurious claim that "(t)he other is the only being I can want to kill", but follows it with an astute evaluation that "(t)he triumph of this power is its defeat as power. At the very moment when my power to kill is realised, the other has escaped."³⁴⁸ In Levinas' philosophy, when the other escapes the self is worthless, deprived of relation to the Other meaning that murder performs a dual extinction. This is a similar process to that which Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov, the central protagonist in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, undergoes after murdering pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna. In the novel, Raskolnikov exclaims, "[d]id I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, not her! I crushed myself once for all, forever..."³⁴⁹ The woman escaped as the power was exercised, alterity was bridged, and the full weight of the

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

³⁴⁸ Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, p. 9.

³⁴⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, (Charleston, SC, 2008), p. 467.

act was left with the perpetrator. Power is extinguished in the act of violence and a sense of justice is achieved as the perpetrator Raskolnikov, by virtue of overwhelming guilty interiority, is re-established as alterity. This order is not to be relied upon, however, and nor is it in the novel, as the social mechanisms mobilise to bring the individual to justice. The city must always be prepared to offer hospitality (and be prepared to receive before the offer) even in the face of potential threat. Justice is a restorative action and as such cannot be preemptive – doing so would be a self-defeating expression of power that would necessitate its own consequential justice. The path of eye-for-eye equivalent justice should not be taken either, for that has the air of retributive, vindictive violence, ultimately imbued with the same failings as the original act. Justice is the violence of the city against exclusionary power and conditions for bare life; it acts to restore the conditions of and for hospitality.

The concept of suffering, whether experienced by variously the victim, the perpetrator, or even the voyeur, is an important consideration in the investigation of the city. In the close confines of the city, both anguish and joy should be unavoidable and part of the day-to-day concerns of the self, yet necessarily limited by the relative anonymity that the city affords the individual. In his concern for the other, Levinas has written a vast amount on the topic of suffering, but again finds a pure essence which threatens to place his thought in the realms of sadism and masochism. Levinas writes: “[f]or pure suffering, which is intrinsically senseless and condemned to itself with no way out, a beyond appears in the form of the interhuman.”³⁵⁰ To firstly find purity in suffering and then to glimpse a beyond in the abject senselessness is to open the possibility of transcendent charity, where one comes closer to the divine through the amelioration of the other’s suffering and the acceptance of one’s own suffering. This stems from Levinas’ envisaging of suffering through an interhuman perspective where it is “meaningful in me, useless in the Other.”³⁵¹ Whilst the intentions are commendable, there is a dark underside to this idea, as it metamorphosises the other into a consumable object offering the opportunity for a transcendental glimpse.³⁵² Also, by finding meaning in one’s own suffering there is an implicit creation of an ontology of suffering; a self-burdening that operates as a masochistic impulse seeking and revelling in suffering, ultimately without the desire to rid the world of it. This has little place in the world where humanity must work to eliminate suffering in all forms. The eradication of suffering is a task that will always remain

³⁵⁰ Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, pp. 93-4.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁵² Unfortunately, this is also the dark underside of a lot of anti-poverty and charity action in the Third World.

incomplete, but it must be started with the understanding that suffering is unsatisfactory in all forms.

In his writings on postmodern theology and the other, John D. Caputo, takes a similar approach to Levinas. In an email conversation with Edith Wyschogrod, Caputo writes:

“The icon incarnates the eros of transcendence, the desire for God, which is made flesh in the neighbour and the stranger, above all in the least of these little ones.”³⁵³

With this sentence Caputo also takes the step of objectifying the other (poor, sick, suffering, disadvantaged), but instead of idolising the sufferers, he views them as icons that cannot be consumed in public or private. This creates a situation where the motivation to help the other arises from the identification of suffering in the other, rather than through selfish self-interest. Also, the icon is always in the public sphere incarnating desire, which is positive in denying private transcendence through suffering. The main misgiving that arises in the reading of Caputo is that transcendence is still present in the conceptualisation of suffering, admittedly not as a direct exchange, but nonetheless it is present, thus attaching a trace of meaning to suffering. The suffering of the other must remain in the public sphere and obtain no personal transcendent value in the private self and as such remains in the public sphere of justice. This is the approach that removes the element of spectacle and returns the true weight of meaninglessness to suffering. The city whose inhabitants find personal transcendent meaning in the suffering of others is an inhuman city, where humanity and object are distinguishable only in their ability to suffer.

To live in the city, the individual needs to firstly take account and responsibility for his or her self. From this position of self-reflexivity the question of hospitality can be engaged with as a truly autonomous offer, rather than a transcendental demand of exteriority that annihilates the ego. Self-reflexivity allows one to say “yes” to their God in private, but this affirmation is subsequently relativised as it engages with hospitality and secularity that demand that if such affirmations are made in the public sphere they must enter into the critical post-Babel hermeneutics of translation. Hermeneutics remain open-ended and incomplete, existing in the messianic time that remains, and performing necessary violence on public claims of singularity. The primacy of the public “yes” is not simply unsure, it is necessarily denied by the incompleteness of communication, and so the private and possibly certain “yes” can only

³⁵³ Caputo, in: John D. Caputo and Edith Wyschogrod, “Postmodernism and the Desire for God: An Email Exchange”, *Crosscurrents*, 48.3 (Fall, 1998). Archived at: <http://www.crosscurrents.org/>.

ever be a provisional public “yes” entering into the subjective infinity of translation. William Hamilton in discussion of this topic with particular regard to the genocide writes:

“Saying “yes” to your God not only distinguishes you from those who say “no,” it requires you to say “no” to the “no-sayers.” Those I negate I am bound to deny, to their right to deny my affirmation, and, finally to deny their right to be.”³⁵⁴

This is why hospitality is so important for life in the city amongst the teeming multiplicity of humanity. To say “yes” to your God does not necessitate saying “no to no-sayers” because the public “yes” is always limited by its interpretation, and indeed even the private “yes” can never really be a capitalised, proper “Yes” because it also enters the hermeneutics of doubt, revision, and reflection. To live as a neighbour to the other, the self must come first, otherwise the walls may come down completely and one is trapped within the private-sphere of the other, whereby the self becomes another’s object rather than a fellow subject in translation. But this outlook, that is consciously ego-centric, must always be tempered by the doubt of one’s own beliefs and the certainty that such beliefs must always be balanced, in the act of conversation (a conversation that remains incomplete), with those of the other.

Therefore, the interaction with difference is the essential quality of city-life and it is by this virtue that the city is also a violent space of exchange. City-life can place immense pressure on an individual’s beliefs, sense of privacy, concept of otherness, and their boundaries of hospitality; this should be a positive experience, but never an easy one. Attempts to short-cut this ongoing process either lead to an over-familiarisation of the other, which is an act of assimilatory violence, or the violent death of the ego via abandonment of the self. City-space must also undergo this constant challenge, reflecting the positive potentiality of the inhabitants. Richard Sennett writes: ““character” in urban space, like character in a novel, develops through displacements which encounter resistance.”³⁵⁵ Urban spaces must be as porous and open to the agents of change and time as the inhabitants. Strong boundaries in people and in spaces destroy the public space needed for interaction and exchange which, in the post-Babel world of interpretation, is the unending task that befalls humanity. The retreat from this task, whether by gated community, the absence of hospitality, or real expressions of violence, all degrade humanity’s potential power of creation. Exertion of isolatory or assimilatory powers leads ultimately, as with Dostoyevsky’s Rodion, to the causation of

³⁵⁴ William Hamilton, “Genocide and the Death of God”, in, *The Death of God Movement and the Holocaust: Radical Theological Encounters the Shoah*, Stephen R. Haynes and John K. Roth, eds. (Westport, Connecticut and London, 1999), p. 28.

³⁵⁵ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 197.

violence to the self and the escape of power. To retreat is not to protect oneself, it is to harm oneself through the radical repression of alterity; the building of a private Tower that unites none and is forever closed to interpretation. In the words of one woman living in a gated-community:

““The irony is that we are trapped behind our own gates... unable to exit. Instead of keeping people out, we have shut ourselves in.””³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ Low, p. 232.

Conclusion

As a polyglot where meaning is hermeneutical and provisional, the city is a site of tension, containing the dialectic of the idea of the city - the heteropolis, alterity that is unable to be summoned forth into being - and the physical existence of the city itself - the physical, hermeneutical city in the temporal. Read through the lens of Judeo-Christianity, the Canon of Western civilisation, this tension is first revealed in the myth of the Tower of Babel. Such tension did not exist in the city that preceded Babel, Cain's Enoch; for Enoch was a site of absence that homogenously merged the idea and the physical existence of the city into one structure, thus becoming a monument, a static vision. Enoch can, therefore, be regarded as a beginning of humanity's creative efforts; as Ellul contends, it is the paradoxical fall from myth and the mythological beginning of civilisation. The Tower of Babel was an attempt to extend the singularity of Enoch into a transcendent and universally uniting structure; to imbue humanity with a name and a mythology. In the Babel myth, divine intervention revealed singularity to be an illusion, thus humanity experienced a second Fall, this time into incompleteness and translation. With God's revelation of difference and subsequent demand to be translated, the dialectic between the idea of the city and the city itself, the heavenly city and the earthly city, was opened. The idea of the city is the inexhaustible alterity necessary to avoid the creation of Enochs and Towers: repressive drives to singularity that deny difference and hope in the present.

Heteropolis - the other city, the idea of the city - is by necessity a secular claim, a claim in and of the *saeculum*, because it is the secular that all the religious and non-religious share, and it is the secular that allows *all* forms of the religious to coexist. To repeat the words of Gabriel Vahanian: "secular - [is] a language that all religions have in common".³⁵⁷ To claim alterity, the idea of the city, as a particularly religious expression would be to pre-emptively deny the claims of others, and deny the structures of translation and the relativisation of values set out with the collapse of the Tower. As Harvey Cox argues, "[t]he relativisation of values must now demand that all individuals are included in the secularization process and not be allowed to believe that his views are ultimate."³⁵⁸ Post-Babel, the world is a space of absence, a space of distance that must be engaged with through hermeneutics, united

³⁵⁷ Vahanian, "The Otherness of Time: Secularisation as Worlding of the Word and the Hallowing of Time", p. 67.

³⁵⁸ Cox, p. 34.

provisionally with the language of the secular. Yet the secular is not a Tower of Babel, it is not singular unless all reference to religion is removed; for only then does it lose its memory and become a meaningless exchange in the present. To maintain plurality and memory, the city should be a secular space, including all in hermeneutics, yet never becoming a singular language in itself that would in effect be a particular and divisive dialect. As a space containing hermeneutics, and as a space *as* hermeneutic, the city is never complete and should not be approached with the mindset of individuals such as Le Corbusier and Jacques Ellul, who saw the city as a problem to be solved, a modernist project to be completed. To seek completion in the world is to will to being an extreme totalitarian violence, a singular that eclipses all else. Claims should, therefore, be tempered by the understanding that the city is a polyglot that should remain as such, vibrant and open to the opportunities that differences allow.

Translation is a necessity in the polyglot city, because it is the attempt to engage with the other and be open to the possibilities that one may provide for the other. Ideally the process of translation should be a humane experience that promotes understanding between the multitudes that exist within the polyglot city. Ideally the languages should sit side-by-side and through a dialectic produce a Žižekian ‘short-circuit’, a new understanding, rupturing the boundaries of both the original and the translator’s languages. One should not try to deny the alterity of the original text by attempting to assimilate the original into familiar forms, denying the ‘otherness’, and thus being spared the positive, yet unsettling ‘short-circuit’. The ‘short-circuit’ of translation allows space for all to engage in the secular structure of the city, critiquing the primacy or sacredness of any particular text by entering it into multifarious hermeneutics. For, the city is a space of text, translation, and hermeneutics that should be open to all to engage in and with, because in the post-Babel *saeculum*, it is the engagement with differences rather than their overcoming that brings humanity closer.

In the *saeculum*, cities have a close relationship with culture, which is encountered on different levels depending on the particular expression of the term ‘culture’. As such, cities contain culture, are physical manifestations of culture, and are also contained within culture as a totality that is analogous to the *saeculum*. Therefore, the analysis of culture is vital to garnering an understanding of the city, and yet such analysis requires a structure of critique, otherwise risks being overwhelmed by the metacultural totality that can include all, exclude none, and subsequently be worthless as analysis. Kierkegaard’s existence spheres offer just

such a structure of critical hermeneutic that can be applied to city-life. The other-for-me of the first sphere, the aesthetical sphere, is violently destructive to the city because it denies the unique differences of others in aid of consuming them in the erotic instant. In the ethical sphere, there is self-reflexivity and an awareness of the individual needs of others, but still lacking is the self-possessed, critical distance that comes with Religiousness A. These three existence spheres can be used as a critical hermeneutic with which to self-reflexively engage with potentially destructive practices and to promote humane cities in the *saeculum*. The sphere of most critical importance, however, is Religiousness B - the sphere that extends beyond the temporal and the immanent. Religiousness B is, effectively, the messianic hermeneutical rupture that cannot be called forth by human endeavour and so remains as a constant critique that limits and challenges any particular cultural claims. Like the heteropolis - the idea of the city - Religiousness B is exteriority that limits and critiques, leaving the *saeculum* open to all through the relativisation of all claims.

Religiousness B should not be understood to be a distinctly Christian or culturally religious expression, but rather it should be imagined beyond any relation to actuality whatsoever. Read through Agamben's conception of the possibility of potentiality without any relation to being, Religiousness B is pure critique that even extends to the possibility of critiquing Religiousness B itself. The messianic possibility of Religiousness B, that is in fact *not* a possibility, promotes hope in the city through the inconsumable possibility of alterity. In the babble of the cosmopolitan city, silence, that which is between action and non-action, between response and no-response, also fulfils the messianic role, the maintenance of alterity. Silence does not bring the messianic closer, it merely recognises the potentiality for other to what is; this is a vital check for the city because it prevents hermeneutics from becoming endless and meaningless exchanges that ultimately claim transcendence in the interpretative act itself. Silence critiques individual cultural claims, and also, importantly, critiques the mediums of exchange and hermeneutical structures. For the city to be a positive and free city it must contend with the possibility of its negation, silence, and only then translation can continue in the understanding that all claims are relative when faced with the response that is neither a response nor not a response.

Cities are discontinuous, broken, polyglot structures that through internal plurality enact a disruptive violence on the inhabitants; as Lewis Mumford writes: “[c]ities exhibit the

phenomena of broken growth, of partial death, of self-regeneration.”³⁵⁹ Cities are reliant on the fracturing and regenerative violence in order to remain as cities, but this must be tempered by the alternative, the messianic, silence that denies the primacy of any particular violence. Mythical violence, as the link between law and violence that accumulates meaning in the violence it enacts, should be avoided. Therefore, meaning should not be attributed to the violence that one experiences or witnesses in the city. To find meaning is to potentially find justification for the violence or tie it to political ends, which dehumanises the tragedy, either by placing it into the sphere of the *homo sacer* who can be killed but not sacrificed, or worse, by finding meaning in the death, with the individual as a sacrifice - a death deemed necessary. As Žižek proposes, we should be like Job and find no meaning in the suffering we encounter, only then does violence attain its full, meaningless weight. Only when it is accepted that there is no reason for the suffering of humanity can the full tragedy of the world be approached appropriately. Living in the city faced with potentially tragic violence, it is language and translation that can lessen the frequency of negative violence and the associated alienating effects. As William Hamilton writes in reference to Ignazio Silone: [o]ur task, in the face of all the ignorance and confusion, is to do what the refugees in Silone’s picture do: tell one another the stories of our lives.”³⁶⁰ Silence sits at the limit of this exchange of translation, as the ultimate critique that offers no explanation and finds no meaning, and in doing so is potentially divine, ending the potential recycling of meaning-full violence.

Whilst finding no meaning in the city, the individual must enact a certain degree of violence on oneself. This is the violence of the internal exile, through which one cleaves themselves from their home and becomes open to the disjunctive experience of the city and the others that share in it. By self-reflexively undergoing the fracturing process of the internal exile, the individual mirrors the conditions of the city, the dialectics between the city-centre and the suburb, no-place and home, change and security. The fractured city-centre offers the chance of rapid change and reinvention, whereas a more stable milieu cannot; but this can be overwhelming and so it is necessary to strike a balance between the maintenance of and the potentially overwhelming violence that could manifest if it is left as singular. This is also the case for the individual, who must balance the alienating-yet-liberating fractured exilic existence with the need to maintain a grounded sense of ego and personal autonomy.

³⁵⁹ Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 294.

³⁶⁰ Hamilton, “On Doing Without Knowledge of God”, in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1 (January 1957), p. 42.

The dialectic of the city-centre and the suburb is vitally important because it prevents both facets from becoming universalisms and as such totalitarian. Suburbs have the potential to destroy the fabric of the city by creating exclusionary zones of preemptive violence, singular through separation. By imposing restrictive covenants or economic stratification, suburbs turn away from the possibilities of the city-centre, reconfiguring the suburban spaces as nihilistic playgrounds for the wealthy to use at their leisure, leaving those excluded exposed to the continued violence of the centre. The suburb and the city-centre must be linked in a dialectic of exchange that allows all inhabitants the comfort and hope that is possible. Tenements, ghettos, and estates also ruin the fabric of the city through the exclusion of those deemed undesirable, thereby reducing their possibilities. The hope, however, that these structures of exclusion retain is the lack of internal surveillance, thus allowing for the possibility of internal autonomy and avoiding the camp-structure of indistinguishable interiority and exteriority. In contrast, gated communities are zones of self-exclusion that attempt to maintain purity through rigorous internal surveillance, and as such are attempts to recreate Towers as expressions of purity, unified in their abandonment of translation, and timeless without alterity. This imposition of rigorous surveillance and discipline actualises a perverse camp-structure where exteriority and interiority indistinguishable, of which Giorgio Agamben writes: “[i]n the camps, city and house became indistinguishable”.³⁶¹ Gated communities ruin the dialectic of the city through self-exclusion, transmogrifying parts of the city into timeless and hopeless camps, silent in their abandonment of translation. Silence goes unnoticed in the gated community and alterity is excluded, leaving them structures without hope.

Gated communities and other exclusionary structures are attempts to turn the state of exception into a permanent reality, timeless zones where the maintenance of purity turns the inhabitants into *homo sacer*, able to be killed but not sacrificed. They are nihilistic in that they find no meaning outside of the maintenance of the security and purity of the indistinguishable zone. The stasis and surveillance denies the individual the chance to be autonomous, the essential opportunity to choose that allows the individual to act as the autistic outsider, in the liminal position of being included, yet able to choose to be excluded and thus to define the limits of their own inclusion and critique the limits of the group. From

³⁶¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 188.

the self-exilic position of the autistic outsider any attempts to rebuild Towers of Babel are able to be thwarted, allowing cities to continue as Babylons - pluralistic spaces of absence - forever incomplete, and thus hospitable to all in the time that remains.

Central to the city's provision for hospitality is public space, vital to the functioning of a vibrant, free and inclusionary city. Cities such as Las Vegas and Dubai with their capital intensive hypermodernity fail to provide adequate public space that is genuinely free and secular. Las Vegas, with its lack of public space and intensive hyperreal simulacras of other cultures, prevents genuine and free interaction. Dubai, with its hyper-capitalism coupled with Islamic law, must provide public space or risk becoming the equivalent of a theme park, a novelty attraction that is largely unliveable. All cities must ensure space is provided that is not just in the public domain, but is genuinely public, without surveillance, where one can be anonymous. Timothy Gorringer writes: “[w]e have many public spaces of course, but fewer and fewer with resonance for civic society, and those we have are increasingly threatened by municipal neglect and vandalism.”³⁶² It is the duty of city-planners and legislators to provide the space in which free interaction is possible, but it is the responsibility of the inhabitants to use that space, to ensure through presence in numbers the space is as safe as possible. To live in the city is to engage in translation in the public spaces where all may enter and interact. It is also here, in the public space, that silence - the action that is no action - will be noticed and the messianic can remain as a possibility that will not and cannot be called forth.

Hospitality is a key factor in the cosmopolitan space of the city that is pluralistic without problematic attempts to completely overcome difference. To be hospitable and to engage in hospitality, one extends a welcome and is welcoming even before the welcome is extended; for welcoming only when one is ready or has already offered a welcome is to offer no welcome at all, hospitality is absent. However, one must be careful not to be overwhelmed in the exchange of hospitality in the city, because to be open to the other and be ready to be hospitable, paradoxically, before one is ready, is a potentially violating experience. Hospitality should not, and cannot, be an obligation, because obligation only exists in the past and present, denying the ability to actually extend an offer. An individual must retain a sense of self, an ego that is not overwhelmed in the offer of hospitality; but in retaining this necessary autonomy one should not be so completely self-centred as to be unavailable to the

³⁶² Gorringer, p. 35.

other. Richard Sennett writes: “[i]n order to sense the Other, one must do the work of accepting oneself as incomplete.”³⁶³ Hospitality requires one to limit themselves, to realise their own incompleteness and in doing so, be open to the other and thus be drawn outside of endless cycle of self-definition in an *émigration extériure*. By engaging in the exchange as an autistic outsider, one can include the other, the neighbour, without becoming lost in an overly empathetic ignorance of alterity.

In the relationship between the self and the other, justice is an integral part, and as such is crucial to the functioning of a cosmopolitan city. As the performance of violence on-behalf-of the individual, justice ruptures, creating a liminal space from which alterity can be maintained. The sense of justice must not, however, be completely unburdened from the individual and should always originate from the autonomous decision-making of interiority. Others cannot summon responsibility from the self, as it is a self-reflexive and ethical process, they can only engage with it when it is offered. Justice is that which could or could not come after the ethical decision and is, therefore, a rupture: first of the ethical, decision-making self, and secondly, the rupture is extended into hospitality. Of course, justice is a violent process, both against the self as singular interiority and also against the other who may come under the jurisdiction of the decision. Violence against the other should not come before the application of justice, because without justice, violence is an attempt to remove the chasm of alterity, to negate otherness. Therefore, justice is the violence of the city that ruptures exclusionary power and prevents others from becoming homogenous *homo sacer*, able to be killed but not sacrificed. Through the application of justice, that is ultimately incomplete and subjective, alterity is restored and with it hope is maintained.

Living in a humane, cosmopolitan city, and engaging with it in the capacities of hospitality and justice, the individual must find no transcendent meaning in the suffering of others. The pain, distress, and indignity of the city must be secularised so that, whether it occurs in the self or the other, it is never justified or privileged. With so many inhabitants living in close proximity, suffering will invariably enter the public sphere, where it must be found to have no meaning and not become an icon that hints at anything beyond the suffering itself. Transcendence must be a private expression, ineffable, that cannot be extended to cover the other with whom one shares the space of the city. Attributing meaning to the suffering of the

³⁶³ Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, p. 148.

other is ultimately an effort to overcome alterity, to make the suffering understandable and less traumatic for the self: the primary aim of this is to decrease the suffering in the self. In the fragmentary space of the city, the individual should act as the autistic outsider: included, reaching out to the other, but ultimately aware that he/she cannot share in the suffering; and so one must extend hospitality and enter into an economy of justice. It is through this approach that the city can continue as secular, cosmopolitan, fragmentary, and ultimately open to the positive and hopeful possibilities that continue to draw humanity into the city, to build, to interact, and to enjoy.

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