In the creation and social use of thresholds a potential spatiality of emancipation emerges. Social struggles and movements are exposed to the formative potentialities of thresholds.

Fragments of a different life, experienced during the struggle, take form in spaces and times with threshold characteristics. When people collectively realize that their actions are becoming different from their usual collective habits, then comparison becomes liberating.

But these thresholds, these heterotopias, are bound to the inconsistencies and twisting ways of social change. In them, the radical otherness of human emancipation is confronted, approached and explored.

Can the city of thresholds become the spatial equivalent of an emancipating project based on the negotiation between different but open identities in the process of collectively inventing the future?

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Towards the City of Thresholds

Stavros Stavrides
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of a city of thresholds has been at the center of my research and active involvement with urban movements for many years. Sometimes as an inspiring image, sometimes as a promising concept, this idea has sustained a probably ambiguous, always precarious and undoubtedly unfinished effort to think about the emancipatory potential of existing, emergent or possible spaces.

This book is created with the aim of exposing the most important facets of a theoretical argument in the making. Most of it consists of extensively reworked or revised papers, presentations and book chapters already published in Greek, which, I hope, may represent the argument’s development along with the theoretical horizons defining the context of the concepts in use.

Chapter 1 contains parts of a paper presented in English at the Seminars of the Aegean (Organized by NTUA, AUTH and Harokopio University at Naxos, 2003). A reworked version was published in Greek as part of the book Suspended Spaces of Alterity (Athens: Alexandreia, 2010). For the present publication the text has been further developed.


Chapter 4 contains parts of a paper presented at the Living in a Material World Conference (Brighton 2001) and published in the short-lived e-journal Journal of Psychogeography and Urban Research (unfortunately no longer accessible).

Chapter 5 is a revised and developed version of a chapter of my book From the City-screen to the City stage (published in Greek, 2002, Athens: Ellinika Grammata; chapter’s title: ‘Distance as a condition and means of approach’).

Chapter 6 is based on a paper published in Greek in Utopia, 72/2006 as ‘The space of order and heterotopias: Foucault as a geographer of otherness.’

Chapter 7 is a developed version of a chapter of my book Suspended Spaces of Alterity (see above), originally titled ‘Following the traces of a heterotopias: In Zapatista Chiapas.’

Chapter 8 is based on ideas developed during a presentation at an RC21/International Sociological Association Conference (Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2009). Presentation’s title was ‘The December 2008 Youth Uprising in Athens: Glimpses of a Possible City.
of Thresholds’ (a version of this chapter can also be found in the e-journal *Spatial Justice/Justice spatiale* no. 2, online: [http://jssj.org/06.php](http://jssj.org/06.php)).

The book’s main ideas were and are still being tested in both academic and activist environments. I owe a lot to my students in the postgraduate course *Experience, representation and meaning of space* which I have been organizing for the last 8 years. Their remarks and criticism have always been inspiring.

A lot of people have also contributed to the city of thresholds idea by commenting on lectures given in the context of specific urban movement initiatives in various Athenian neighborhoods.

I believe that my research was strongly influenced by my participation in the interdisciplinary group on Critical Research Methodology in Athens, which combines engaged social criticism with a truly collaborative and beyond academic formalities dialogue on social science methods.

Sotiris Dimitriou, Demetres Karydas, Maria Kopanari and Fereniki Vatavali will undoubtedly find traces of our discussions in this book. John Holloway, who has always been so encouraging, Karen Franck, Quentin Stevens, Andrew Wernick, Eftichis Bitsakis, Costas Gavroglou, Sabine Horlitz, Oliver Clemens, Jenny Robinson, the late Annie Vrychea and Andrea Mubi Brighenti have in different times and places expressed stimulating opinions and offered helpful suggestions concerning the ideas elaborated in the book’s chapters.

Andrea Mubi Brighenti has also generously and consistently supported this publication from the very beginning, meticulously and creatively commenting on the final draft.

Anna Holloway has translated the texts on which chapters 5, 6 and 7 are based.

Special thanks to Alexandria Editions for granting permission to use material from the published book *Suspended Spaces of Alterity*.

Evgenia Michalopoulou has always been inspiring in her caring criticism and in her insistence on the power of collective dreams. She and Zoe Stavrides-Michalogiopoulou had once more to face the alternating disappointments and enthusiasms which always accompany my attempts to think and write. I really appreciate their patience and their unlimited support. I cannot promise them, I am afraid, that it will be easier next time…

*Picture credits.* Unless specified, all pictures were taken by the author. Special thanks to John Davis, Babis Louizidis, Stamati Papadimitrou and Ioannis Papagiannakis for allowing reproduction of their works.
While attempting to consider the role space has in the potential emancipating transformation of society, radical thinking and action tend to take for granted that space contains, delimits and thus identifies social life. Spaces of emancipation are mostly envisaged either as freed strongholds to be defended or as enclaves of otherness in an urban spatial order. It is important however to think of space not as a container of society but as a formative element of social practices. Imagining a different future, means, therefore, trying to experience and conceptualize spatialities that may help create different social relations.

People not only experience space but also think through space and imagine through space. Space, thus, not only gives form to the existing social world (experienced and understood as a meaningful life-condition), but also to possible social worlds, to worlds that may inspire action and express collective dreams.

Seeking to explore, then, the ways in which space is potentially connected to the process of emancipation we cannot be satisfied with the discovery of alleged ‘spaces of emancipation’. If emancipation is a process, it has to generate dynamic transformations and not simply institute defined areas of freedom. Spatial characteristics rather than concrete spaces can possibly become the focus of such an exploration. It is exactly at this level that the idea of threshold emerges as a concept which captures the spatial dynamics of emancipation. As will be shown, threshold areas mark changes, indicate comparisons, regulate and give meaning to the act of crossing as an act which produces changes.

This book’s main argument is that in the creation and social use of thresholds a potential spatiality of emancipation emerges. Social struggles and movements are exposed to the formative potentialities of thresholds. Fragments of a different life, experienced during the struggle, take form in spaces and times with threshold characteristics. When people collectively realize that their actions are becoming different from their usual collective habits, then comparison becomes liberating.

Struggles implicitly or explicitly aiming at changes in common life do not only create temporary enclaves of otherness. Otherness is often experienced as the inhabiting of in-between spaces and times. In a self organizing neighborhood these spaces and times are created in assemblies, demonstrations or common meals. In a rebellious Zapatista municipality, thresholds become the means to invent the future now, as new forms of collective self-determination create ambiguous forms of
coexistence in space.

To be able to approach otherness in its potentially liberating comparison to dominant regulating values, means to be able to invent passages towards otherness. It also means to be able to understand otherness as a process rather than as a state. One can speak of an important art that the emancipating movements need to investigate, an ‘art of doing’ that helps people understand, discover, create and appreciate otherness.

It is in their everyday encounters with otherness that people develop an art of negotiation based on the creation of in-between spaces, i.e. thresholds. And it is this art that is being collectively practiced to its maximum potentiality in the periods of liberating change.

We can think of the city of thresholds as the always emergent work of such a collective art when combined with efforts to create a liberating future. An emancipated ‘public culture’ will hopefully create out of these thresholds towards otherness bonds of solidarity and new forms of common life.

**Beyond borders**

Many thinkers seem to describe the imposition of boundaries in human settlements as a natural phenomenon. Some of them, observing animals in the process of defining their territory, suggest that a kind of natural will imposes marks on nature as boundaries of an area where a single being or group reigns supreme. Territoriality then is supposed to be a natural need arising from the urge to survive while fighting against enemies or rivals.

It is true, indeed, that the demarcation of an area goes hand in hand with its description as a potential site of fighting. The act of marking out an area seems to be an attempt to ward off a fight but at the same time necessarily constitutes a declaration of war.

However, humans creating settlements do not only define boundaries in order to secure inside them a community which senses the hostility of the surrounding environment. Boundaries are created also to be crossed. And an often complicated set of ritual acts, symbolic gestures and movements accompanies the crossing of boundaries. Invasion is only one among many other possible ways to cross the borders. So we could agree with Georg Simmel that man is not only ‘a bordering creature’ but also the ‘creature who has no border’ (Simmel 1997a:69).

The creation of an enclosure contains, in Simmel’s words, the “possibility at any moment of stepping out of this limitation into freedom” (*ibid*). If the bridge and the door exemplify as material structures this ability to separate and connect at the same time – since “the human being is the connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating” (*ibid.*) – then we must start to understand bordering as an act that contains many possible meanings. Not only the declaration of war on otherness but also the possibility of crossing the bridge towards otherness. Not only hostility but also, perhaps, negotiation.

An exile, feeling always away from home, would probably describe a quite revealing border consciousness. Hear an activist who was forced to leave South Africa:
Indeed, the experiences and products of exile could be a dissolvent of border consciousness. It could be a way of reconnoitering, shifting and extending the limits. (Breytenbach 1993:76)

An exile understands that borders possess the power to cut people away from the places that define them, their history, their identity. But while away and not permitted to come back, the exile realizes that identity is not a totally circumscribed area marked by a permanently identified structure of characteristics.

Identity constructed in exile is assimilating new experiences, discovering new criteria, checking new targets. Identity thus becomes not an area defined by a boundary, but – to use a Bakhtinian term – it assumes a *chronotopic* quality. Identity in exile is open to otherness, it is forced to face otherness.

Of course an opposite experience is also possible: in a foreign land, an exile may attempt to seal off his or her identity. This attitude will surely erect walls, freezing identity in an imagined state of unpolluted innocence. Travelling mentally towards his imagined homeland, an exile is always absent, creating around himself boundaries even more rigid than those he has escaped or has been ostracised from. And fighting to preserve this small imaginary enclave of sameness from imaginary or real invasions, an exile may thus actually strengthen the idea of borders as a site of clashing forces: forces that at the same time define and exclude.

What is it that the experience of an exile could reveal concerning border consciousness? Mainly that social identity is constructed through a process that is radically influenced by the reality of relations defining what could be called “the borderline of identity”. This borderline, as in the case of spatial frontiers, can be permeable or extremely controlled, can be a limit or a starting point, a place to be and to communicate or the entrance to a no man’s land extending between two opposing worlds that do not share common points, even when they are in contact. Identities can be described as corresponding to defined areas and the status of this definition through the use of differing borders actually constructs the character of identity. A fixed and unambiguous identity is a closed identity, an identity with rigid borders. An open identity is mainly not one that has no borders but one that is enclosed in flexible borders offering meeting points with otherness. This kind of identity could, as we shall see, be described as possessing a threshold quality. And actual spatiotemporal thresholds would be the places where identities may open in acts of negotiating encounters with otherness.

Such a line of thought would give a new meaning to the words of a very well known theoretician of modern geography, David Harvey: “The relations between ‘self’ and ‘other’ from which a certain kind of cognition of social affairs emanates is always … a spatiotemporal construction” (Harvey 1996:264). Indeed: not only because identities are understood as circumscribed areas defined by the quality and the specific place of their borders but also because very concrete space and time relations make identities visible and materially effective. That is why the identity of persons or peoples can be forced to change through changes imposed on their spatiotemporal awareness.
Thresholds as social artifacts

As social constructions, the different ways of defining and controlling space not only mirror different social relations and values but actually shape them, participating in the construction of concrete, socially meaningful experiences. Identities then are not only sets of beliefs or ideas but are actually embedded in the social environment influencing different practices and different ways of life, producing therefore material results. Studying the logic of different spatial arrangements as characteristic of specific societies one can discover not only the uses and meanings of space but also the logic of creating and sustaining different social identities.

Pierre Bourdieu has observed that in societies lacking “the symbolic product-conserving techniques associated with literacy” these social dispositions “are inculcated through an interaction of inhabited space with the bodies of societies’ new members” (Bourdieu 1977:89). Space then becomes a kind of “educating system” that creates what we have so far been referring to as social identities. But, it is important to realize that such identities are the product of a socially regulated network of practices that, secreting their logic, actually weaving again and again distinct characteristics.

So, when Bourdieu studies the Kabyle house, he does not study it as the material index of social symbols but as the sum of the possible practices that produce a world of values and meaning. The Kabyle house then is a series of spatiotemporal conditions that acquire their social status when they define the meaningful movement of social bodies. The house endlessly teaches the body and is erected again and again as a universe of values by embodied performances.

To prove this double relation of the body with inhabited space in the creation of space’s symbolic attributes, Bourdieu chooses to observe the symbolic function of the house’s main door. The threshold is the point where two different worlds meet. The inside, a complete world belonging to a distinct family, and the outside, a public world where the fields, the pastures and the common buildings of the community lie. These two worlds are not only symmetrically different, opposing each other as woman to man or darkness to light, but actually meet in order to “fertilize” each other. The important fact is that the threshold acquires its meaning as a point of both contact and separation through the practices that cross it. These practices actually create the threshold as meaningful spatiotemporal experience, depending on who crosses it, under what conditions and in which direction. Men cross the threshold of the main door only to leave the house, to go to the fields where they belong, facing the light of daybreak as the door faces east. Women cross the main door only to enter the house facing the wall opposite the main door called the wall of light. Both men and women perform their acts “in accordance with the beneficent orientation, that is from west to east”. And this is possible because, as Bourdieu demonstrates, the threshold establishes a symbolic change of the orientation of the house, that is a change in its relation to the outer space. The threshold then “is the site of a meeting of contraries as well as of a logical inversion and … as the necessary meeting-point and crossing point between the two spaces, defined in terms of socially qualified body movements, it is the place where the world is reversed” (Bourdieu 1992:281-282).

As in the case of the Kabyle house, the spatiotemporal experience of the thresh-
old is produced by this potential of communication between two different opposing worlds. Existing only to be crossed, actually or virtually, the threshold is not a defining border that keeps out a hostile otherness, but a complicated social artifact that produces, through differently defined acts of crossing, different relations between sameness and otherness. If inside and outside communicate and mutually define each other, then the threshold can be considered as a mediating zone of varying size that exists in-between.

The anthropologist Victor Turner, following Arnold Van Gennep, has described these in-between lands as possessing the status of **liminality** (from the Latin word *limen* = ‘threshold’). The condition of liminality is characterised by the construction of transitory identities. In Turner’s words, “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (Turner 1977:95).

Every passage creates the conditions of a threshold experience which is essentially the suspension of a previous identity and the preparation for a new one. Passing through a threshold is an explicitly or implicitly symbolic act. It is, therefore, also a gesture towards otherness: not only spatial otherness, as in the case of emerging from a house into the outside world, but also temporal otherness, as in departing from the present for a more or less unknown future.

“Rites of passage”, as Van Gennep has named them, accompany the passing of initiands from one social identity to another, and most of the times are connected with an actual, ritually executed, crossing of spatial thresholds (Van Gennep 1960:26). If then this act of venturing towards otherness is performed in and through thresholds, couldn’t we assume that thresholds are the place of negotiation with otherness? Thresholds can be the systematic scheme through which societies symbolically construct this experience of negotiation and, at the same time, the material artifacts which allow this negotiation to take place. Thresholds could offer the schematic and at the same time realistic description of encountering and negotiation areas created between permeable and evolving identities.

**Approaching otherness**

Approaching otherness is a difficult act. In all societies, such an act is represented as full of symbolic and material dangers. But approaching otherness is also a constitutive act of every social encounter. And every society or social group would appear to be characterised by the ways it controls and formalizes these acts of encounter. If the encounter is considered only as the necessary step to verify and deploy hostility between groups of people, then the act of crossing borders will be only an act of symbolic or actual war. This form of encounter characterizes communities that describe everything outside them as potentially hostile. It is not by chance that these communities build shelters protected by material or symbolic walls with drawbridges that are drawn most of the time. Contemporary gated communities are an obvious example of such an attitude.

If, however, the encounter is part of an effort to embrace otherness without an intermediary phase of mutual recognition and negotiation gestures, we may end up with a virtual extinction or assimilation of otherness. In contemporary consumer culture everybody is forced to be on the move, chasing ever new products, ever
new sensations. As Zygmunt Bauman points out: “Consumers are first and foremost gatherers of sensations” (1998:83). What appears then as a new desirable sensation is a kind of fabricated figure of otherness. Fabricated by the media, by the advertising images, by the continuous, consumer oriented, education of the senses. Towards such an otherness, the citizen-consumer is all too eager to cross the borders. And with a similar attitude, guided by desire-propelling exoticism, the consumer assimilates otherness while touring in a foreign land, only to add new sensation-trophies.

In order to approach otherness in an act of mutual awareness, one needs to carefully dwell on the threshold. In this transitory territory that belongs to neither of the neighbouring parts, one understands that it is necessary to feel the distance so as to be able to erect the bridge. Hostility arises from the preservation and increase of this distance while assimilation results from the obliteration of distance. Encounter is realised by keeping the necessary distance while crossing it at the same time. The wisdom hidden in the threshold experience lies in the awareness that otherness can only be approached by opening the borders of identity, forming – so to speak – intermediary zones of doubt, ambivalence, hybridity, zones of negotiable values. As Richard Sennett remarks: “In order to sense the Other, one must do the work of accepting oneself as incomplete” (1993:148).

These zones may require gestures that are not performed as indices of identity characteristics but mainly as acts of approaching. Therefore, the gestures will have an equally hybrid status, describing an intermediary identity offered as meeting place. This intermediary identity is perhaps what results from the “subjunctive mood” that Turner connects with liminality (Turner, 1982: 84). Intermediary identities are performed only to test the other’s will of contact. They are performed not to hide or to deceive but to offer ways to depart from a fenced-in self towards a self constructed through the encounter.

Sennett describes civility as the “treating [of] others as though they were strangers and forging a social bond upon that social distance” (1977: 264). If we understand civility as part of an art of building thresholds between people or social groups, then we can agree with Sennett and his defence of a new public culture. This culture would be characterized by this continuous effort to preserve otherness and to create in-between areas of negotiation. And a curious, difficult to define, theatricality seems to be performed in such gestures of reconnaissance and mutual approach. A theatricality in the Brechtian sense seems to dwell in thresholds: one does not only depart from himself to be somebody else, one actually shows this temporary transformation as a gesture – a Gestus, in Brecht’s vocabulary – of seeking to understand what is other than him or herself. Theatricality will thus be the common element in the behaviour of both liminal actors during rites of passage and contemporary strangers groping their way towards each other through a modern version of civility. The human ability to become other is at the foundation of such an experience of a “subjunctive mood”. This socially constructed ability helps people to meet others without forcing them into precast identities. Being able to become other, even if one returns again to one’s former self, is being able to accept otherness and, potentially, being in a position to construct a relationship with the other as other. Isn’t imagination after all this curious staging of reality that creates thoughts and feelings out of non-existent happenings, actually performed in the mind? And isn’t this an
exploratory encounter with otherness in its purest form?

**An emancipating spatiality?**

This book is divided in three parts which are supposed to correspond to three interconnected areas of research concerning the threshold spatialities of emancipatory processes. The first part is organized around the idea that contemporary urban space is discontinuous: to understand spatiotemporal experiences we have to work with concepts which may capture this inherent discontinuity. Chapter one explains how, in this context, rhythm and exception are appropriate terms if we aim at finding not only the characteristics but also the potentialities of the dominant urban model, that of a “city of enclaves”.

What the second chapter of this part reveals is that both rhythm and exception are not only the means to establish a dominant spatial order but also forms through which spatialities of resistance are created. Focusing on the experiences of the aftermath, exile and immigration, this chapter explores spatiotemporal discontinuity as a possible ground of encounter with otherness. Otherness, understood as a relative term rather than as an essence, is actually the result of a distinguishing comparison, which is shown to prosper in periods in which collective habits are destroyed or suspended.

The second part problematizes the ways in which an encounter with otherness can take place in the context of urban experience. Making use of Walter Benjamin’s unfinished study of 19th century Paris, the opening chapter attempts to understand the metropolitan experience as inherently dynamic and ambiguous, containing both nightmarish elements and liberating potentialities. Through an antithetical description of the bourgeois “private individual” and the “flaneur”, two distinctive attitudes towards public and private space are exposed. Both attitudes are equally compared in terms of their dependence on the manipulation of individualizing traces in metropolitan life as well as their participation in the creation of (private or public) ‘auratic’ urban phantasmagorias. A precarious “study of thresholds” is evoked, considered as a knowledge constructed through the ambiguous experience of the flaneur-as-allegorist. This study can possibly explore the dynamics of urban experience by pointing to the revealing trace-aura dialectics that permits the surfacing of a third, in-between element, the threshold. A “city of thresholds” can thus possibly describe the perspective of a “redeemed” urban modernity.

Taking walking as a practice which exposes someone to the experience of otherness in the city, the next short chapter further explores the spatiality of threshold. Porosity as a spatial quality and passages as spatial artifacts are the terms introduced in order to focus on the act of crossing which essentially creates thresholds and activates threshold potentialities.

What follows is a chapter on one of the crucial points of the book’s main argument: thresholds mark processes of transformations of social identity. Anthropology is the discipline that has theorized the difficult relationship between self and other as a culturally determined relationship. Approaching otherness (cultural as well as historical) is a crucial problem in social sciences. In this chapter, approaching otherness is shown to be equally a crucial problem in the tactics of habitation. Distance, the appropriate distance of encounter, is necessary for differences to persist without
being a block to negotiation and mutual understanding. The ability to recognize the appropriate distances in space and time critically influences the theatricality of social interaction. This ability is actually acquired and improved in the varying conditions of threshold creation. The in-between space of thresholds is thus explored in this chapter as a potential stage in which encountering otherness means visiting otherness, rehearsing, testing and exploring otherness.

The third part of the book tries to bring together the findings of the two former parts in an effort to reveal the importance the term threshold has in the understanding of the spatial aspects of emancipating practices. Reformulating Foucault’s definitions of heterotopia, we can consider as heterotopic all those spatial experiences that “rehearse” a future of human emancipation. Hence, the first chapter of the third part focuses on the threshold character of heterotopia. Beyond and against the city of enclaves, heterotopic spaces mark thresholds in space and time where dominant order and control are questioned.

Testing the idea of heterotopias, understood as thresholds towards radical otherness, the two remaining chapters analyze two exemplary cases: the actions and words of the Zapatista rebellion, and the practices of the December 2008 youth uprising in Athens. In both cases it is shown that multiple and ambiguous collective experiences have produced their heterotopic spaces inside and beyond dominant capitalist spaces. As in both cases collective identities were put into crisis, heterotopic experiences were indeed connected with transformations and identity comparisons characteristic of threshold theatricality. Can we thus speak of glimpses of a potential city of thresholds?

It is possible to describe the social experimentations that take place in heterotopias as essentially constructing the temporary thresholds that lead into the future as otherness. But these thresholds, these heterotopias, are bound to the inconsistencies and twisting ways of social change. In them, the radical otherness of human emancipation is confronted, approached and explored. Think of the Paris Commune of 1871, think of the settlements of the pobladores squatters in the Chile of Unidad Popular, think of the Lacandona jungle as a Zapatista heterotopia, or, perhaps, think of the streets of Seattle, Genova or Athens at the time of huge dissident demonstrations. All of them temporary thresholds, all of them heterotopic gestures towards an emancipating otherness. Can indeed the city of thresholds become the spatial equivalent of an emancipating project based on the negotiation between different but open identities in the process of collectively inventing the future?
PART I
CHAPTER 1
Exemplary metropolitan rhythms and the city of enclaves

**Rhythms, social practices and public space**

The idea that city-space not simply contains or supports social life but also expresses those social values that are necessary for social reproduction is well formulated and documented in the social sciences. It seems that this idea is already part of various forms of social knowledge, as well as forms of knowledge oriented towards specific practices, such as, for example, the knowledge of real estate vendors, municipal technocrats, advertising experts and, of course, politicians. However, from this knowledge, we can draw questions and findings that can be used for a different (or perhaps complementary) research perspective: are there ways in which the city space can express and support practices and values that are different or even opposite to the dominant ones? Is space actually formed not only by forces of reproduction but also by forces and acts of resistance or cultural differentiation? Can we possibly speak of spatialities in which social reproduction fails, spatialities moulding alternative cultural values, spatialities in which new hybrid forms of public culture emerge? To be able to search for such different spatialities, to be able to locate practices which appear to secrete, express and use such spatiotemporal conditions, we need to explore city space by locating its dominant characteristics but also its points of rupture, where those characteristics are disputed, suspended or reversed. From this perspective, the discussion on the contemporary crisis of public space may offer a useful starting point. Probably, what is at stake here is not simply the actual or potential use of existing physical configurations but the ways in which space is created through inhabiting practices and shared forms of projection (e.g., collective memories or dreams).

We can understand public space as a coordinated system of spatial distinctions that correspond to crucial social distinctions (cf. Bourdieu 2000:134). But, can we effectively understand social relations and how they are politically mediated without actually observing how public space is constantly produced and interpreted by social actors as the experience of public life unfolds? In that case, we would need concepts that capture the ways in which public space is “performed” in everyday practices, concepts that can reveal changes not only in spatial forms but, principally, in spatial practices. And those concepts must undoubtedly be suitable for capturing transformations in the public character of public space that leave no observable or
permanent marks. How can we conceptualize temporary constructions, such as for instance the “red zones”, that are created in exceptional circumstances only to be removed shortly afterwards? Don't these spatial markers affect public space even when they seem to be absent? How can we discern their possible or actual mutations?

In order to answer this kind of questions, we need to be able to integrate time into public space, not simply the empty time of clocks but the socially meaningful time of performed practices. Red zones, which can serve as a crucial example of the ongoing transformation of metropolitan public space, can thus be conceptualized as constructions of a characteristically new social space-time. Red zones are actually performed; and through their performance, it will be argued, a new model of citizenship and governance is being enacted.

**The logic of red zones**

When Pierre Bourdieu insists that there is a distinct and distinctive “logic of practice” which is different from the logic we employ to interpret practice, he stresses the inherent temporality of every meaningful social action (Bourdieu 1977). Revealing the “fallacies of the rule” that tend to reduce practices to cause and effect relations, he shows how practices make use of time intervals in order to take advantage of varying circumstances (ibid. 6). Thus, practices, as series of interrelated acts, are defined by their tempo, by the way they unfold in time, by the ways they employ and simultaneously reproduce socially meaningful distances in time. Anthropologically, “making use of time” means understanding how rhythms of practices ensure a strengthening of human social relationships and how individual or collective performances can be based on differentiating variations of dominant rhythms. The return of a gift, for example, establishes a variable rhythm of reciprocity that can affect contestable power relations. Ritual acts can in general be considered as communal manipulations of social rhythms, despite the fact that these acts often appear focused on natural rhythms.

Rhythm seems to be a promising concept in an effort to connect a theory of practice as meaningful performance with the experience of time and space. Metropolitan experience can thus be understood as the result of differentiated practices of habitation performed in distinctive rhythms. We can indeed borrow from Henri Lefebvre’s loosely constructed project of “rhythmanalysis” this defining statement: “Every rhythm implies a relation of a time with a space, a localized time, or if one wishes, a temporalized place” (Lefebvre 1996:230).

Using the concept of rhythm we can understand the characteristic qualities of public space as being created through recurrent social practices. These qualities are perceived by social agents and become involved in their acts only insofar as they can integrate them in the rhythms of social life. Can we understand a marketplace without the everyday rhythms that define it in different times of the day? Can we understand places in which collective decisions are being taken (ancient agoras, post-1789 National Assemblies, modern forums, etc.) without knowing the rhythms of the assemblies, the connection of these rhythms with production rhythms, the interdependency of those rhythms with rhythms of combining rituals and so on?

Space is thus defined, or rather comes into being, as a socially meaningful arti-
in the process of being “temporalized” through inhabitation rhythms. Space is recognized as familiar, or becomes appropriated because occurring incidents can be understood as similar to those that have already taken place there before. Rhythmicity is a way of understanding the present and the future as being punctuated by defining repetitions.

If we follow Lefebvre, we can distinguish between two forms of repetition that define two major types of rhythm. “Cyclical rhythms” have in general cosmic origins. They can be considered as ways through which recurrent natural phenomena are being conceived as obeying laws of rhythmic repetition. These laws make them predictable and therefore socially usable. Cyclical rhythms have “a determined frequency or period” (Lefebvre 1996:231). There is a tendency to identify these rhythms with traditional societies where social life is organized and understood as repeating itself. In this case, social rhythms follow closely the rhythms of seasons and the corresponding productive duties. In his famous distinction between cold and hot societies, the former lacking the idea of history and therefore enclosed in a constantly self-repeating universe, Lévi-Strauss considers rituals as “a machine for the destruction of time”. Alfred Gell is perhaps more accurate in noting that in such societies “it is not time that is destroyed, but its effects” (Gell 2001:27). Cyclical rhythms, as social artifacts, use the experience of time in a way that coincides with the image a certain society has of itself. It is not that the inhabitants of cyclical-rhythms societies do not pay attention to the passage of time and its effects. Rather, what they do is give a specific social meaning to this passage of time by connecting it with the recurrence of social acts necessary for a specific form of social reproduction.

“Linear rhythms”, according to Lefebvre, are “defined by consecutiveness and the reproduction of the same phenomena, identical or almost at more or less close intervals” (Lefebvre 1996:231). In other words, “the linear is routine” (ibid. 222). Regulated work rhythms (mechanical as in hammer blows or bodily, as in rowing) appear as linear rhythms that can be extended infinitely. In modern societies a concept of time essentially connected with historical conscience can be attributed to a linear conception of time. This time is “empty” and “homogeneous” (Benjamin 1992:252) because what defines it is the linear rhythmicity through which time is measured. In this case, everyday experience of time regulated by clocks and routinized in measured, repeated acts, can only have quantitative differences from the time of history. Within this framework, commentators can speak of an alleged “tempo of history” speeding up.

Routine is obviously a form of predictability. In modern societies though, the myth of novelty is offered as a substitute to the experience of routines. Rhythmicity is banished as restraining and anonymous, whereas originality appears as the true mark of identity. Yet, imposed working and living routines are methodically regulated. Imposed order in time as well as in space is only half-concealed behind a well-calculated randomness. In its prototypical form, this condition is exemplified in the structure of the advertising message: You are urged to buy something which you know is produced in massive numbers, by being convinced that it was created “especially for you” (your identity is supposedly verified, created through this act of buying).
The partitioned city and the “framing” of identities

In the much-heralded “postmodern” metropolis, public space appears as the site of a phantasmagoria of freedom. Chaos and randomness, as opposed to the supposedly modernist quest for universal order, are elevated to key positive characteristics of an emerging urban environment. The apotheosis of privatization and the consumer ideologies of individualistic hedonism that accompany it, transform the practices that used to “perform” public spaces into practices of self gratification. Those practices tend to represent the city as a collection of chances (and places) for consumer satisfaction. Nevertheless, as Peter Marcuse among others has showed, the “postmodern condition” goes along with a new “partitioned city”. Urban chaos goes along with a fragmentation of the city that is far from random (Marcuse 1995:244). The modern metropolis is increasingly becoming a conglomerate of differently defined enclaves. In some cases, walls literally separate these enclaves from the rest of the city, as in the case of large department stores and gated communities. Walls can also be of “pride and status of rule and prejudice” (ibid. 249), as in the invisible walls defining ghettos, suburban neighbourhoods and gentrified recreation areas.

One of the basic attributes of the “partitioned city” is that it destroys what appears to constitute the public character of public space. Public space, as created by the practices that inhabit it, “is always contestable, precisely because whereas there are criteria that control admission to its purview, the right to enact and enforce those criteria is always in question” (Hénaff and Strong 2001:4).

The partitioned city is full of privatized public spaces in which public use is carefully controlled and specifically motivated. No contestation is tolerated there. Users of these spaces must often be checked and categorized, they must follow specific instructions in order to be allowed access to various services and facilities. A shopping mall or a large department store, for instance, contains such quasi-public spaces. A company-owned town or an enclosed community, separated from the network of public spaces that surround them (streets, squares, forests, etc.), controls local space by limiting its use to certified residents. Holiday resorts often exhibit former traditional public spaces in theme parks featuring rural or village communities. Public life is reduced to a conspicuous consumption of fantasized identities in a sealed-off enclave that mimicks a “holiday city”. What defines those spaces as sites of “public life” is not the clashing rhythms of contesting practices (that actually create the political) but the regulated rhythms of routines under surveillance. The publicly exhibited identities of the users are enacted in accordance with those rhythms that discriminate and canonize them.

Social identities are performed in this quasi-public space of the partitioned city. Different categories of people are allowed to enter the various enclaves and the fact that they are allowed to be there is already one crucial indicator of their identity. Residential enclaves can define recognizable urban identities, especially when inner or outer forces homogenize the residents producing visible distinctive characteris-

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1 Loic Wacquant’s concept of “advanced marginality” attempts to understand contemporary ghettos as “isolated and bounded territories increasingly perceived by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, leprous badlands at the heart of the postindustrial metropolis” (Wacquant 2008: 237).
Pict. 1. Paraisopolis, São Paulo – Adjacent enclaves of the rich and the poor.
tics. In this respect the suburban areas of American cities, the shantytowns of Africa, Latin America or Asia, the gentrified residential areas of different European cities, and the immigrant ghettos all over the world equally attribute visible urban identities. Public space in these areas is eventually separated from the rest of the city and its use is essentially restricted to the members of the corresponding community of residents. Gated neighborhoods and impenetrable favelas obviously take separation to the limit.2

Identities are both spatially and conceptually framed. A frame is spatially characterized by the clear demarcation of a contained space versus an outer space: what lies outside the frame does not contribute to the definition of the inside. Our experience of pictures, both in modern news coverage and advertising images, strengthens this socially inculcated intuition. A frame defines a situation, a subject, and eventually specifies information, attributing to it the status of a meaningful message. Framed messages are not connected to each other. Advertising messages float all around us on top of buildings, in magazines or even on human bodies. News photographs also appear next to each other in a temporal or spatial juxtaposition that produces the image of a fragmented – or should we say partitioned – world. Framed identities therefore correspond to the experience of a partitioned urban space where residential enclaves appear to be or rather are fantasized as completely independent of their surrounding public space.

Contemporary metropolis, however, presents itself to its inhabitants as more a network of flows than a structure of places. As Castells has shown, the “space of flows” constitutes the dominant structure of distribution of function and power in contemporary society (Castells 1996:428). “The new dominant ideology”, Castells explains, insists on “the end of history and the supersession of places in the space of flows” (ibid. 419). There still exist however, albeit ideologically dominated, experiences and practices of places as identity supporting spatialities. Besides describing a life divided between parallel universes (space of flows versus space of places), Castells is careful in describing an essential link between the mobility of managerial elites and their need to inhabit secluded enclaves “establishing the ‘in’ and ‘out’ boundaries of their cultural political community” (ibid. 416).

The experience of urban enclaves appears only as an extreme exception in a city where movement prevails over localized inhabitation routines. But, is this really so? First of all we must distinguish between those for whom movement is a privilege and those for whom movement is an obligation (Bauman 1998). We must also distinguish between different kinds of movement defining in each case the horizon that limits them. Is it inside an enclave, traversing the city, connecting house with work, connecting posts of status around the world (as in the case of travelling managers or academics) etc.? (cf. Castells 1996:417) What seems to be even more important, is to observe how each potential or actual movement influences the formation of different urban identities. Not all of these identities become temporary because somebody is on the move. Rather, some of them are strengthened when

2 For Teresa Caldeira, contemporary São Paulo, one of the most segregated great cities in the world, is characterized by “a new pattern of urban segregation”, “the fortified enclaves, which are privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work” (Caldeira 2008:65).
they are performed while moving from one place to another. The identity of a successful businessman or of an international politician obviously belong to this kind. In this case, a spatial frame is also a defining structure. Even though these identities are not circumscribed by the enclosed space on which they are performed, actually a series of well-defined enclaves constitutes the urban space of various cities where businessmen and politicians are expected to be found. This series of enclaves (corporate buildings, selected restaurants, lobbies and so on) constitutes a kind of topologically functional frame outside of which the rest of the city appears as almost non-existent.

There is, however, a whole range of contemporary urban spaces where the rules of urban identity formation do not seem to apply. People are always passing but nobody understands them as places that define their users. An apparent and generalized anonymity seems to prevail. In airports, supermarkets, motorway service stations or hotels, most people are only in transit, as if the part of their lives that unfolds there were “in parentheses”.

These places, where a solitary anonymity is performed, fabricate nonetheless defining characteristics of contemporary urban identities. Those transit-identities of the motorway traveler, the supermarket client and so on, construct the type of the average modern city dweller. Explicit or implicit instructions for use always accompany these spaces, addressing each one individually but eventually, as in every advertising message, fabricating recurrent characteristics. Non-verbal messages are especially powerful as markers of those characteristics, such as advertising images in department stores or company logos in chain fast food restaurants or service stations. Transit identities are thus not the product of chance experience; on the contrary, they distill what is typical and recurrent out of what is contingent and personal in the experience of urban “non-places” (Augé 1995).

So, these identities are framed too, enclosed as they are between socially identified spatial and temporal parentheses. This framing has something of the framing of snapshot pictures. No matter how arbitrarily chosen, these pictures somehow lose their contingent character as soon as they are shown, and appear as recognizable typical scenes. Family and vacation albums are full of such photographs: “In front of the Eiffel Tower,” “Our baby walking,” “Daddy’s first fishing success”… Arguably, modern urban identities are framed spatially and temporally according to practices that transpose the experience of the partitioned city into the experience of partitioned identities. Metropolitan enclaves are of various kinds, used by certain categories of city-dwellers (defined either in terms of target-groups or for general public, exactly as in advertisement) but are always perceived and performed as defining frames that seemingly ignore the urban fabric that surrounds them. Actually, however, their status is founded upon their relations with the surrounding environment and these relations are regulated by concrete checkpoints.

A carefully designed system of control is absolutely necessary for the regulation of socially defining rhythms. More than by walls, metropolitan enclaves are characterized by checkpoints. One has to pass through control, prove his innocence in

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3 Proposing a “sociology of immobility”, Bryan Turner understands “enclave society” as a society in which “governments and other agencies seek to regulate spaces and, where necessary, to immobilize flows of people, goods and services” (Turner 2007: 290).
Pict. 2. Korogocho, Nairobi – “Advanced marginality”. 
advance, as Marc Augé (1995:102) brilliantly remarks, in order to be allowed to use these enclaves. Similar checkpoints punctuate the city: you can see them in airports and in office buildings, in supermarkets and in banks, in clubs and in theaters, not to mention of course guarded public buildings.

Checkpoints are those modular elements of a prevailing rhythm that produce a new dominant experience of “being in public”. By marking everyday routines, checkpoints define at the same time distinct routes for different categories of inhabitants of the partitioned city. Toll posts or underground station checkpoints mark the everyday movements of many city dwellers. The rhythm of the supermarket cashier marks, similarly, an everyday normalizing ceremony of shopping.

Collective and seemingly individualized identities are enacted in the process of participating in such rhythms. Even the temporary identities of the traveler or the purchaser are marked by the act of crossing identifying entrance points. There, one has to show his or her passport or pay-card in order to be allowed a seemingly liberating anonymity – “the passive joys of identity loss” (Augé 1995:103).

We can easily discern in those new urban rhythms, regulated by identity-control checkpoints, the emergence of new linear rhythmicalities. The interesting thing however is that these linear rhythms function as generators of almost ceremonial practices of identity confirmation. No matter how functionally necessary those control points are, their existence generates the performance of practices devoted to ritual repetition. As in the case of “prophylactic rituals” (Turner 1977:168-9 and 1982:109-10) devoted to protection from unexpected natural disasters, checkpoints appear above all as points of self-evident protection: protection from practices which are unpredictable, other, different – in other words, protection from “arhythmical” practices. Checkpoints appear to protect normality from its opposite, society from what should appear as outside, foreign and therefore hostile.

A “state of exception” becoming the rule

The contemporary dominant ideologies of security evoking a looming anti-social threat are obviously finding fertile ground for our everyday addiction to normalizing checkpoints. What this phobia, deliberately spread throughout the world, is adding to the status of metropolitan public space is the inauguration of a state of emergency with no apparent end. Checkpoints become metastatic, police blocks punctuate the city, public sites are heavily guarded, immigration control is everywhere. Wars, mostly generated by outside brutal interventions, cause massive movements of people. Checkpoints are always there to identify, separate and subordinate helpless people by ceaselessly searching for the “infiltrating terrorist”. Security, elevated to the status of the most important goal, justifies these metastatic control points as markers of exception. This situation, however, is in essence concretizing a potentially coherent new model of governance in the making (Vecchi 2001). The state of emergency turns out to be a test. What will be a new mutation of the partitioned city is justified by recourse to exceptional conditions that demand exceptional measures, measures that suspend basic recognized civil rights.

Agamben’s (2005) idea of exception can be used as a means to understand and conceptualize the contemporary city of enclaves. Central to this idea is an essentially juridico-political understanding of exception: exception has to be compared to a
rule. According to Agamben, however, exception is not the opposite of the rule, rather it is the founding condition of the rule.

There is a historical component in this reasoning as well as a logico-mathematic component. Exception can thus be traced as a specific condition of power imposition, as the history of the state of exception clearly shows. Historically, the state of exception describes moments or periods during which law is suspended in the name of society’s protection from internal or external crucial threats. During a state of exception, authority (a sovereign authority) is justified in taking such a decision (to suspend the law) in its promise to reinstitute law and order as soon as the threat is eliminated. This situation however, according to Agamben, reveals what is essential about authority: the legitimated ability to decide when and for how long the law will be suspended. In this act, authority reveals itself to be the precondition of law and not vice-versa.

During the state of exception a very peculiar relation between law and power is revealed. It is not that naked power simply replaces the regulating force of law. Law is present in its suspension as a legitimated force, a power to impose certain actions and prohibit others, a power to punish. The force of law as a legitimate force is passed over to the executive power while law is simultaneously suspended. A kind of ambiguous zone of indeterminacy is thus created “where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other” (Agamben 2005:23).

Agamben characterizes this situation as a “threshold of undecidability … at which factum [concrete events and acts] and ius [law] fade into each other” (ibid. 29). It is interesting to observe how and why Agamben employs in this context the image and concept of the threshold. For him, a threshold appears as an intermediary zone where supposedly distinct areas (in spatial terms, inside and outside; in juridical terms, law and anomie), lose their margins and “blur with each other”. Had he used the image of border or limit, he would have described the state of exception as a situation of trespassing, of exceeding or crossing a limit. The exceptionality of the state of exception would have been conceived as the complete outside of law, the complete other of law. Agamben, however, insists that the law is present in the state of exception as the legitimating element of a sovereign decision. Law is present in its suspension. In the threshold-like condition of the state of exception, opposing parts are co-present and indistinguishable (as their defining perimeters are replaced by a zone of indistinction) and thus no longer exclusive. In terms of the historical analysis of the exception, the threshold is an in-between period during which crucial differences (between law and anomie) are suspended.

There is, however, a certain inconsistency in using the image of the threshold in historical terms. If the period of threshold is an in-between period, “before” and “after” should exist as concrete and differentiated periods, their essential difference being created by the act of passage from the one to the other. But the state of exception is supposedly not a period that produces qualitative differences and changes, rather, an intermediary period of difference during which a threat to the social status quo is eliminated. This period of difference mediates between two periods of order, that is, two periods which share the same defining characteristics.

We know from anthropology that the social experience of threshold-crossing is an experience of change. This change does not have to be a collectively created
change, as in an uprising or any other qualitative leap in terms of social relations. It can be a change affecting specific groups of people in specific periods of their social life. Anthropologists have provided us with many examples of spaces that house periods of ritualized transition from one social position or condition to another. Famously, Van Gennep has described as “rites of passage” (Van Gennep 1960) those ritual acts connected with spaces that symbolize transitions (for example, from childhood to adolescence, from single to married life, from the status of the adolescent to that of the citizen, the warrior or the hunter). Ritual acts supervise the passage from one social identity to another, thus ensuring the overall stability of society and the corresponding social relations. In Agamben’s threshold however, there seems to be a kind of circular movement. The state of exception in a way equates “before” and “after” as it is supposed to ensure that after this in-between period order is restored as before. The state of exception renders before and after in-different: not different and thus mutually exchangeable.

In terms of a logico-mathematic analysis, the period of a state of exception presents itself as a logical paradox: opposing terms such as inside and outside, terms that are logically mutually exclusive as in set theory, have to be described as possibly indistinguishable. Agamben attempts to use a “complex topological figure” as the Moebius strip to represent this state “in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another” (Agamben 1998:37). In this image there is a slight shift towards a different understanding of this zone of indistinction. As on a Moebius strip, where one has to move (literally or speculatively) along the strip to discover that opposites “pass through one another”, so in the state of exception a movement between law and lawlessness creates the dynamic situation of a temporary suspension of law. In other words, the logico-mathematical analysis of this threshold period gives to Agamben’s use of the threshold image-concept a dynamic component that is more close to the actual social experience of crossing thresholds. As we will see throughout this book, it is in the performed or virtual act of crossing that the threshold is constituted as a space of potentiality.

In Agamben’s conceptualization of the state of exception this element should have been crucial, since it radically influences the understanding of a further antinomy inherent in the history of the state of exception: the exception becoming the rule. How can a temporary state, a state characterized by a temporary condition and legitimated as a crucial part of the necessary rights of sovereign power, become permanent? And, since in terms of history nothing can be described as immune to change, what does it mean exactly to characterize a condition, a state, as permanent?

Probably, what Agamben has in mind is that in the temporary character of the state of exception, law and lawlessness must be equally present in the process of “passing through one another”. The zone of indistinction he describes should be understood rather as a mechanism than a state. Law and anomie are constantly compared during this period. The mechanism constantly empties a period from law (as it is suspended) because the force of law is necessary to impose the state of exception. In a way, law is continuously present and at the same time power suspends it. The zone of indistinction therefore is an active zone of blurring the differences
because differences exist, differences are socially perceived and posited in order to be suspended. This mechanism’s fuel, so to speak, is the legitimating temporariness. The mechanism works only because it constantly withdraws law from a situation where it is still regarded as the necessary force for ensuring social order.

**Exception versus thresholds**

When the state of exception becomes the rule, the mechanism turns into a “killing machine” (Agamben 2005:86). We could say that in this case the mechanism is immobilized. The constant passing through the opposing elements (spatial as well as juridical) comes to a halt. Instead of being an area of active comparisons, the zone of indistinction becomes an area where opposing elements coincide.

What Agamben wants to describe with the image of the camp as not simply a historical case but a model is exactly this “permanent” coincidence of law and anomic: suspension no longer needs to offer any justification. What the camp represents is the final obliteration of a crucial distinction: the distinction between exception and rule. Exception becomes normal. “The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule … a permanent spatial arrangement which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order” (Agamben 1998:169).

That the camp is a “permanent spatial arrangement” essentially means that it is no longer a zone of indistinction, given that the comparison between outside and inside (spatially as well as juridically) is no longer possible. “The camp is a hybrid of law and fact in which the two terms have become indistinguishable” (*ibid.* 170). There is a slight difference in expression that actually reveals a qualitative leap. If the two terms “have become indistinguishable” then the zone of indistinction as a zone where opposites pass through one another is stiffened in a state where the opposites cannot be differentiated any more. “Have become” describes a resulting state rather than a process.

The camp is not a threshold state. The camp, to coherently follow Agamben’s symbolism, should not be characterized as a space of exception (as Agamben himself explicitly states) but rather as a space of normalized exception. The paradox of the camp is different from the paradox of the state of exception. The camp remains “outside normal order” (*ibid.* 169), but at the same time it constitutes and contains a localized “normality”, an exceptional law, a law that holds only inside this gigantic enclave.

What is so terrible about the Nazi camps is that they were so functionally organized as lethal machines. Administrative reason in its terrifying efficiency has defined the logic of this enclave of mass-murder. The Nazi camps were neither the first nor the cruelest machines of mass murder involved in civil wars, genocides or imperialist expeditions; however, they can help us to understand a specific urban-administrative mechanism through which “exception becomes normal”.

When exception loses its threshold character, and thus loses an inherent characteristic threatening a process that has to repeat itself, when, in other words, exception becomes the rule, it also becomes a secluded enclave. For those spatiotemporally contained in the enclave, the law “outside” simply does not exist. For those outside this enclave, the enclave can be either a potentially fatal trap (if this enclave
takes the form of camp) or a potential zone of protection (if this enclave takes the form of a secluded area of privilege).

The camp can be taken to represent the limit towards which the city evolves only if we accept as a crucial characteristic of contemporary urban life the inhabiting of disconnected and enclosed enclaves. Otherwise the camp, considered as a model arrangement for defining and confining people without rights (“bare life”), has a concrete history that can indeed include today’s detention centers for “illegal” immigrants (treated as non-citizens). What we can gain from understanding the camp as a model is necessarily connected to our ability to distinguish between these two levels in the use of such analytical model.

An urban enclave is a clearly defined area where general law is partially suspended and a distinct set of administrative rules apply. The force of law is present in an enclave as a protocol of use. Experienced from the outside, i.e. experienced as an outside, every urban enclave appears as an exception. Exception is made apparent in all the forms by which access to the enclave is regulated: general rules or common rights do not apply; upon entrance one must accept specific conditions of use, specific obligations and forms of behavior. It is as if the city, considered as the uniform locus of sovereign law, is replaced by an urban archipelago comprised of enclaves where exceptional measures define different forms of suspension of law.

Experienced from the inside, i.e. experienced as an inside, the urban enclave is a secluded world, complete in its uses and defined by rules especially created for its inhabitants. Exception, to continue the comparison with the camp, is thus normalized. An urban enclave is usually a carefully planned system of human relations regulated by protocols of use. While such protocols have the appearance of administrative or functional directions for use, they essentially constitute a localized legal system in place of a suspended general law 4.

Accordingly, urban enclaves are not simply places where general laws do not apply, but places where localized rules, having the form of functional decrees, normalize an exceptional status which becomes permanent.

Is there a specific urban order from which enclaves depart? First of all, urban order has not ceased to be a project to govern the contemporary city. Legal acts in support of zero tolerance politics are exemplary of such a project based on the re-institution of a general law defining the status of urban citizenship. It is interesting, however, that this project is inspired by the regulating efficiency of protocols for the use of the enclaves. The city itself can thus be legally and administratively fantasized as a gigantic enclave.

Order can also be projected as a system of delimiting obligations, as a restraint of freedom for those inhabiting privileged enclaves. Exception can be welcome to inhabitants as a defining mark of their privilege 5.

4 Atkinson and Blandy observe that gated communities are “characterized by legal agreements which tie the residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management” (Atkinson and Blandy 2005:178; see also Minton 2009:74-77).

5 The World is a floating “residential cruise liner”, the ultimate enclave of the super-rich (Atkinson and Blandy 2009:92-110). “Moving out of public space, via gated communities and other secessionary modes of governance, has created places that are spatially embedded within, yet contractually outside many of the arrangement of state functions” (ibid. 108-9).
Generally speaking, the construction of spatial as well as legal orders is always a process open to social antagonism. What seems to be a crucial characteristic of current administrative practices and logic is the acceptance of a dynamic condition of ordering based on two premises: the localized order of urban-island enclaves and the regulating power of metastatic checkpoints which merely impose a partial and precarious order on the urban sea surrounding those enclaves.

Indeed, refugee and immigrant detention centers constitute a kind of containment which marks “a radical crisis of the concept [of human rights],” as Agamben (2000:19) insists. But perhaps what is more important is the fact that the camp as a model of an enclave of normalized exception metastasizes in every aspect of city life. We don’t have to be refugees reduced to bare life to be treated as enclave-confined users. We are trained in accepting as legitimate “site specific” protocols of use without reference to general (or universal) rights. We tend to consider as normal the fact that exception is organized in spatial terms as an area where only specific rules apply.

We learn to adapt to exception without even considering what we live as exception. This is how “red zones” become normal: routine control procedures and limited access rules tend to characterize access to the city centre or to specified areas guarded as potential “terrorist” (whatever the word is taken to mean) targets. Checkpoints and surveillance systems in shops have become normal. Body searches even at athletic events have become normal. It is in this direction that the state of exception is generalized and becomes a rule. It is not that we generally live in a state of emergency (even though lots of people do, as for example the Palestinians and the Israeli people). Rather, it is that we are constantly deprived of a crucial characteristic of urban space which also happens to be a crucial characteristic of any legal culture: the ability and the opportunity to compare, to dispute by comparing, to investigate the ways limits are imposed. Thresholds can be both spatiotemporal urban experiences and areas of actively experiencing indistinctions: spatial and juridico-political indistinctions alike.

If we are to investigate the liberating potential of the experience and conceptualization of thresholds, then we should clearly understand thresholds as always being crossed. A dynamic image of threshold crossing can help to locate the potential of change in the mechanism (and not in the state) of exception. If Agamben’s use of the threshold image can only be taken to describe a state, then exception can only be understood as a trap. Exception, in this case, describes “a passage that cannot be completed, a distinction that can be neither maintained nor eliminated” (Norris ed. 2005:4).

It is crucially important to understand the state to exception as a dynamic mechanism which only once it is immobilized can be transformed to the setting of an exclusive inclusion (Agamben 1998:177). In this context, Walter Benjamin’s thought that “our task [is] to bring about a real state of emergency” (Benjamin 1992:248), acquires an interesting meaning. Taken not simply as a historically specific appeal for anti-Nazi mobilization, Benjamin’s sentence can perhaps summarize the task of creating thresholds in history. On those thresholds past and present are not connected in a linear way. The present is just one of the possible futures the past contained. Discovering hope in the past is the ability to locate ourselves in the past’s unrealized
potentialities. “Being aware of historical discontinuity is the defining characteristic of revolutionary classes in the moment of their action” (Benjamin 1980, I:1236). Thresholds in history are created out of this awareness.

In this understanding of historical thresholds, the exception triggers a transformative disruption of normality. Exception, thus, can be the spatiotemporal condition of change, of difference. In place of the state of emergency’s cyclical sequence of normality—exception—return to normality, in Benjamin’s “real” state of emergency normality is replaced by exception leading to possibility. Exception thus destroys normality instead of becoming normality’s supporting mechanism.

Red zones as normalizing exceptions and the “city of thresholds”

Red zones appear to belong to these kinds of spatial formations that have nothing to do with the rhythms that organize public spaces. No cyclical rhythm seems to govern their emergence, no linearity calculates their presence in the modern city. Red zones instantiate a form of temporal conception which is not based on repetition, i.e. rhythmicality, but on exception. Red zones are erected in exceptional cases and represent the “state of emergency”. Red zones though, are not as exceptional as they seem. Rather, they constitute “exceptional” cases of a whole category of urban rhythms that tend to define the characteristics of today’s urban public spaces.

Red zones are only the extreme case of ubiquitous checkpoints in the city. On the occasion of a major meeting of world leaders, the city is divided into forbidden and accessible sectors. The new “forbidden city”, an enclave “temporarily” marked by fences, walls, surveillance cameras, police barricades, searchlights, flying helicopters and so on, is becoming the image of a publicized utopia of complete security. On the body of the city, the mark of a new project of subordination is inscribed. All the more so, because the city is increasingly becoming ungovernable. Urban conflicts erupt in major cities and the police assumes the role of an “interior army”: It used to be Beirut, Jerusalem, Belfast, Los Angeles, Paris or Rio; but nowadays urban conflicts and riots, urban violence and racial clashes are everywhere. As Agamben (2001) remarks, modern authorities tend to adopt the model of the infected medieval city, where zones of progressive control were erected, leaving part of the city to the plague while securing disinfected enclaves for the rich. In 2001, Genoa, with its prototypical red zone, appeared as an “infected city”. The new world order, utopian and nightmarish, is based on zones of varying control, where checkpoints attempt to introduce the globalizing rhythms of neoliberalism. The utopia of absolute governance is tested at various scales in cities as well as in continents. Eventually, a partitioned globe is strategically designed to emerge.

Red zones are temporary constructions aimed at permanent results. As the “terrorist threat” (which, as a term, is designed to encompass indiscriminately any threat to the status of the new order) is a constantly renewed threat, exception becomes the rule, emergency becomes canonic. While red zones appear as exceptional when compared to ordinary urban rhythms, they in fact inaugurate new urban rhythms in view of a heavily mythologized new metropolitan order. Exception thus becomes the model of repetition.

Jon Coaffee has revealingly shown how the economic core of London, the City, has evolved into an enormous enclave defined by an urban “ring of steel” (Coaffee
2004:276-296). As “counter-terrorist” urban policies have evolved from temporary responses to Provisional IRA threats and acts, to more permanent measures taken after 9/11, the City has gradually become an area “excluding itself from the rest of central London, through its territorial boundedness, surveillance and fortification strategies” (ibid. 294).

Red zones deliberately dramatize threat as a recurrent exception. As with prophylactic rituals, what the red zones ceremonially act out is a demonized otherness. Those violating others, those potential or actual trespassers, are described by the mere existence of the red zones as outsiders, not to be allowed in the “forbidden city”. Law-abiding citizens are asked to comply with the measures, consenting in the suspension of their “right to the city”. They are asked to participate in a ritualistic purification of the city, in the exorcising of the evil, which, as in most rituals, appears as both unnatural and beyond society. Red zones ceremonially describe the new citizen: just as the supermarket cashier (itself a checkpoint) defines the purchaser, the airport check-in defines the traveler, and the police block sanctions the authorized driver or the legal immigrant, so does the red zone aim to define the new citizen. Always eager to abandon his or her rights in exchange of a feeling of security, this new citizen accepts a permanent state of emergency. The wall erected by the Israeli government in Palestine is only an extreme case of a red zone concretizing a permanent state of emergency, circumscribing through a series of checkpoints the social life of the new citizens. Red zones are purposely presented by the media in the form of a coherent spectacle which praises state violence as justified and effective.

The display of absolute control contradistinguishes the image of power created by the neoliberal mythology. No more leaders parading in open cars or shaking hands with common people. Modern politicians exhibit themselves mostly through the media, posing as benign, humane, but also determined. The images ceremonially reproduced by the red zones are images of exclusion and distinction constructing the profile of a quasi-feudal power that paternalistically promises to provide security above all. All those constructions of control, completely out of scale and functional only in the case of a civil war scenario, constitute a new fortress, a castle for the governing elites. This mediatized castle, however, is only the extreme case of the protected enclaves of the partitioned city (Davis 1992:221-60).

What the anti-global movement has achieved, challenging the acceptance of red zones, has been to reveal their pedagogic use in forming the characteristics

6 An analogous security “enclavism” is occurring in New York, especially after 9/11. Security zones define both public and private corporate buildings in ways that destroy public space (documented for instance in Németh and Hollander 2010).

7 The Israeli wall is indeed a “temporary” security measure which is becoming permanent. “The Occupied Territories are trapped in a time loop where temporariness becomes permanent and exception becomes the rule, where no reality is fixed, no rules are clear, and no legal definition is stable” (Weizman 2005: 241).

8 For Kurt Iveson (who uses as an example the red zone created in Sydney in September 2007 during an APEC Leaders Meeting), “physical regulatory measures … far from being kept secret, … were endlessly circulated through a wide range of media interventions” (Iveson 2009:243). The protestors also used the media to their own means, to interrupt, expose and fight the red zones: they thus “combined actions in the street with action on the screen” (ibid).
of urban dwellers-citizens. Their role in support of an emerging model of government remains to be actively shown. All of the movement’s practices show explicitly enough the transformation of public space into a series of controlled enclaves culminating in the mediatized Castle of World Leaders.

To borrow a term from Edward P. Thompson, we can observe a “countertheater” (Thompson 1993:57 and 67) created by people’s symbolic acts of civil disobedience in front of red zones. Demonstrators may sometimes show through the theatricality of a controlled clash that red zones are actually drawing lines inside the society and not between the society and an external vicious enemy. By doing so, they refuse to play the part of the plague in a sanitizing city and unmask that what appears as a modernized prophylactic rite is in effect the metastasis of those discriminating rites of initiation that most societies call citizenship.

Citizens before the fencing politics

Contemporary city-dweller identities are framed and framing. Their borders are carefully defined and correspond to the defining perimeter of the spatial and temporal enclaves in which they are performed. Not only do checkpoints enforce the discriminatory effect of a fenced spatiotemporal perimeter, they also actually test urban identities in their recurrent performance constantly proving, as it is, their efficiency in defining recognizable citizens.

Contesting contemporary identities would thus mean contesting their repeated performance enacted in framing enclaves. A different public culture, based on mutually aware and open identities would need different spatial experiences. Public space would have to be transformed from a series of enclaves, indifferent to each other, into a network of communicating areas. A permeable membrane instead of a frame would have to indicate the perimeter of these areas. Instead of checkpoints that discriminate, passages that connect would have to ensure spatial and temporal relations as necessarily formative of interdependent identities.

Liminality, the experience of temporarily occupying an in-between territory, can provide us with an alternative image for a spatiality of emancipation. Creating in-between spaces might mean creating spaces of encounter between identities, instead of spaces corresponding to specific identities.

The act of recognizing a division only to overcome it, yet without aiming to eliminate it, might become emblematic of an attitude that gives to different identities the ground to negotiate and realize their interdependence. Emancipation may thus be conceived not as the establishing of a new collective identity but rather as the establishing of the means to negotiate between emergent identities.

From Van Gennep’s seminal study on the “rites of passage” (Van Gennep 1960) we can borrow a revealing knowledge: societies have to instruct and guide their people when they change social status through crucial events in their social life. Birth, marriage, death of a relative, coming of age, entry into a professional community, army service, acquiring the status of citizen, warrior etc., all mark specific identity transformations. As these transformations are crucial for social reproduction, and as they have to be combined with tests and the inculcation of relevant knowledge to those who are destined to change, societies devise ways to regulate those transformations and ensure that the process will always be repeated without
threatening social cohesion.

Victor Turner, drawing from Van Gennep’s theory, has focused exactly on this threat: it seems that transformation already contains the seed of dissent, the seed of deviation. People experiencing the changes connected with social identity transformation, people having to pass from an intermediary period during which they are being prepared for their new social duties, can possibly discover ways to challenge dominant identities. Especially in the process of abandoning former identities, often expressed by the creation of an in-between community of equals with no differentiating characteristics (communitas, in Turner’s terminology: see Turner 1977:169-170 and 1982:26-27) there exists a threatening spark of collective rule transgression. In the experience of communitas initiards sense the power which suspends the rules of identity: they are not-any-more but simultaneously not-yet. Their social obligations and rights are suspended, for they could reveal a threatening awareness: identities are constructed and people can communicate and act together without them or exploring different ones from those for which they are prepared. Emergent identities are identities to be learned, that is why so often initiation through rites of passage is connected with impersonations and disguises. Rehearsing identities is, in the corresponding rituals, a very strictly regulated procedure. But people unavoidably acquire a very important social dexterity: to be able to become other, to be able to be in someone else’s place. It is here that the power of inhabiting thresholds, in-between space-time, lies. To be able to experience a change in identity, to be able to rehearse, test, check and visit otherness means potentially to acquire the power, to negotiate with otherness. For Turner (1982:27) these initiating visits to otherness revealingly expose learned habits and can open identities to unexpected changes.

Recognizing, opening, creating and inhabiting thresholds can become an important characteristic of emergent emancipatory spatialities. Opportunities for encounter with otherness, which activate comparisons, negotiations and inventive transformations, are necessary for any attempt to go beyond existing social taxonomies and values. Throughout this book, the idea of a city of thresholds will be explored. It will be argued that by this term we can describe a multifarious process of spatiotemporal creation through which emancipatory experiences may arise. Can we perhaps recognize glimpses of such a process in current urban mobilizations and demands? And can we locate the potential or actual characteristics of urban movements that would support this view?

The fragmented and ambiguous experiences of protest that opposed the growing tendency to fence and control open public spaces in Athens might offer us the opportunity to answer these questions.

Local authorities and the government aim to prove that Athens is safe for its inhabitants and for visiting tourists. This had been particularly evident in the context of preparing the city for the 2004 Olympic Games. In a localized version of an international security mania, allegedly “uncontrollable” public city parks were surrounded by tall fences controlling access through gates to be closed at night. In the case of the Philopapou cliff, where some important ancient ruins are located, this

9 Specifically, Turner (1977:95) writes about “liminal entities”, “threshold people” and “liminal personae”.
was presented as an effort to protect them. The fences, however, were mainly a form of enclosure in the prospect of establishing entrance prices to what used to be an open public space. Pedion tou Areos, a park in the center of Athens, was presented as a dangerous area to be controlled, while in fact it is a place where public life is rich and varied. Policing the park meant chasing stigmatized minorities such as poor immigrants or homosexuals out of the area.

Many local residents both in Philopapou and Pedion tou Areos demonstrated against the growing fencing politics. In many cases people gathered outside parks and collectively destroyed the newly built structures. Through acts of urban civil disobedience, socially as well as culturally differentiated people jointly opposed the transformation of public spaces into controllable and discriminating enclaves. They equally refused to accept the privatization of parts of those public spaces (an arbitrarily growing athletic center in Pedion tou Areos or large areas of Philopapou region colonized by restaurants and coffee-shops). The interesting thing about these mobilizations is not only their unpredictable acts of actually demolishing fencing constructions but also the diversity of people involved. No political party initiated those demands and those acts, and neighborhood assemblies were organized with no formal or institutionalized support. In the Philopapou area, a few residents took the initiative to call for a neighborhood meeting. Five hundred people responded and in three cases (on 3 November 2002, 10 March 2003 and 12 September 2003) the assembly collectively voted to tear down the fence and promptly did so. Eventually, out of various similarly mobilized groups a loose network was formed aiming at the coordination of efforts.

In these acts we can see the characteristics of an urban movement spontaneously formed in response to major governmental intervention in a neighborhood. This urban movement indeed “makes urban demands which challenge existing policies and practices” (Pickvance 1995:198). However, the demands are not limited to a neighborhood enclave of outdoor public space but aim to ensure unrestricted public use of similar spaces all over the city. To quote from the declaration of the People’s Committee for the Protection of Pedion tou Areos: “We want the park to be a free public space, accessible to all Athenians, easy to use, safe and beautiful.”

These mobilizations explicitly oppose the model of tourist-oriented public space which in various forms has already forced residents to leave gentrified areas around the city center, as in the Plaka and in Psiri. Instead of contributing to local demands for security, policing the streets and eventually supporting homogenized collective urban identities, these movements create – consciously or not – passages in public space. Their organization mirrors a form of public coexistence of differentiated identities that aim at mutual recognition. Their acts also seem to defy the framing effect of the targeted spatial constructions, defending the essentially porous character of the perimeter of these spaces.

From the city of enclaves to the city of thresholds

Might not we consider these anti-gating movements part of a multifarious and sometimes even contradictory dispersed effort to oppose the partitioning of city space? The measures taken during the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union, or during the 2004 Olympic Games, in the form of an imposed state of
emergency continue the policy of fencing and controlling public space, pushing it to its limits. Athens city centre is becoming a highly controlled area with temporary fences becoming permanent in many cases while police blocks keep on proliferating.

Actively opposing temporary red zones is a way of refusing to accept a partitioned and always surveilled public space. The multicolored blocks of young activists of “alterglobalization” movements expressly show that public space should be the place where different identities are allowed to communicate, meet, exchange ideas and longings and act. A potential city of thresholds sometimes emerges when public space is occupied and organized by all those different people. Both symbolically and practically, these groups create an open to all, porous public space in the streets and squares of the city. If a new form of governance is being tested in the temporary-permanent construction of red-zones, a new form of emancipating culture is spontaneously tested in public space. In the migratory and ephemeral practices of social movements explicitly or implicitly oriented towards urban demands, this public culture is ambiguously performed. The more these acts of essentially urban protest spread in the city, the more we can hope for passages, as public thresholds, to replace metastatic checkpoints. And, perhaps, instead of the “bourgeois utopia” of completely secure urban enclaves (Davis 1992), or the fantasy of identity-conferring ghettos as strongholds to be defended from the rest of the city, we can see emerging the heterotopias of porous public spaces. An open city is a city of thresholds (Stavrides 2002; 2007).

Contesting the prevailing mythologies of terror and security may eventually mean contesting the partitioned city as the image and the locus of a new globalized order. In the process of opposing barricaded public space, new spatial experiences may emerge. Instead of checkpoints, passages may be created. A city of thresholds can be a city where public space functions as a network of intermediary spaces, of metropolitan thresholds where different and interdependent collective identities can be performed in mutual awareness. Actions of civil metropolitan disobedience may realize temporarily those urban thresholds as places of otherness, opposed to the normalizing urban identities ritually enforced by red zones.

Perhaps, in the renewed project of social emancipation, we can replace the rhythms that define checkpoints with those that define turning points, with those thresholds where a new concept of time will emerge. Walter Benjamin calls this time “Messianic”, only to describe a new epoch marked by a crucial rupture in social time. As we will see in chapter 3, Benjamin’s concept of time is based on the spatiotemporal experience of thresholds. His study of urban thresholds can become a part of a possible research on the liberating potentialities of threshold spatiality. Can we indeed imagine, in this context, a new kind of social time awareness which will emerge as multifarious and polyrhythmical collective identities secrete the spaces of their encounters?
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