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What is social visibility? How does it affect people and public issues? How are visibility regimes created, organised and contested? Tackling both social theory and social research, this book provides an exploration into how intervisibilities produce crucial socio-technical and bio-political effects. It elaborates the concept of visibility as a general category for social theory and social research. The issue of the visibility and intervisibility of social events, subjects and sites proves relevant to a wide range of disciplines including sociology, cultural and media studies, political science, urban studies, criminology, identity studies, and science and technology studies. However, to date no comprehensive reflection on the topic of visibility as a distinct category – ranking it as a basic sociological category – has been attempted: this book fills that gap.

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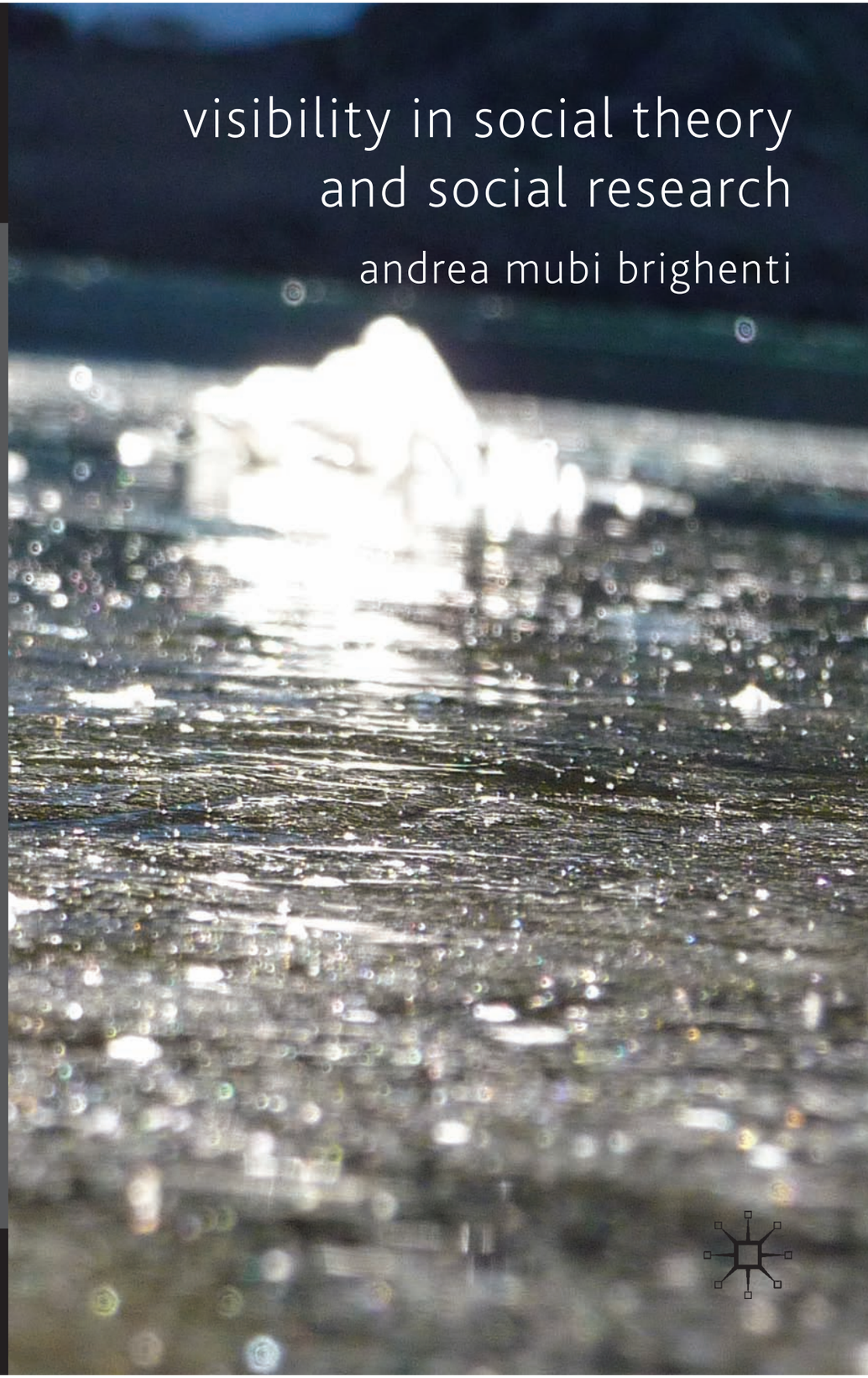

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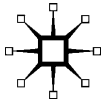

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Urban Visibilities

This chapter extends the analysis of the interplay between visibility and publicity, delving into the city as a site of intersecting visibilities, motilities and stratifications. Urban studies literature is immense; in this instance, I choose as interlocutors Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift and their recent call to 'reimagine' the urban dimension. Inspired by a Deleuzian perspective, Amin and Thrift (2002) have argued against the priority given to a phenomenological approach to the city and in favour of a machinic one. However, here I seek to point out that, in the attempt to understand urban visibilities, the phenomenological and the machinic perspectives can and, indeed, should be kept together. The matrix view of flows and fluxes in the city, that is, of the city as a pattern of traces and trajectories, is important and enlightening, but rather than being opposite, as claimed by Amin and Thrift, it is complementary to the phenomenological experience of urban circulation. Urban circulation is located precisely at the intersection between top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

Consequently, in this chapter I propose to extend to urban visibility the perspective outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, which I have called 'ecological phenomenology'. In other words, my suggestion is that urban machines can and should be analysed as prolongations and events that take place in an ecology of local *plena* unfolding in the element of visibility. Consequently, while Amin and Thrift contend that it is necessary to overcome the image of the city as a 'territorial economic engine', I support a territorological analysis of the urban environment as carved in an element of visibility. Amin and Thrift rightly describe the city as a 'means to engineer encounters', however they do not seem to agree that such an engineering integrally unfolds through territorialisations in a field of visibility of events, subjects and rhythms – which is precisely

what I suggest. Their critique, it seems to me, is applicable only to a narrow notion of visibility as visuality, but misses what is at stake in the more general phenomenon of visibility as an element of the social. A particularly revealing case, as we shall see, is the theme of the urban crowd or, better, crowd states as they manifest themselves in the city. Where can such crowd states be found? Where do they originate? What precisely do they reveal?

Motilisation

Modernity has set the city, this space of settlement *par excellence*, in motion. Richard Sennett (1994) singled out the significant parallel between the medical discovery of blood circulation in the seventeenth century and the emergence of a new urban model. The image of the fluidity of blood pumped around the human body by the heart, as described by the English physician William Harvey, is at the root of the type of social organicism that inaugurated the discipline of sociology. The emergence of such an idea is part of a process that had already begun in the sixteenth century with Humanism and its vision of an Ideal City that transcended the medieval walled town. However, the modern urbanisation process introduces into the urban pattern not simply a quantitative difference, but also a qualitative one.

As the city becomes a site of flows and circulation, it turns into a complex territorial composition of vectors, trajectories, paths and directions that are both sustained top-down, through planning, and shaped bottom-up, through interaction. If the modern city emerges as a site of circulation, this process is in part problematic and contradictory, given that, as Tim Cresswell (2006) has shown, due to a dominant social scientific 'sedentarist metaphysics', mobility has been always feared as a 'social pathology'. At the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in early American sociology, the city is seen from the perspective of natural history as a diagram of zones (Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1967[1925]). Urban zones are the product of both short-term and long-term flows, but each movement of resettlement is associated with forms of social disorganisation, which can be recovered only through a gradual process (Park used to call this process the 'race relations cycle').

On the other hand, in the 1920s and 1930s rationalist and functionalist architects enthusiastically embraced the ideal of circulation as a necessary means to clean up 'rotten' urban centres. The latter term recurs in Le Corbusier (1924), who famously opposed the 'stagnation'

and 'putrefaction' of the immobility to the project of an urban street conceived of as a 'factory in length' for sorting traffic according to speed, liberating the fastest automobiles from the 'congestion' caused by the slowest vehicles and pedestrians. While there may certainly be some psychoanalytic explanation of *père* Corbu's *Angst* with *embouteillage* in the traffic and the ensuing need for 'fresh air', the image of the straight street as a speed-generating machine remains the perfect urbanistic *péndant* of his architectural depiction of the house as a *machine à habiter*. Far from being uniform, urban motility is composed of highly differential rhythms and speeds. With respect to this, it is amply recognised today that functionalist urbanism significantly overlooked urban experience and its affects created at the intersection of differential motilities.

Among the harshest critics of functionalist urbanism, in the 1950s the Lettrists and the Situationists – tracing from the Surrealist *promenade*, as illustrated by Francesco Careri (2002) – heralded by contrast the playful possibilities associated with free, non-rationalised and even random movement in the city. Traffic circulation, in particular, was seen by them as the opposite of human encounter, that is, as an organised universal isolation. The Formulary for a New Urbanism (Ivain 1953) and Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism (Kotányi and Vaneigem 1961) – which included urban practices such as the *dérive* ('drifting') and the *possible rendez-vous* ('unarranged meeting') – constituted the Lettrists' and early Situationists' response to what they perceived as the 'frigid architecture' of modernism that bred the fragmentation of the human being into a series of functionally defined, cut off spheres of existence.

Against the functional circulation of city inhabitants, imposed upon them by the imperatives of spatial separation of the various dimensions of life (production, consumption, rest, etc.) the Lettrists and more extensively the Situationists sought to reconstruct the unity of human existence through the free construction of situations and an alternative use of space and urban motility, often inspired by unsettled minorities such as the Roma people. From Constant Nieuwenhuys's project of a mobile city, *New Babylon* (1959–1974; see in particular the beautiful documentation by Careri 2001), through Isaac Joseph's (1984) *Le passant considérable* and David Le Breton's (2000) *Eloge de la marche*, to Rebecca Solnit's (2001) *Wanderlust*, the idea of wandering in the city through a type of movement that exceeds territorial fixations, constantly re-emerges as a vital reaction against the planned, merely functional aspect of urban movement. Importantly, the different motilisations in the city produce

social territories through subsequent chains of deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations of the urban environment: such a production is eminently practical.

Vision in motion

> Around 1840 for some time it was considered fashionable to take a tortoise out walking in the galleries. (Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*)

Another crucial author in this thread, Michel de Certeau (1990 [1980–1985]: 142–146), argued for a theoretical shift in the imagination of the city, from the idea of a single 'urban system' to the visibilisation of a multitude of 'microbic practices' within urban space. Possibly the most microbic practice is the mere act of walking in the street, a public performance that actualises and appropriates urban space in a variety of ways (and styles). It has been noted since the early years of cinema that, phenomenologically, the combination of vision and motion in urban space creates an effect that is similar to *montage* or editing. The moving observer meets unfolding vistas, with sudden changes in the visual field, cuts and new appearances. Transit becomes transience and transformation. Yet while the idea of a linear and progressive 'liberation through speed' was celebrated by modernist urbanists *à la* Le Corbusier in their attempt to ameliorate the urban performance, the kinematics of urban movement is usually related not so much to work and production, as it is to leisure and consumption.

Visual consumption of goods displayed in various guises has played an important role in urban strolling and urban promenades since the late eighteenth century. The Jardins du Palais Royal in Paris served as the prototype for the arcades, which in turn served as the prototype for the shopping mall; and in the 1880s Émile Zola represented these seductions of the *grands magasins* – together with the ruthless exploitation of its employees, to be sure – in his *Au Bonheur Des dames* (see Flam 2010). From its inception, urban visual enjoyment was linked to the elements of light, fashion and design. Throughout a wide array of visible practices, the city is enjoyed as a spectacle. In a critical vein, Henri Lefebvre (1991[1974]: 99) observed that city inhabitants are constantly caught up in a web of what he called 'analogons', that is 'doubles of themselves in prettified, smiling and happy poses'. Advertising, which we encountered at the beginning of this book in our attempt to

understand the social ontology of visibility, stands here as the epitome of the seductive nature of the urban spectacle.

All sorts of spectacular fascinations can be imagined, including the (in-)famous 'wretchedness tours'. In a track by the French *banlieue*-based group Saian Supa Crew, entitled *Zonarisk*, a mock safari bus escorts tourists through the urban wasteland of the French *banlieue*. Tourist tours of this type are actually organised to the *favelas* in Brazil (Freire-Medeiros 2009), the shantytowns in Africa and (post-)conflict cities such as Belfast. As John Urry (1990) explained magnificently, the tourist gaze amounts to a specific form of visual enjoyment and visual consumption of places. Tourism spectacularly emphasises and monumentalises what is officially recognised as a place's major attractions. While the city is a living complex, always caught in a struggle between past and future and, more precisely, between the assertion of its different pasts and differing futures in its multiple presents, the tourist gaze freezes all sorts of transformations and processes, looking only for those fixed, 'authentic' monuments officialised by the accredited authority of tourist guides. This is not a uniquely contemporary phenomenon. Let us not forget that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century city was probably even more spectacular than today's: tours were given not only to the usual monuments, but also to places that today are subject to very restricted access, including the morgue in Paris, which attracted an unbelievable one million visitors per year (eventually, it was closed to the public in 1907).

Urban experience then appears as a spectacular, cinematographic experience (AlSayyad 2009). In this sense, Walter Benjamin (2003 [1935–1939]) first argued that cinema is the medium that best corresponds to modern urban perception: an entertainment or distraction (*Zerstreuung*) which embodies a specific sensibility and, through 'tactical reception', breeds and reinforces certain urban habits. Cinema changes perception just like the city does. If the city is cinematic, simultaneously cinema is a deeply urban medium – it is imbued in urban culture. Ultimately, in Benjamin's view, urbanites enjoyed cinema as a homeopathic shock that enabled them to recover from the fluster of urban vision in motion.

Urban *aisthesis*

> She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she

> always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. (Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*)
>
> Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. (Paul Auster, *City of Glass*)

Urban perception or *aisthesis* is cinematic and fragmentary. German social theorists Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer shared this fundamental insight, describing the modern metropolis as sensorially dense, powerful, shocking. As highlighted by David Frisby (2001) and Stéphane Füzesséry and Philippe Simay (2008), Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer provide us with a deeply sensorialised theory of social experience. Of course, much has been written about the alleged dominance of the visual in the city and it would not make much sense to reiterate the argument for its own sake. What I am interested in analysing here is not so much the cultural impact of such a dominance of the visual as the properly epistemological consequences of conceptualising the urban environment as a *lieu* of visibility thresholds. As we shall see, such a relational conception is not limited to the key concern of early urban theorists of the metropolis, that is, the phenomenological experience of the city. On the contrary, a relational view on visibility also spans the ecological prolongations of the phenomenal *plenum*.

The city is motilisation visibilised as much as it is visibility motilised. The urban surface becomes a new immediate, meaningful anthropological space. The inception of Simmel's (1950[1903]) reflection on these topics lies precisely in the excavation of such 'surfaces of sociality'. Just as for other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelists, for Simmel sight is the most excited sense in urban life, in that cities are characterised by a rapid accumulation of changing images: the city hypertrophies the eye to the detriment of the other senses. Seeing is intertwined with stimulation and restlessness, given that seeing without understanding definitely leaves one more tired than understanding without seeing. City life thus shapes its own peculiar socio-psychological type, a personality that is defined by reaction and adaptation to the intensification of all sorts of stimulations. Here, we find the image of a metropolis that is put into a state of vibration by chains of shocks

that incessantly cut across it. Notably, such a Simmelian idea of urban shocks is later widely echoed, including in Freud's (1920) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Half a century later we find a biologist, Henri Laborit (1971), who attempted to found a discipline he called 'aggressology', which would have been devoted to the study of the impact of urban shocks upon humans.

In this context, gazing and, above all, glancing acquire a crucial role in the navigation of city space. Indeed, the 'flow' that marks the life in the streets makes staring impossible: the city dweller must develop a competence in watching while 'keeping the flow'. Also, as we observed in Chapter 5, it is improper to stare at people as this might be received as intrusive behaviour. Consequently, there is an issue of the *rhythms of visibility* in the city. Simmel insisted upon the sociological function of immediate reciprocal eye-to-eye contact. Our gaze is an essential tool of knowledge, but this same field of gazes, as a field of intervisibilities, makes us constantly visible to the others. Recognition is in most cases of a categorical type. In one passage, for instance, Benjamin describes two fundamental human figures: the shopkeeper, the public citizen par excellence indifferent to being seen, and the collector, the private buyer intent on hiding the object with himself, to transform it from a commodity into a personal fetish which would enable him to disappear. Because of the incompleteness of categorical recognition, the urban glance is the site of a wide range of feelings, so wide that it is doomed to remain always ambiguous. What is in a gaze: complicity, threat, disgust or seduction ... ? Perhaps, ambiguity is not even enough to capture what is at stake here. At first, the eye-to-eye contact seems to be the most intimate and personal type of contact. But, especially in the crowd, the glance is also always very close to being impersonal and deindividuated. So, for instance, Edgar Allan Poe's 'man of the crowd' is almost at the edge of himself: he is on the verge of becoming a mere crowd detector. Actually, here is where we have a phenomenal experience which is at the same time an ecological event.

The visible is the field in which city and subject mutually interpenetrate and constitute each other. Of course, we have arrived *in limine* at the figure of the *flâneur* and the space of the arcades. Benjamin (1999[1927–1940]) collected thousands of pages of material for his unfinished *Passagenwerk*, a project in which he delved into the peculiar, mixed, hypnotic and oneiric nature of the urban architecture of the glass-roofed shopping arcade, 'the most important architecture of the nineteenth century'. It is a project in which, as is crucially

recounted by Buck-Morss (1989), the natural history of the fossil, the mythic history of the fetish, the mythic nature of the wish image and the historical nature of the ruin encounter each other. Because of the deep mutual interpenetrations of architecture and the subject, the human types inhabiting the arcades mirror the hybrid nature of in-betweenness that characterises these architectures: prototypes of the shopping mall and 'original temples of commodity capitalism', the passages were at the same time for Benjamin places protected against noise and the weather, separated from the ordinary and the prosaic: places in which the distinction between inside and outside, between daytime and night, became uncertain – enigmatic places in which to rethink or recast the modern urban human figure. Like the architectural *passage*, the *flâneur* is in a state of transit and receptivity to urban visibilities.

Although often criticised as a male bourgeois loiterer, whose movements in the streets are ultimately dictated by the pursuit of voyeurism, adventure, entertainment and pleasure (e.g., Bruno 1993), the *flâneur* should not be seen in this way, at least, not primarily – and not simply, because in fact Benjamin insists on the ascetic qualities of the *flâneur* who walks all day without stopping and without even eating. In my view, seeing in the *flâneur* only a psychosocial type means missing its real theoretical import. The *flâneur* is not a person but a diagram of affections, a recorder of the territorialities, combinations, variations and stratifications in the urban environment. It is a script of everyday urban experience dictated by stimuli on the ground, strained between those two contradictory – both 'sick' – tendencies that are *hyperaesthesia* on the one hand and *anaesthesia* on the other. As a moment of urban sociality, the *flâneur* is a peculiarly urban visibility regime that takes place in a context of public circulation, and in a state of tension between the necessity of reacting to ever-changing stimulations and the hollowing out of personal experiences.

There are some ecological similarities but also a fundamental difference between the *flâneur* and money. As described by Simmel (1900), the impersonality, abstractness and calculability of money as the universal medium of exchange dominates city life. As soon as money substitutes the unique goods produced by craftsmen (and craftswomen!), industrial production becomes anonymous and invisible to citizens 'in the street'. In other words, the reciprocal invisibility between producer and consumer is due to an increased number of intermediate passages in the production chain. Monetary economy, which is essentially symbolic, mobilises goods and allows for large numbers

of transactions to take place very rapidly. Hence, we get the restlessness of modern urban life, and the acceleration of speeds and tempos. The theme of alienation, which begins with Marx in the sphere of production, extends with Simmel to the streets. As later described by Elias Canetti (1999) in his memoirs, money – especially as revealed in the condition of inflation – is a crowd state. In Poe, Baudelaire and Marx, as observed by Benjamin, the crowd assumes the coloration of the demonic. All of these dimensions increase the precariousness of urban aisthesis, a precariousness that can be summarised, following the crucial observations by Joseph (1984: 64), as being composed of: the *effects of motility*, the *fluctuations of opinions* and the *segmentation of situated interaction* – to which we should now add a fourth ingredient, the *circulation of money*.

The *flâneur* is the anthropological reaction to this precariousness of the experience of money and the volatility of urban aisthesis. The *flâneur* is not so much a 'man in the crowd', as it is a reagent that illuminates the crowd as a multiplicity, a precarious composition, that is, the urban aisthesis. While for Poe and Baudelaire the issue at stake in the crowd was mainly aesthetic and affective (how to give a soul to the crowd), for Marx and Engels, as well as later for figures such as Le Bon, it became explicitly political (how to forge the crowd). To these dimensions, Benjamin added the ethical one (how to be in the crowd). Throughout all of these reflections, I think, there lurks the ultimate question, which is one of social epistemology: what is the constitution of urban aisthesis? Visibility is everywhere an element of sensibility, the element where *percipiens* and *perceptum* coexist.

Streets as strata

The precariousness of urban aisthesis, at the intersection between motilisation and visibility, ultimately leads to the discovery of the third dimension: depth. The city is not only a place of motility but also of stratification. Perhaps, to recognise the work of stratification, it is not even necessary to endorse Spengler's (1926 [1918]) dictum that history is an urban invention. In an image that may not yet have been sufficiently analysed, Benjamin speaks of urban crowd as a 'veil'. What does it mean that the crowd is the veil through which the *flâneur* sees the city? What kind of perception of the environment are we confronting here? What kind of intervisibility exists in a crowd? A crowd, we have argued, is neither a subject nor an object. A crowd is a multiplicity in a state of thriving and indistinction; it is a population *in vivo*. Of course, the thresholds of crowd states are relative to an assumed point of

view and they can be acted upon through techniques. Action upon a multiplicity is essentially action from the outside: for instance, architecture can be, and historically has been, designed to manage crowds. As such, architecture is one out of many different techniques developed to break down the crowd. Foucault called this endeavour to break down confused multiplicities and turn them into more manageable pieces, such as individual bodies, 'discipline'. It is not by chance, then, that Foucault's analysis of enclosed institutions began by considering the architectural project of the panopticon.

There is another important consequence of a thriving state. The urban event occurs in the mode of the 'problematic': in other words, the intelligibility of the city is problematic. Because different events, phenomena and processes unfold at different degrees of visibility, the problem of reading the city emerges as the problem of deciphering and investigating it (Frisby 2001). As in Paul Auster's novels, the city is a city of signs. These signs are often mere hints, but sometimes they can be blood stains. Similarly, the 'pearl diver', as Hannah Arendt called Benjamin in her 1968 essay, kept on puzzling about the intricate, multiple and floating relationships between the city, history, modernity, change, vision and imagination. Here, the 'werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness' (one of Benjamin's aliases for the *flâneur*) behaves as an urban excavator. Excavation presupposes superposition, like the stratification of different times in every single place. Perhaps, the prototypical superposition analysed by Benjamin is the one between the street and the interior, between outdoor and indoor. The street is where superpositions and overlays become most complex. From this point of view, Simmel's and Benjmain's interest in the topic of the street, as well as that of other early sociologists, is understandable. The street is the most visible urban environment. As a social space endowed with its dynamics, organisation, norms and representations (Fyfe 1998), the street entails an entry threshold (one can always be charged with 'unruly behaviour' and removed from the street), yet such thresholds are very low compared to other social spaces like shops, offices and factories.

The street represents an essential testing point for publicness. Visibilities in the street are problematic when they are set to test civilised and uncivilised behaviour. To decide what is 'in place' and what is 'out of place' (Cresswell 1996) in a place like the street entails a street-level politics of visibility. The example of eating in the street can be helpful. In a vehement pamphlet against eating in the street, the conservative intellectual Leon Kass (1994) paralleled that to animal-like

behaviour. For Kass, public eating is out of place and should be regarded as a shameful and embarrassing spectacle, etc. At first, one might suspect a class prejudice here, because the urban poor are those who perform most of their activities on the street. However, there is also a paradox, which speaks more to the psychoanalytic side of this *pruderie*: indeed, according to Kass the most obscene form of public eating is not an activity that characterises the poor, but rather one that accompanies the typical middle-class *promenade*, namely licking an ice cream.

Similar moralistic controversies can be better understood through Benjamin's notion of porosity, which concerns the reciprocal articulation of internal and external spaces and their respective visibility. The life of a city like Naples, Benjamin (1979[1929–1937]: 174) observes, reflects its architecture: both are 'dispersed, porous and commingled'. Here, porosity inheres in a relational space-time structure of the city, where intermediary and mediating places emerge. These pores are passages, or, in Simmel's (1994[1909]) words, 'thresholds', zones or junctions that, like pivots, simultaneously connect and separate. In porous urban situations – which should be taken as a phenomenon present to various degrees in every city – spatial and physical elements do not determine perception; rather, they offer it a series of affordances that can be activated, that is, made visible, in interaction. For instance, surprise, desire and memory are modalisations of the gaze which re-articulate stratified visibilities, establishing new lines of discontinuity and new thresholds. The relationship between urban underground cultures and the mainstream can be similarly imagined as a porous zone, whereby underground and counter-cultural practices enact forms of creative resistance, initially conceived of as acts of subversion, which, through a phenomenon the Situationists dubbed '*récuperation*', end up being reintegrated into the mainstream in the commodified form of 'fashion', defusing the critical and subversive qualities of the original project.

The glass and the grand vista

Compared to the medieval city, the modern city enacts a large-scale conquest of visibility. While in the medieval walled settlements, walls were boundaries *of* the city, in the modern age they are turned into boundaries *in* the city. The walls that surrounded medieval towns were walls of protection, aimed at blocking flows. In his classic history of urban culture, Lewis Mumford (1996[1938]) remarked that the capitalist economy overcame medieval restrictions pushing towards an unprecedented

spatial expansion of urban space. As cities deterritorialised and spread in every direction into the mainland, as well as overseas, the walls that surrounded the medieval town centres were demolished both practically and symbolically. The modern boulevards and *prospekts* such as the magnificent boulevard Haussmann in Paris and Nevsky Prospekt in Saint Petersburg are the logical endpoint of this process, through which, as we observed at the beginning of this chapter, the modern city is set in motion. Once removed as boundaries of the city, walls took on the function of separating and segregating devices. Such an enclosing function is present for instance in the late medieval Jewish ghetto and prolongs into modern ghettoes which, while not literally walled, are nonetheless removed from the official urban visibility. Concurrently, since the creation of modern states the appearance of the city – and, more specifically, of the capital city – has been architecturally reshaped according to the imperatives of political celebration. The architecture of urban visibility is thus architecture in the most literal sense, in so far as architecture, together with urban planning and urban design, determines concrete boundaries and flows of visibility.

In this regard, the utopian glass architectures of visionaries like Paul Scheerbart and Moholy-Nagy exhibit a singular convergence between technological elements (the new construction materials available since mid nineteenth century) and ideal ones (the desire to imagine a new form of life for the mass society). In particular, Moholy-Nagy (1947: 62) identified a revolutionary potential in glass architecture precisely because it made it impossible to separate the inside of a building from the outside: in his view, by eliminating the traditional habitative distinction between interior and exterior, transparency would have given rise to new ways of seeing the world and a new horizon by which the polity could be imagined. Not dissimilar ideas can be found in the 'unitary urbanism' theorised by the Situationists in the 1950s. In the late eighteenth century, the architectural production of relations of transparency had already been imagined by architects such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, who deemed it central to the human and social reforming project of the Enlightenment (Vidler 1990). Ledoux understood that intervisibility can be arranged in either a hierarchical or, conversely, a symmetrical way, and that these different ways of organising it correspond to different types of projected human interaction.

As hinted above, in the twentieth century Le Corbusier and other CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) architects envisaged a dream of transparency of urban space as a means to exert control

upon it and organise it in a 'rational' and 'functional' way. While such control was imaged by the French modernist architect as fostering social emancipation, the step from utopia to dystopia is always short: actually, utopia and dystopia are the same phenomenon observed from different perspectives. So, in Eugene Zamyatin's novel *We* (1920), One State, the city of the future where the novel is set, is a city of glass where walls are transparent in order to ensure that everybody is constantly visible, except – in a typical instance of *arcana imperii* – the Well-Doer (or Great Benefactor), who governs without being seen. Interestingly, in One State highly visible exemplary, expressive punishment coexists with invisible, 'dull' disciplinary practices. The novel was prescient, for this is precisely what we find in the totalitarian city, whether fascist, national-socialist or Stalinist. Let us remember that large urban regeneration projects are not born neo-liberal, they are born totalitarian. In the Italian case, for instance, from 1927 Rome was subject to extensive clearances, with swathes of old buildings being demolished, their inhabitants evicted and the majestic Via dei Fori Imperiali built in their place (Atkinson 1998: 20). The fascist parade assumed a central function of spectacular propaganda, and urban propaganda was massively employed, for instance in the 1934 plebiscite (Ghirardo 1996). On this and other occasions, the fascist regime revived, and tailored upon the Duce's figure, the Renaissance tradition of the *apparati effimeri*, temporary installations and triumphal arches constructed in honour of the occasion. Similar strategies were enthusiastically adopted in planning new towns, coupled with a nationalist policy of demographic increase (Caprotti 2007).

Similarly, Hitler and his architect Albert Speer had long conversations about how the future architecture of the Third Reich would physically incarnate the ambitions of the national-socialist political regime. Destruction of cities (not simply through urban projects but eventually through the war) and construction were to be adjacent if not entangled with each other: new buildings had to be erected for 'crowd cults' that enabled crowds to be reassembled and repeated. Through a series of finely calculated spatial arrangements, in huge stadiums the crowd doubles itself, while in the main streets it is slowly set in motion, to parade or march (Canetti 1979[1976]). Perhaps then, it is not by chance that in the early post-World War Two conference 'Building dwelling thinking', Martin Heidegger (1951) himself associated architecture with dictatorial rule. After the war, the philosopher of the Black Forest – now no longer a Nazi, but anti-urban in mood

as always – decried spectacular architectural devices, contrasting to them a type of building which was more modest and had at its core the practice of dwelling.

Punctuation

> As the cab drove across O'Connell Bridge Miss O'Callaghan said:
>
> – They say you never cross O'Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse.
>
> – I see a white man this time, said Gabriel.
>
> – Where? asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy.
>
> Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand.
>
> – Good-night, Dan, he said gaily. (James Joyce, *The Dead*)

If urban experience is an experience in motion, there are nonetheless all sorts of discontinuities in a cityscape. Some of these discontinuities function as punctuation marks in the landscape. For instance, monuments are among these punctuation marks, and illustrate how they function as visibility devices. The term 'monument' derives from the Latin verb *admŏnĕo, -ēre*, 'to admonish'; as such, the monument is the visible inscription of a public mnemonics. Monuments are landmarks which are projected in order to be looked at. They usually function as attractors to be seen at a distance; sometimes, they also allow the possibility of entering them and enjoying panoramic sightseeing vantage points for contemplating the city. A particularly interesting project for a monument to be built in London for the 2012 Olympics is called *The Cloud* and represents at best the visibility diagram of the new media, a 'tribute to a digital age of bits and atoms'. In a sense, it represents the coming age of interactive 'monuments 2.0'. Yet the function of punctuation remains essential. Visibility analysis, which was originally a concern of military science and is now used in landscape and urban planning, addresses, in a sense, precisely the measurement of the effects of punctuation. In visibility analysis, the notion of 'viewshed' is used to indicate a region of intervisibility, that is, the extent of an area that is visible from a fixed vantage point, or viewpoint (Rana

2003). A viewshed is shaped as a cone or a series of cones that stem from the viewpoint and whose extremities are varying because they depend on the aspect of the terrain. The cone's edges are lines of sight, that is, lines that connect the observation point to the observed region and discriminate between visible and invisible regions. What planners are most interested in is not only the distinction between visible and invisible zones (the shape of the viewshed) but also the assessment of visual dominance.

The visual dominance of a building or another object in the landscape corresponds to the kind of impact that a building has in terms of visibility – in other words, how effectively it punctuates the landscape. The various forms of landscape punctuation mark have a crucial impact on the experience of navigating and perceiving the city and its vistas. In respect of this, Kevin Lynch (1960) – a figure who, from a certain point of view, did for architecture what Charles Wright Mills did for sociology – identified a quality in the city which he called indifferently 'legibility' or 'visibility'. A cityscape is legible-visible if the organisation of its parts can be recognised as forming a coherent pattern. Legibility-visibility depends on the opportunity given to the observer to use the punctuation marks in the landscape to organise his/her experience of movement. For Lynch, the image of the city is the result of a two-way process between the observer and his/her environment. The urban environment, as already remarked, is filled with affordances which suggest a number of possible relationships, but such possibilities need to be activated and rendered meaningful by the observer to achieve certain practical aims. When the outcome amounts to a distinctive, vivid and powerful set of features, the city is, according to Lynch, imageable, or visible. A highly imageable city is much more inviting and pleasurable for the observer than a moderately imageable one, and it is correspondingly more sensorially engaging and gratifying.

It is doubtful – and contested – whether twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century high-rises and skyscraper constructions made cities more imageable or not. Certainly, besides its obvious economic meaning, the vertical race has been a contest for visibility and for the imposition of landmarks, often interpreted as trademarks. The era of towers, inaugurated by Eiffel, clearly pushed the activity of punctuation towards extreme spectacularisation. But urban spectacle through punctuation also includes other forms. For instance, the comparative reflection by Tony Bennett (1995) on museums and amusement parks highlighted the role of these architectures as crowd attractors and pacifiers. More

diffusely, the contemporary city is increasingly covered with screens, whereby the walls of stations, metros and similar places of transit and high traffic become surfaces of projection that rhythmically claim public attention. Admittedly, these are minor forms of punctuation mark, yet they are notable for their proliferation and capillarity. Display for advertising purposes is the epitome of a secularised visibility. The historical antecedent of contemporary screens was outdoor billboard advertising, which struck and elicited important observations from Walter Benjamin and Sergei Eisenstein. While the German intellectual famously evoked the larger than life effect of billboards selling 'toothpaste for giants', the Russian director pointed out the loss of all sense of proportion and realistic depth created by electric advertising (Eisenstein 1942). Neon outlines became famous punctuators of the city in novels and movies, and the red light of neon signs reflected in a 'fiery pool' on the asphalt was described by Benjamin (1979[1929–1937]) as what made advertisement 'so superior' to all criticism.

Governing space

Not only is urban space stratified and punctuated, it is also partitioned. The literature on the spaces of flows has often overlooked the fact that wherever an urban boundary is passed through, it does not mean at all that that boundary is removed; quite the contrary, it testifies to its enduring existence. Michel Foucault explored various facets of this boundary-flow duality. In his study on disciplinary rationality (Foucault 1977: 172) he remarked that disciplinary architecture was not built to be observed, but to make observable those who were to be kept inside it. Concurrently, the wall of the enclosed institution became a 'familiar presence' in the city – and, in the sense we have adopted above, almost a monument ('admonishment'). Later, in his study on the birth of bio-politics, Foucault (2004b[1978–1979]) carried out an extensive investigation into how the government of events in urban spaces is enacted. He described it as a type of action on the environment rather than on bodies or conduct. One of his most important points was that liberalism, insisting upon the necessity of circulation of flows of goods, is not the opposite of government; instead, it is a precise governmental rationality, one that is not focused on issuing direct orders or norms but rather on controlling aggregate trends and establishing margins within which events may take place in the city.

Today, a situation of multiplication of urban enclosures is consolidating. Since the 1970s new spatial divisions within cities have been

emerging (Marcuse and van Kempen 2000). A pattern of separate residential and productive clusters, of protective citadels and militarised consumption areas, shapes the geography of the 'partitioned city' (Marcuse 1995). In its most extreme forms this is a dual city (Caldeira 2001), which rigidly sets as opposites, on the one hand, a new urban poverty abandoned to itself and 'shut off' from the advantages of urban life and, on the other, the global business of finance capital to be protected with military means. In both cases, the context is that of the neoliberal city (Harvey 2007; 2008), in which the Lefebvrian 'right to the city' is deeply compromised by the spatial action of private corporate interests (Marcuse 2009). Social stratification becomes a stratification of mobilities, in which each mobility correlates to a series of immobilities, so that these sorted and differentiated immobilities organise and regulate the partitioning of the city. While urban society is increasingly structured through networks, a massive 'databaseisation' (Urry 2007) of networked individuals takes place.

A segregated city is also a city of cut off visibilities, hampered or incapacitated perception. For instance, Northern American suburbanisation stands out as a model of retreatist and anti-political lifestyle, characterised by anxiety and paranoia. As already noted by Virilio (1993[1976]), the application of sanitary ideology is functional to the enactment of the triple process of segregation, ghettoisation and suburbanisation. Such a process is also a perceptual process and a politics of visibility, whereby the *cloisonnement* of space corresponds to the production of dead zones and other territories to be hidden or even denied (Franck and Stevens 2006). Lefebvre (1996) famously described the urban form as a phenomenon that is physical, psychological and social at the same time. The urban form consists of the simultaneity of events and their perception, a zone of convergence and indistinction between *percipiens* and the *perceptum*. I have tried to show that the characteristics of concentration and encounter that define the urban form are also the elected object of the government of space. This confirms our initial claim that urban machines as ecologies of assemblages and montages cannot be analysed independently from the phenomenology of encounters that take place in local *plena*. Urban stratification, punctuation and partitioning are all ecological *and* phenomenological events of visibility.

The urban infravisible

Before concluding, we should turn to the specific relationship that is forged between the visible and the invisible in the city. Above, we

observed that discipline, as conceptualised by Foucault, is a sort of anti-spectacle. Yet there is another opposite to the visibility of spectacle, namely the invisibility of urban infrastructures. Among classic urban theorists, Lewis Mumford (1996[1938]) used to call the underground sewage system 'the invisible city'. Sewers are but one example of a number of prosaic, networked infrastructures, upon which cities rely so heavily. Graham and Marvin (2001) have explored in detail the form of this 'splintering urbanism', which is built and managed largely invisibly but which provides essential socio-technical support to urban existence. For most city inhabitants, networked infrastructures are like black boxes which are never unpacked. Infrastructures are managed technocratically by a few specialised professionals in invisible 'calculation centres' (Latour and Hermant 1998), each of which selectively focuses on its single domain of competence (for instance, water pipes, electric wires, etc.). Each of these invisible networks is heterogeneous, as it spans control rooms, administrative offices and manual workers performing maintenance; yet it remains distinct from other parallel networks, specialised in a different 'selective gaze' on the city. Latour and Hermant define them as 'oligopticons', because rather than seeing everything they actually focus on a very small range of phenomena.

Networked infrastructures also sustain an invisible infusion of software and computing devices into contemporary urban space. Nigel Thrift (2005) has argued that wherever we go we are increasingly not only assisted, but also almost directed, by software. This entails an increasing and perhaps unprecedented mediatisation of the city. For Thrift, it becomes almost impossible to get lost or to be 'out of touch'. As hinted in Chapter 5, Stephen Graham (2005) has defined these spaces 'software-sorted geographies'. Far from being mere personal empowering tools, ubiquitous and pervasive computing devices are part of the new governmental morphology of the contemporary city. Increasingly, urban space is disseminated with fixed and mobile devices that are connected in a network and work incessantly to detect events and subjects in specific local contexts, classify and sort them according to the programmed instructions in their operating codes and, whenever necessary, to the relevant information stored in central databases.

After the medieval walled settlements and the urban wall of the enclosed institution, a further trend towards pluralisation and dispersal of walls takes place. It is a process which can be understood through the Foucaultian notion of 'capillarisation' of power. New forms of segregation emerge, based on networked infrastructures that manage individual access to certain places. Walls become virtual: they

are invisible, pluralised and potentially everywhere. Once the technological infrastructure is implemented, it takes no more than an instant to actualise an ad hoc wall. A double invisibility can be highlighted in this process: first, as just said, the performance of computing systems is encoded in their software, which users can access only through external interfaces but cannot question beyond the possibilities made available to them by the interface itself. Second, in most cases computing processes are not in the foreground, instead, they are subsidiary to other tasks; consequently, they are mixed and merged within larger processes, thus passing completely unnoticed.

The extensiveness and embeddedness of computational processes also mean invisibility, which in turn means reliance and dependence. Not only do we rely on the functioning of these systems, but we also depend upon their correct functioning. Graham and Thrift (2007) have drawn attention to the activity of maintenance as invisible but crucial work that allows infrastructures to work and perform correctly. In a sense, the invisibility of infrastructures represents the immotility that makes motilities possible. However, routinary motilities, too, can easily become invisible. In this sense, knowledge can play a paradoxical role here. On the one hand, knowledge enables the visibilisation of sites and subjects, on the other, the same knowledge, in so far as it becomes implicit and pre-packed, can produce an inability to see – just as in the invisible city of Phyllis described by Italo Calvino, which becomes visible only to the eye that is able to revert expertise into inexperience, catching the city 'by surprise'.

The peculiar politics of visibility in the contemporary city has an important impact upon the public domain. As observed in Chapter 5, the distinction between a city's public and private spaces archetypically used to correspond to a distinction between visible public spaces and invisible private spaces, due to a different degree of accessibility of those spaces. Today, spatial partitioning also corresponds to a polarisation between supravisibility and infravisibility or invisibility. On the one hand, public areas become subjected to intense surveillance and/or heavy policing, while on the other the infrastructures, including informational infrastructures and calculation centres recede into invisibility and operate infrapolitically. While Amin and Thrift have claimed the priority of invisible, networked, disseminated infrastructural assemblages over the immediate phenomenological experience of the city, I have argued that this relationship should not be thought of as dialectical, but rather as a constant copresence in a distributed field of visibilities. The encounter, or event, can be engineered, but can

never be fully predetermined: it can only be calculated within a certain range of variations in given dimensions. But such a calculation will never exhaust the full ecology of the *plenum* of the here-and-now – not only because calculations are approximated, but above all because calculations are referred to a small number of predetermined dimensions, while the event qua phenomenological here-and-now always contains more than what is taking place: it contains the encounter as a potency which can only be charted on that element of sensibility which is visibility itself.

In conclusion, in this chapter we have seen how motility, stratification, punctuation and partitioning generate urban visibilities. The spatial, political and cultural materiality of cities is shaped in this sensible field of visibilities which, in a sense, represents its proper 'flesh'. Technological infrastructures and motilised visions thus operate within the same social territory. The cityscape can be appreciated as a territory of visibilities that are governmental but are also always contested and refuted. Planning the city means planning new diagrams of visibility, while reclaiming the city means setting the visible boundaries of the public domain.

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