Introduction

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This book collects ten contributions from urban scholars pivoted around the notion of 'interstice', or – as we might tentatively call it – in-between space. To our mind, the current interest in this notion is grounded in some general considerations emerging in the field of urban studies at the beginning of an announced *urban century*. For some time now, social scientists, including geographers, economists, sociologists and anthropologists, have been questioning classical models of urban growth, such as for instance the centre/periphery model. It has been argued that both phenomena of urban expansion – such as urban sprawl and the formation of polycentric urban regions – and phenomena related to new forms of land use – including processes as diverse as enclavism, gated communities, new media urbanism, 'splintering' urbanism, capsularized dwelling, slumification, panic-city, squatter evictions and the militarization of urban space – challenge most classic models employed to understand the city.

In particular, a cleavage becomes increasingly evident: it is the current cleavage between two processes that could be termed, respectively, the *urbanization of territory* and the *territorialization of the city*. While urbanized territory corresponds to a territory that is infrastructurally as well as structurally equipped with a wide array of urban devices for communication and control – ranging from street signs to information technologies and the infusion of software into urban spaces and objects – the territorial city seems to evoke a wider, and arguably more complex, aspiration towards a *new urbanity* or a *new civility*.

On the one hand, the process of *urbanization of territory* has been first identified by Michel Foucault (2004/1978) in his studies on the emergence of a modern government of the population – in particular where he examined the 'sciences of police' that appeared in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, later to be developed into more specialized 'apparatuses of security' and control. On the other hand, the notion of *urbanity* as tied to a specifically *urban* culture has been described in classic works by Jane Jacobs, Erving Goffman and Richard Sennett as a capacity to positively interact with strangers in public. Following the appreciation of 'distance' as a key feature of democratic public space expressed by Hannah Arendt, Sennett (1977: 264) characterized urban civility as an ability that consists of 'treating others as though they were strangers and forging a social bond upon that social distance'. Compared to that classic form of civility – and in measure proportional to the reach of urbanized territoriality – today's new urbanity faces a number of major challenges: the increasing dispersal of

public space (see e.g. Amin 2008), and what Sloterdijk (2005: 543) has called the 'asynodic constitution' of contemporary society. At present, the contours of such new urbanity are far from clarified or settled; what is certain is that classic urbanity has been fundamentally reshaped by the spatial, technical and social process of the extensive territorialization of the city.

Into the interstice

In this context, we believe the notion of urban interstice might prove useful. To begin with, to speak of an in-between or interstitial space clearly means to go beyond the centre/periphery dichotomy, the core/margin dichotomy or even the city/suburb pseudo-dichotomy. As King and Dovey (this volume, Chapter 10) argue, 'the metropolis [itself] is always interstitial between the global and the indigenous'. Interstices exist – and come to exist – everywhere in the city and its territory. If so, how do we recognize them? The fact that a certain space is indicated or enacted as a space 'in-between' others presupposes that it is regarded as somehow *minoritarian* vis à vis other spaces that surround or encircle it. The interstice is a 'small space': far from being a merely extensive notion, such smallness inherently signifies a power issue. In other words, 'in-between-ness' refers to the fact of being surrounded by other spaces that are either more institutionalized, and therefore economically and legally powerful, or endowed with a stronger identity, and therefore more recognizable or typical.

Traditionally, interstices have been associated with wastelands and leftover spaces, generated as by-products of urban planning, i.e. as unplanned margins that result *a fortiori*, after a planned action has unfolded on an urban territory (Edensor 2005). Interstices are thus imagined essentially as vacant lots, *terrains vagues* or decaying ruins. While this is certainly the case, we also suggest that such an image does not exhaust the whole extent of the notion of interstitiality. Indeed, an additional complication is due to the fact that in the contemporary city it becomes increasingly difficult to establish a clear and univocal *Gestalt*: what is to count as the foreground shape of the city, and what else as its shapeless – hence, interstitial – background? The complexities generated by the extensive urbanization of territory and the proliferation of criss-crossing plans on the territory carried on by different agencies and actors make it difficult to neatly separate foreground and background phenomena: our very observational point of view is called into question. An enriched observation of the processes of territorial production, stabilization and transformation is required – a veritable territoriology (Brighenti 2010a). As reminded by both Lévesque (this volume, Chapter 2) and King and Dovey (this volume, Chapter 10), rather than a mere gap in the urban fabric, the interstice is in fact an active component. From this perspective, interstitial territorialities can only be appreciated by taking into account the dynamics of power and resistance, of fluidity and boundedness, of mobilities and moorings, of smoothness and striatedness that occur in the contemporary city. It is in a classic

passage from Deleuze and Guattari that we can locate the essential coordinates of such a puzzle:

> In contrast to the sea, the city is the striated space par excellence; the sea is a smooth space fundamentally open to striation, and the city is the force of striation that reimparts [*redonnerait*; literally 'would give back'] smooth space, puts it back into operation everywhere, on earth and in the other elements, outside but also inside itself. The smooth spaces arising from the city are not only those of worldwide organization, but also of a counterattack combining the smooth and the holey and turning back against the town: sprawling, temporary, shifting shantytowns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, to which the striations of money, work, or housing are no longer even relevant. An explosive misery secreted by the city, and corresponding to Thorn's mathematical formula: 'retroactive smoothing.' Condensed force, the potential for counterattack? (Deleuze and Guattari 1987[1980]: 481)

Thus formulated, the issue is clearly a political one: city government represents a force of striation which is resisted and opposed by two fundamentally different forces of smoothness: capitalist large (planetary) organizations, on the one hand, and minority populations (the 'explosive misery') living in urban interstices, on the other. Yet, simultaneously, the issue also looms larger than the – albeit certainly real and dramatic – opposition between social actors with their respective 'material and ideal interests', to use a Weberian category. Rather, what Deleuze and Guattari also illustrate is the functioning and the dynamic production of *material spatial logics*. The city is a force of striation – i.e. of planning, *quadrillage*, urbanization of territory – that by its very functioning constantly reintroduces smoothness in the space thus created: indeterminacy, ambiguity of location, a number folds and underground paths in the urban territory.

While the city colonizes territory through acts of spatial repartition, it also creates within itself a space of distributions and trajectories. Such a process is anything but arcane. In fact, it can be easily observed today. Indeed, the trend towards larger-scale urban planning – for instance through iconic territorial and architectural intervention –inherently produces larger interstices. From an old modernist unsophisticated functionalist viewpoint, interstitiality equates to emptiness. However, emptiness also means possibility – at the very least, some fresh air to breathe that flows through the otherwise asphyxiating landscape of the corporate city. Thus, the interstice could also be observed as an involuntary side-effect of the spatial production of atmospheres (Sloterdijk 2005): whenever a plurality of pressurized, air-conditioned and immunized bubbles are added side by side, a foam is created. The co-isolation and co-fragility which characterize the structure of the foam essentially amounts to the emergence – albeit unwilling – of an under-determination: an urban interstice.

The interstice as urban morphology and urban event

Yet, in our view, the notion of interstice cannot be thoroughly reduced to its morphological characters only. Identifying two general points of view on interstices might help clarifying what is at stake. The first point of view is an essentially *structuralist* one: it regards the interstice as a leftover space, what remains after a single, central planning process, or between two heterogeneous and discontinuous plans. The second point of view is, by contrast, event-oriented or *evental*: from this second perspective, the interstice is to be regarded as the outcome of a composition of interactions and affections among a multiplicity of actors that coexist within a given spatial situation. The second perspective adds, to a realistic – and therefore necessary – consideration of power relations, a genealogical point of view that attends all the minute accidents that eventually constitute the specific atmosphere – understood as both ambience and pressure – of a given place.

Adding *movement* to our understanding of the interstice is what shifts us from the first to the second perspective. The type of urban exploration carried out by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s (Benjamin 1999), as well as the one practised by the Situationists in the 1950s (Situationist International 1958), enacted a type of movement capable of plumbing the uncertain, ill-defined, crepuscular and metamorphic states of urban territories. *Flânerie* and *dérive* are simultaneously aesthetic, cultural and political practices. The spirit of such observers on the move has been inherited by a number of contemporary interstitial explorers, such as for instance Stalker/osservatorio nomade and their urban trekkings across the city of Rome (Careri 2002). When compared to the seemingly stable territories of the urban built environment, *flânerie* and *derive* imply a degree of deterritorialization and the initiation to a more fluid spatiality created by encounters in loose space and their ensuing events.

Overall, our argument is that it is only by taking the evental point of view seriously that we can begin to recognize the simple fact that interstices *cannot be known in advance*: the interstice is not simply a physical place, but very much a phenomenon 'on the ground', a 'happening', a 'combination' or an 'encounter'. This is the reason why studying interstices as mere leftover urban spaces is not enough: interstices result from the actualization of a series of environmental affordances (an expressive potential, a reservoir that is inherent in certain zones) in the context of a phenomenologically relevant encounter (an interactional framework) that unfolds in a given *meaningful spatial materiality* (a specific work on the materials that make the city). Following Mattias Kärrholm (this volume, Chapter 7), interstices 'can be found or produced at any place' and time. They can be usefully conceptualized as a form of 'spatial production through territorial transformation'. Consequently, the task of observing and interpreting in-between spaces requires both historical and territorial reconstruction of such spaces, and an *in situ* exploration through which the researcher can make sense of the events and the encounters (certainly, not always 'good' encounters) that contribute to the creation of an interstice. It is from a similar perspective that

in his case study on pier 84 in Manhattan, Tonnelat (this volume, Chapter 8) distinguishes the 'institutional career' of a place from its 'experiential career'; and it is from this perspective that I (this volume, Chapter 9) have carried out an extensive empirical investigation of an Alpine suburb as a peculiar contact zone in the urban fringe.

The in-between-ness of minoritarian spaces refers, as we have remarked above, to the fact that they are surrounded by other more institutionalized spaces. Most importantly, however, the way in which such 'being surrounded' takes place in practice makes interstices more or less liveable, more enclave-like or more threshold-like (on these two notions, see respectively Caldeira (2001) and Stavrides (2011)). As remarked by Lévesque (this volume, Chapter 2) the attempt to make sense of in-between-ness generates 'a polysemous discursive field oscillating between connection and disjunction': the interstice is sometimes a rapture and sometimes an opening up. At first, interstices are places for minority populations ranging from Roma people to hip hop crews, for urban losers and all those who are for many reasons forced to struggle for their right to the city (Mitchell 2003; Marcuse 2009). In this sense, just as it hosts interstitial spaces, the city also hosts interstitial subjects: it is the case of evicted squatters in North American downtowns (Blomley 2004; this volume, Chapter 1) and the inhabitants of tent cities (Mitchell, this volume, Chapter 3). Here interstitiality corresponds to a form of inhabiting that resists 'sanitization', expulsion and deportation. Mitchell cautions us against any easy-going romantic understanding of interstices, showing that, in fact, they can be places of domination as well. It is thus important to stress that the interstice is a descriptive notion rather than one necessarily laden with positive overtones. Tent cities as interstitial spaces of survival are functional to a neoliberal management of public visibilities and invisibilities: they represent a space where the social outcomes of a disastrous economic model can be conveniently hidden. In a different context, the new retail spaces studies by Kärrholm (2012) illustrate how interstices are appropriated and exploited by marketing and advertisement strategies.

The richness of interstitial encounters is not limited either to the brutal clench of power on specific places and subjects, or to the capitalist logic that tends to exploit all visual ecological niches, though. Issues of visibility and invisibility are always ambiguously played out in between the denial of recognition and the possibility of resistance. So, Kim Dovey (2010) has spoken of the invisibility of informal settlements in South-East Asian cities, which can be marginalizing but also protective (see also King and Dovey, this volume, Chapter 10), while Iain Borden (2001) has analysed urban skaters' performative critique of architecture as a fleeting and nightly activity. In-between spaces are invested with desires and imagined (not imaginary) needs, as a conceptualization of urban mobilities that is attentive to affects (Adey 2009) reveals. Driving in the city provides one such affective, as well as imaginative, experience (Borden, this volume, Chapter 6). Interstitiality as *porosity* – literally, 'possibility of ways' – may therefore suggest an approach to the city that stresses the many spatial modes in which a plurality

of social differences associate, as well as the ways in which they are allowed to associate or prevented from associating. Rather than being unequivocally 'good' or 'bad', positive or problematic, the space in the middle – as Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (this volume, Chapter 4) reminds us – is a space of struggle. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos's radical theorization of spatial justice calls for a notion of justice as inherently spatial, moving beyond merely topographic versions of social justice. Because 'space embodies the violence of being lost, of being uncertain about one's direction … there is no respite from the relentless and simultaneous spatial presence'. Precisely such a recognition could lead us towards a view of spatial justice as 'the movement of taking leave' in order to let the other exist. In this sense, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos insists on the affirmative power of the 'middle', the milieu that cannot be reduced to any sort of 'lack'. As Kärrholm writes, '*place making* always starts in the in-between, in the middle of thing, *in medias res*, or *in mitten drinnen* to use a Yiddish expression'. It is therefore not paradoxical after all to discover – in particular thanks to Adey's (this volume, Chapter 5) exploration – that *interstitial* is also the air that envelops us all. The atmosphere has long been confined to a condition of invisibility, but today, as Adey writes, it can no longer 'really be separated from the apparently more solid and persistent story of the city'.

The aesthetic and politics of urban interstices

With this collection of essays, we invite urban scholars to deploy, refine and test the notion of interstice, putting it to work and developing an ability to move back and forth between the aesthetic and the political dimensions of the territorial city. Specifically, we speak of *aesthetics* to address phenomenological, perceptual, embodied and lived space, and we speak of *politics* to attend the ecology of the socio-material connections imbued with power that form today's urban common world (Brighenti 2010b). Thus, we raise a number of questions and explore them at the theoretical, methodological and ethnographic level:

- How do we conceptualize, discover and describe urban interstices vis à vis the macro-phenomena of planning and economic development that shape the city? How is the interstice related to the partitioning and the zoning of the city, and to its current transformations? Where is the interstice localized? How is its legal status shaped and how does its political significance manifest? What is the relation between flows, networks, boundaries, territories and interstices?
- What is the place and function of these interstitial locales in an ordered and 'disciplined' urban environment? And what is, complementarily, their function in a disordered environment evoked by the notions of 'excess', 'danger' and 'threat'? How do these spaces contribute to the construction of the city, the perception and representation of its spaces?

- What happens in urban interstices? What type of phenomena, events and social interaction do these spaces attract? How are they interpreted, represented and managed by the authorities? Which rhythms, speeds and affects characterize interstitial territories? Which different social subjectivities do they breed? Which new aesthetic styles? Which new orientalist observers?
- How do walls, separations, distances, borders, but also legal, administrative, political and media discourses and boundaries concur in the definition of interstitial areas in the city? And what technical, economic, legal, political and governmental significance do these areas assume as a consequence?
- What kind of relation can we find between alternative and underground street performances/practices, on the hand, and the official/mainstream cultural practices and discourses (official art, advertising, political propaganda, military scenarios) on the other?

Interstices have sometimes been described as a failure of urban development, as lack of a 'healthy' public space or even as the prototype of 'anti-public space' (Chevrier 2011), deserts inhabited only by marginalized people and urban outcasts. From this perspective, interstices represent dangerous contact zones where panhandlers, squeegees, street drunkards, drug addicts and homeless people embody at best the otherwise elusive notion of 'public disorder' propounded by broken windows criminology, albeit an echo of early-twentieth-century Chicago School's notion of 'social disorganization' can be heard. However, Luc Lévesque (2008: 145) has observed that the current transformations of public space are inherently transforming public space as a whole into a veritable 'interstitial and fluctuating constellation'. Interestingly, such transformations are linked to the emergence of new architectures *for* social multiplicities as well as new architectures *of* social multiplicities. Urban network topologies (Graham and Marvin 2001) as well as the need for on-going work maintenance of technical infrastructures (Denis and Pontille 2011) reveal the importance of the interstitial in the contemporary urban process. The number of ways in which new associations and dissociations take place increasingly generate interstitial spaces. Thinking and researching through the notion of interstice might thus provide us with an opportunity to re-image contemporary social multiplicities beyond the classic categories of crowd, mass, nation, population, social group and social actor. As Lévesque (this volume, Chapter 2) argues, 'the nature and diversity of the conceptual field related to the interstitial condition rather seems to resist stable and precise visual characterizations'. Yet this should be seen as a promise for research, rather than a fault of the concept. Indeed, it is precisely in this sense that the aesthetic and material dimensions interweave with the political dimension: in a *politics of visibility*.

    In conclusion, we think that the notion of interstice, and the related study of urban interstitialities, could shed light on the complex relationships between urbanized territory and the territorial city. It could help us advance in the understanding of a range of crucial phenomena that are accompanying the unstable and shifting

relationship between urbanized territory and territorialized city, shaping the forthcoming configurations of urban togetherness – in other words, our common world.

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