

City of Unpleasant Feelings. Stress, Comfort and Animosity in Urban Life

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Abstract. The image of the city as a stressful place is an evergreen topic. In this article we review the imagination of urban stress, starting from Simmel's classic thesis that the modern city is an unavoidably psychic-stimulating environment potentially leading to stimuli overload. City dwellers are then supposed to counter stimuli overload with a series of adaptation strategies. However, the ways in which these phenomena can be conceptualised are varied. Historically, a shift of emphasis seems to have occurred from the classic conceptualisation of hyperaesthesia to the contemporary preoccupations with the design of comfortable atmospheres. Such atmospheres are, in fact, comfort bubbles. In the article we tackle the aspirations and predicaments of such engineered atmospheres. In particular, we build on Sloterdijk's argument that, ultimately, bubbles fail to do away with stress: whereas for Simmel stress anaesthetised urbanites, Sloterdijk has pointed out that, rather, comfort itself stresses them. To better tackle the magmatic stratum of dissatisfaction that seems so coessential to urban life, in the final part of the article we focus on the notion of animosity. We suggest to conceptualise it as a type of disquiet that cannot be reduced to established recognisable interaction formats.

Keywords: Urban Stress; Urban Feelings; Urban Atmospheres; Atmospheric Engineering; Animosity

For here as elsewhere it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man be reflected in his emotional life as comfort. (Simmel 1903)

Actually, it is evident that monuments inspire social wisdom and arouse a veritable awe. The storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of affairs: it is difficult to explain such a crowd movement, except by taking into account the animosity of a people against those monuments who are their real masters. (Bataille 1929)

Introduction

The image of the city as a stressful place is an evergreen topic. Recent research in cognitive psychology seems to reiterate the idea that city life is, quintessentially, stressful life (Abbott 2012). But, what does such an idea really mean? What are its theoretical underpinnings and practical consequences? Which are, in other words, the stakes that follow from conceptualising the urban experience in terms of stress, and even as a permanent quest for getting rid of it? What is comfort and how is it supposed to counter stress? What theoretical alternatives are left to make

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sense of the city of unpleasant feelings? In this piece, we try to unpack the complex imagination about urban stress. Inquiring into the apparent polar opposite of stress, namely comfort, we wish to get a better grasp of the hidden assumptions and the contradictory desiderata which urban theory has somehow – and more or less unwillingly – subscribed to. We propose to dig into a curious circuit of urban hyper-aesthesia and anaesthesia in order to let a third category emerge, which we call *animosity*. Concurrently, we advance the hypothesis that animosity functions as a kind of illicit mediator between the contradictory faces and requirements of the urban world.

To begin with, it is clear that the sensorial, aesthetic dimension of the city encapsulates all the major cultural tensions of modernity. In particular, the tensions between urban anaesthesia and urban hyperaesthesia play a topical role. On the one hand, the process of civilisation, as theorised by Norbert Elias (1939), suggests that the experience of urban space is expected to progressively shift towards anaesthesia. In collaboration with the dictates of hygienism, civilised urban spaces are increasingly sanitised from all excessive sensory manifestations. From this perspective, sterilisation cannot but be a progressive trend, given that the thresholds of what is regarded as excessive tend to lower – suffice to recall, as examples, the increasing intolerance towards behaviour such as smoking and consuming alcohol in public places. On the other hand, however, a push towards sensory excess seems coessential to urban life. Since at least Georg Simmel's 1903 essay on the mental life of urbanites, a classic view holds that sensuous hyper-stimulation in all its faces is what the city always has to offer to its inhabitants. This argument has historically come hand in hand with the realisation that hyperaesthesia represents a major source of stress for city dwellers. So for instance an enhanced sensitivity towards noise and a number of debates around air pollution can be traced back to late 19th century Europe.

On the one hand, the medical and psychological study of neurosis and neurasthenia paved the way towards psychoanalysis and a modern conception of the self as an entity shaped by its dynamic relation to the surrounding milieu (including the human milieu, but not limited to it); on the other, an array of engineering technologies to measure noise were developed while simultaneously political controversies about urban aural nuisance erupted. The beginning of anti-noise and anti-nuisance campaigns can be dated at about this time. In 1908, for instance, the German philosopher Theodor Lessing founded in Hannover the Anti-Noise Society [*Antilärmverein*] under the eloquent banner, 'Culture is evolution toward silence!' (we may gloss silence as anaesthesia). The urban historian Payer (2007) has richly documented the debate on the noisy city that took place in the city of Vienna. The realisation of the ontological impossibility of the coexistence of city and silence has since led to a series of horrified if not hysterical reactions. A constant mourning over the lost silence of the quiet pre-industrial golden age has since become a common refrain. A 1909 quote from Alfred Freiherr von Berger about the disappearance of silence tellingly makes the point: 'What the city dweller calls silence, is a mixture of all sorts of sounds he has become used to; he does not hear them anymore and therefore to him, they represent silence' (quoted in Payer 2007: 778). Despite the urbanite's inattention, such indelible city bustle was charged with inducing sleeplessness and, ultimately, neurasthenia, the prototypical disease of the urban dweller.

Classic Stress – Hyperaesthesia and Retreat

Which are the exact sources of urban stress? In his celebrated essay, Simmel (1903) tackled this issue by focusing on the nexus between sensorial stimulation and psychic activity. In his view, the maintenance of personality entails a constant work of *adjustment* to external forces of the natural and human environment. Humans, Simmel famously argued, are differentiating creatures, or diversity-driven beings [*Unterschiedswesen*], whose consciousness is stimulated by the *difference* between subsequent punctual stimulations [*augenblicklichen Eindruck*]. In other

words, we are affected by differences, and we adjust to circumstances by processing the differences that exists between various incoming stimulations. In the flair of cities, Simmel observed, all sorts of events surrounding the individual consume [*verbrauchen*] a quota of her consciousness [*Bewusstseinsquantum*]. Because what matters is the neat difference between one stimulation and the following one, it is not so much the number or even the intensity of each event that matters but, above all, their swiftly-shifting *variety* and their *unpredictability*. In reaction to such conditions, urbanites retreat from urban hyperaesthesia into a special type of anaesthesia. They ‘intellectualise’ social life, using their brain as a protective organ [*Schutzorgan*] that, so to speak, cools off the heat of affective stimulations. In this view, urban life is a life of the brain, not one of the heart, a life of rational control over emotions, and even, of a cover-up of emotions. An interesting corollary of such theory, to which we shall return, is that stress has ultimately anaesthetising outcomes. In other words, it leads to self-enclosure, isolation, and passivity. Indeed, Simmel’s idea of the urbanite’s retreat into his own intellect will resonate abundantly in later classic analyses, beginning with Wirth’s (1938) diagnosis of city life as quintessentially fragmentary, role-based, and impersonal.

In the second part of the essay, however, the German theorist gives an unexpected twist to his argument: the urban individual, who has given away affectivity in order to protect himself with cold intellectualism, also looks for compensatory measures. The blasé attitude is an attitude based on systematically de-valuing every new thing or event. In his coolness, the blasé deprives things of their liveliness. However, this is not all s/he does. Simmel believes that, ultimately, the blasé manages to turn the quantitative (a sequence of downgraded, even vilified differences) back into the qualitative – a strife to produce an original, albeit preposterous, individuality. The blasé, who always takes the others for granted, has the pretence to appear eccentrically unique. Simmel’s early reflection on stress thus seems to call for the development of two possible sciences: on the one hand, an analysis of urban affects, understood as the science of psychic stimulations and the measurement of their effects; on the other, an analysis of urban rhythms, conceived of as the science of the speeds at which stimulations attain the individual brain and, in turn, feed back onto the human environment.

It is interesting to observe how a development of Simmel’s view of the *Unterschiedswesen* might be envisaged in either a positive or negative sense. On the positive side, urban life is explored through the lens of openness, and meeting-ness. Before Simmel, in his *Laws of imitation* Gabriel Tarde (1890: §7) had already connected urban life to a transition from a tradition-oriented (*coutume*) to a fashion-oriented (*mode*) society. Tarde had remarked that urbanites possess a mental ‘plasticity’ and a ‘nervous suggestibility’ capable of leading them to be more openly imitative of new influences. The negative version of such exposure to differences is, of course, insecurity. The urbanite lives in a position of vulnerability that inevitably leads to anguish. Such view of city life as inherently stressful became predominant in 20th-century architectural modernism. So, in his foundational book *Urbanisme*, Le Corbusier (1924: 79) depicts Paris as a ‘dangerous magma of accumulated, precipitated and aggregated crowds’, where ‘rhythm has accelerated to the point of putting humans ... in an always increasing state of instability, insecurity, fatigue, and hallucination.’

Developing a further rationale for Simmel’s view, in the 1950s and 1960s the iconic social psychologist Stanley Milgram (1970: 1462) employed the notion of *stimuli overload*, to be countered by a series of adaptation strategies: ‘When overload is present, adaptations occur. The system must set priorities and make choices.’ We recognise Simmel’s problem of stimuli selection, and more generally the question of the selectiveness of attention in a hyper-stimulating environment. The question here is not simply that of observing what are the strategies that the individual enacts in order to deal with the problem of overload, but also what are the ways in which his or her attention is pre-emptively channeled by the ‘manifold intervening institutions

and practices' through which attention works (Waldenfels, quoted in Hannah 2013: 240). In this sense, stress may be the result of the contemporary political economy of attention, and more precisely of the clash between the pervasive manipulation of attention in the immersive condition of contemporary capitalism, and the unavoidable fact of attention itself being a finite, scarce resource, with all the mismatches, overloads, frictions and short-circuits that follow (Marazzi 2008; Hannah 2013; Crogan and Kinsley 2012).

In this context, the question of psychic *delegation* appears as paramount. According to Milgram, adaptive responses may follow different routes, or policies. A first policy lies in diminishing the time dedicated to each response – this way, attention becomes ephemeral and superficial. A second option consists in selecting which stimuli require response and which not. This option corresponds to the establishment of a hierarchy of priorities, an 'agenda', so to speak, whereby all unwanted stimuli are not processed (with which result, it remains unclear). The third possibility consists in shifting the burden of stimulation onto other parties. If one wishes, such disburdening move may also be called the *social dumping of stress*. The fourth, fifth and sixth policies mentioned by Milgram refer to various type of pre-emptive isolation or pre-emptive discouragement, whereby the individual blocks a series of possible access channels, ranging from unfriendly countenance in the street to setting higher privacy setting in mediated interaction. With these strategies, the urban encounter is filtered and, whenever possible, screened off. All the tools of protection are inevitably instruments of estrangement: such a gloomy view of urban isolation also recurs in Milgram's (1977) renown essay on the 'familiar stranger', where this by-now commonsensical notion was first introduced. Despite her/his everyday presence, for instance as 'fellow commuter', the familiar stranger is never approached openly. Only a catastrophe, Milgram writes apropos of this, would enable us to overcome the 'frozen world' of indifference built by the mute device of civil inattention.

But, what if, on the contrary, the stranger becomes an active presence? Even too much active – say, a threatening presence? One could never explain the political relevance of the endless debates about *urban safety* without considering that urban stress derives from vulnerability and exposure to not simply a generality of stimuli, but a range of specific actions enacted by unknown others. This is the archetypical scenario of the threatening encounter with a predatory other who unsurprisingly ends up being depicted in ethnic and racial ways – which incidentally also explains why topics concerning migrants and refugees are so politically hot in contemporary Europe and the US. The space of the encounter easily turns into a geography of fear for women and other subjects who are constituted as 'victimisable' (Valentine 1989). So intimate appears the relation between urban space and violence. In the 1960s, applying a perspective derived from a curious synthesis of system theory, biology and cybernetics, Henri Laborit (1971) envisaged the study of urban life as an 'aggressiology', a social-psychological science of aggressive tendencies. While his name is not so well known, in a way Laborit can be considered a precursor to much current research in the neurosciences. For Laborit, the ethological idea of aggression as merely instinctual is unsatisfactory. While, for instance, an animal scientist such as Lorenz (2002[1963]) could attribute human intra-specific aggression (that is, aggression towards an animal of the same species) to animal instinct – a view that, incidentally, seems to echo Freud's later introduction of a specific 'death drive' into the human unconscious – Laborit rejects this view. Instead, he outlines a more complex problem deriving from the stratification and superposition of three cerebral systems in humans: the hypothalamic-reptilian (automated reflexes), the limbic (affection and memory), and the frontal-orbital or neocortical (imagination and rationality). The reptilian brain is an essentially reactive brain, one that proceeds according to a stimulation-reaction circuit. The prototypical predatory scene in the animal world unfolds at this level, with no feelings of hate, rage, fear and anxiety associated with it. Indeed, no specific feeling is attached to the hypothalamic system; in this sense, it would be wrong to characterise the predator as being emotionally 'aggressive' towards the prey. The predator's act is simply a pre-

programmed reaction. More recently, a very similar thesis has been argued for instance by LeDoux (2014), who claims that the hypothalamic system, including the functioning of the amygdala, is a ‘defensive survival circuit’ that has nothing to do with the conscious feeling of fear. The amygdala and the hypothalamus are the cerebral regions exploited for instance during Pavlovian conditioning, which proves the extent to which this neural system bypasses consciousness and subjectivity.

Meaningful aggressive as well as fearful attitudes only appear at the level the limbic cortical system. This is also the cerebral zone where personal, cultural and social memory reside – in general, it is the space where the processed influences from the environment are stored. According to Laborit, aggressive attitudes occur when the limbic system starts releasing hormones such as epinephrine-adrenalin, testosterone, serotonin, cortisol etc., which contribute to brain arousal. The problem lies in the fact that the hypothalamic system has lost many of the practical occasions that determined its usefulness in the first place, as the novel environmental conditions of urban life since the Neolithic revolution have practically erased many of the circumstances for which it had evolutionarily developed. This is why this system, deprived of useful targets, makes pressure onto the limbic system, generating useless aggressiveness. In addition, Laborit makes a distinction between explosive, episodic aggression on the one hand, and chronic, systematic aggression on the other: whereas the former is the visible violence in the streets, the latter is the structural, institutionalised violence of the whole social arrangement. From this perspective, domination and inequality amount to actual forms of aggression, with the difference that they are enacted at group level rather than at the individual level. In any case, it is possible to appreciate how both types of aggression are productive of stress. In Laborit’s view, societal phenomena such as addiction and the diffusion of tranquillisers are escapist adaptations to structural aggression, whereas a different type of adaptation is conducive to explosive aggression and open conflict in public space. In any case, the development of the neocortical system – that is, the deployment of human creative and inventive capacities – appears to him as the only hope to overcome the entwinement of aggression and urban life.

Modern Comfort – From Boredom To Stress (Again)

It seems, however, that the modernist view has largely preferred a different recipe to avoid stress, namely the enhancement of comfort. As a consequence, the urban atmosphere has been largely conceptualised as a ‘dual tone’ made of two subsequently alternating states: *being at ease*, and *being alarmed*. Such duo-tonal condition is well encapsulated by Goffman (1971: 238) at the outset of his analysis of ‘normal appearances’:

Individuals, whether in human or animal form, exhibit two basic modes of activity. They go about their business grazing, gazing, mothering, digesting, building, resting, playing, placidly attending to easily managed matters at hand. Or, fully mobilized, a fury of intent, alarmed, they get ready to attack or to stalk or to flee. Physiology itself is patterned to coincide with this duality.

The duo-tonal modern city is a flat composition that alternates and juxtaposes the state of being-at-ease and the state of being-alarmed, the state of comfort and that of stress. Most importantly, the two states are conceived of as, respectively, *value* and *anti-value*. *Value* is not only understood in a moral sense, but also more practically in an economic sense. The development of comfort-oriented societies is thus the kernel of a theoretical genealogy of global capitalism. In this sense, Sloterdijk (2013[2005]: 169 ff.) has analysed the case of 1850s Crystal Palace in London’s Hyde Park as more than a sheer piece of futuristic steel-and-glass architecture. Crystal Palace is a materialised concept: it stands for the paradigm of a process Sloterdijk calls ‘interiorisation’, that is, the construction of large, climate-controlled interiors that function as new large-scale socio-spatial collectors. Thanks to the introduction of such hothouse-

like grand interiors, contemporary urbanism has developed under the aegis of an ‘aesthetic of immersion’. Interestingly, Sloterdijk calls ‘comfort ether’ and ‘pampering’ precisely what, in the 1960s, Laborit had identified as those very conditions of urban life that, since the Neolithic revolution, have determined the interference of the limbic system onto the hypothalamic system. In practice, from Crystal Palace onwards, the conditions of modern social interiorisation have enabled unprecedented levels of existential assurance inside a number of ‘protective shells’. Perhaps not by chance, the image of the protective shell employed by Sloterdijk recalls Weber’s (1905) famous metaphor of the *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, the iron shell of the rational capitalist money-making attitude. Crystal palace is definitely one such *Gehäuse*; and recalling Weber’s analysis of capitalist ethics aptly reminds us that each climatic shelling has its price. The price of immersion into comfort, is boredom:

Diffuse boredom on the one hand and aspecific stress on the other are the atmospheric universals of hothouse existence. Just as boredom means relief as such, relief *sans phrase*, so too stress means irritation as such, irritation *sans phrase*. These two fundamentals of existence in the crystal palace create a chronically ambivalent atmosphere in which the alarm and the all-clear are in constant alternation. (Sloterdijk 2013[2005]: 213)

Therefore, the first atmospheric problem of modernity (before the greenhouse effect!) is that, from a human point of view, comfort is boring, mentally polluting, existentially asphyxiating.² From this perspective, the total relaxation initially envisaged as a value turns out to be socially counterproductive: Sloterdijk remarks that it ultimately leads to unleashing unconceivable perversions, senseless yet unconditional discharges of evildoings – an obvious discovery for J.G. Ballard’s readers. This happens because sadistic cruelty becomes a means to retrieve a glimpse of the fresh air of a lost outside. Moving from the psychological to the sociological domain, with respect to such a curious history of globalisation, it should be remarked that the comfort-boredom circuit does not really depict a global geography. Globalisation itself can be imagined as a *trans-local yet limited* geography – a ‘comfort-animated artificial continent in the ocean of poverty’, as Sloterdijk (*ibid.*, 195) puts it. Boredom is essentially a luxury (a questionable one) for a minority of humans. From Crystal Palace to Disneyworld, a vast wave of immersive boredom is cast against the animosities of history, against all asperities, all efforts, all conflicts, all struggles. In climatised dwellings and comfort bubbles, boredom and stress are only apparently opposite to each other. For stress *directly derives* from comfort: it is the distress that follows from every frustrated promise concerning the avoidance of all accident and the eternal annihilation of history. Thus, in their denial of outer urban stress, comfort bubbles are stressful to the extent that they constantly promise total existential assurance and well-being precisely at the moment when these expectations are for some reasons systematically disappointed.

The picture has thus changed: whereas for Simmel stress anaesthetises, for Sloterdijk it is rather comfort that stresses. In retrospect, it is possible to say that Simmel’s description of the urbanite as living in a kind of intellectualised retreat captures one of the possibilities of the neocortical brain, an organ that slows down affect and is endowed with the incredible quality of interrupting the immediacy of overflowing affective experiences.³ However, as Laborit explained,

² We tend to assume that inside-ness is comfortable, yet the action by a performer such as Abraham Poincheval, who spent one week in a hole inside a boulder having to store his own faeces, reminds us that radical inside-ness can be as unsettling as the wildest conceivable unprotected exteriority. The news is reported at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/26/french-artist-living-inside-a-rock-surrounded-by-excrement-i-feel-completely-at-ease> (Accessed 26 Feb 2017).

³ There is an intriguing resonance between this model of the psyche and Gabriel Tarde’s inter-psychology. For Tarde, too, inventions (which, in Laborit’s three-fold partition, correspond to the neocortical system) call for a moment of interruption of current social experience, a moment of unsociability.

the neocortical brain sits upon, and is imbricated with, other stratified cerebral formations, whose switching on and off is not subject to deliberate control. Current cognitive research has returned to this ‘primal scene’ of hypothalamic mental life (Lederbogen *et al.* 2011; Abbott 2012): in the urban environment, the human in-built evolutionary stress response system tends not to switch off, leaving humans over-responsive to their environment. It is currently hypothesised that prolonged exposure to such condition might lead to mental-health disorders such as schizophrenia. In the immunological ethos of our time, constant attempts are made to carve out spaces of safety, relax and comfort away from the chaotic stress of the outside. But, as seen above, stress-reduction strategies have two sets of paradoxical outcomes: on the one hand, they are always partial and relative, actually placing additional stress onto those who are unable to afford shelled immersive spaces; on the other, they enhance anxiety also in those inside shelled spaces, curtailing their capacity to deal with the urban wild, and spreading fears about a phantasmal outside that could, at each instance, irrupt back and destroy all safety accumulated so far.

In short, living in bubbles results in an increased difficulty in experiencing urban space – hence, heightened levels of stress, anxiety and fear in public space. Again one is reminded of the work of cultural geographers who have analysed stranger encounters (Valentine 1989; Hopkins 2010; Wilson 2011; Adey *et al.* 2013). The *malaise* of contemporary urban life seems to no longer result from the indifference of the city, its anonymity, its lack of social relations, its hyper-stimulation, and its disenchantment (as per Simmel, Wirth *etc.*). Rather, it is the immunological, ‘immersive’ imaginary that multiplies the mismatch between a fiction of comfort and a reality of conflict. The immunological imaginary systematically discourages the need to act and, accordingly, weakens people’s ability to do so. Channelling urban mobilities within safe and entertaining interiors, the geographies of the interior displace, deny and suppress frictions, impairing the capacity of urbanites to traverse the conflictive multiplicity of the city as a whole. For the inhabitants of the artificial continent of comfort, the neat result of all these incapacitations reverberates in the feeling of boredom – ultimately, a manifestation of depression. Comfort city is, in other words, the locus of depression. Since the 1980s, at precisely the time when neoliberalism gained its momentum, the psycho-medical model of the urban dweller shifted away from the image of the *conflictive* individual towards the image of the *depressive* individual. In his social theory of depression, Ehrenberg (1998) has clearly identified such a shift, in terms of the overcoming of the Freudian individual by a new model pivoted around the anti-depressants-driven individual. If, at the end of the 19th century, neurosis was constructed as a drama of inner conflict between selfish egoistic drives and super-egoic structures of authority demanding sacrifice for the benefit of social stability, at the end of the 20th century depression appears as a tragedy of *insufficiency* in the individual who cannot perform enough to keep up with market competition, and in some cases an individual who can no longer perform at all. By and large, inhibition loses its moral connotation of *pruderie* to acquire a markedly *economic* connotation: asthenia, blockage of action, non-responsiveness, failure to achieve results and targets. In this context, the proliferation of material and semiotic spaces, of boundaries and norms to which the urban dweller can outsource her responsibility to act in response to an encounter, can hardly be coincidental. We can only make sense of the psycho-medical model of the depressed individual by considering the fact that depression *is in the air*.

Atmospheric Engineering and Delegation Strategies

In the 1960s and 1970s, as we have seen, a first-rank social psychologist such as Milgram was worried by the idea that urban life discouraged social responsibility. Milgram wanted to gauge *in vivo* what he called ‘the duty to intervene’, e.g. the willingness of passers-by to assist a stranger in trouble, to stop an on-going aggression, to say something when a husband-and-wife quarrel

escalated, and so on. Few years later, new urban design approaches oriented to crime prevention began to adopt a different perspective. This array of theories – including, for instance, ‘situational crime prevention’ (Clarke, 1983) ‘defensible spaces’ (Newman, 1973), ‘broken windows’ (Wilson and Kelling, 1982), ‘environmental design’ (Jeffery, 1971) and so on – discarded the search for the social, moral and psychological roots of crime, focusing instead on the analytic calculation of risk and opportunities made by a deviant yet rational actor, assumed to be engaged in purely utilitarian decisions and assessments.

Such well-known shift from the ‘transformative’ to the ‘managerial’ approach in criminology (Garland, 2001) would be later complemented by a subsequent shift towards ‘affectivity’ in the 2000s. Whereas the major concern of punitive welfare and its correctional ideology was the morality of the deviant, and while neoliberal managerial approaches exclusively zoomed in onto the analytic factors involved in decision-making calculations, more recently criminology has turned towards ‘the aesthetic, affective, positive features of urban space ... their atmospheres as well as items involved in shaping these atmospheres (such as dresses, lights, colours)’ (Hentschel 2010: 143). The assumption is that the aesthetic and affective qualities of the environment impact on behaviour more powerfully than any set of formal regulations. This is what Allen (2006: 442) terms a ‘logic of seduction’, in which power works ‘through the experience of the space itself, through its *ambient* qualities’, tailoring various sensuous regimes to foster inclusion within an atmosphere that is meant to be comfortable, consensual, shared, convivial (Coleman 2005; Degen 2008).

The ontological assumption that informs this approach is that the relevant entities at play cannot be limited to either disciplined bodies or rational acting subjects, but are complemented by the by-now familiar yet still quite mysterious element of ‘the atmosphere’. The construction of comfortable atmospheres clearly entails a whole politics of attention (Hannah 2013) whereby the directedness and selectivity of attention is skilfully guided. This way atmosphere-oriented urban design also breeds what have been called ‘soft policies of exclusion’, which are in fact not literally ‘softer’ but strategically ‘alternative’ to the more explicitly restrictive zero tolerance models. They also encompass different sectors of urban governance aiming to ‘make the city safer, beautiful, and comfortable’ (Thorn 2013: 989). Questions of security, entertainment and comfort thus converge into a single focus: urban management is no longer simply a matter of either disciplinary training or governmental subjection, but more precisely a matter of engineering safe, comforting and entertaining atmospheres (Thrift 2011). In fact, atmospheres cannot be fully understood from a phenomenological point of view, they also need to be tackled ontologically. This implies dismantling what Grusin (2015) terms the naivety of ‘transparent immediacy’, i.e. the belief in the unmediated freedom that the senses would afford us. This appears to be the limit of some approaches to notions of atmosphere, ambiance and affect, what Rose et al. (2010: 345) term a ‘relentlessly presentist performative account of human subjectivity’. According to Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016), by privileging phenomenological experience atmospheric engineering dissimulates the socio-cultural-legal structures that striate the atmospheres themselves. It is thus important to complement the phenomenological bias in the approach to urban ambiance (Thibaud 2011; 2012), atmosphere (Böhme 1993; 1995) or sensorium (Goonewardena 2005) with an attention to the historical sedimentation and ontological constitution of atmospheres themselves (Sloterdijk 2004), as well as to the role of technology as the ontogenetical process that projects atmospheric bubbles.

At the same time, as Bissell *et al.* (2012) usefully suggest, apocalyptic or paranoid readings of atmospheric engineering should be avoided. Indeed, engineering atmospheres should not be understood as a *per se* dystopian praxis. Since we are space-creating beings, our urban being-togetherness is always somehow tuned, both implicitly and explicitly, in material, affective and symbolic sense. Rather than charging the term ‘engineering’ with an *a priori* negative nuance,

what interests us is the way in which in contemporary society such an atmospheric quality of urban space has become more and more emphasised. Besides the convergence of security and entertainment in a common economy of urban atmospheric engineering, as mentioned above, another good example is provided by the increasingly atmospheric quality of legal texts. The literature on urban atmospheres has perhaps not paid enough attention to the effects of the lawscape (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013). For instance, it is interesting to recall the UK legal definition of anti-social behaviour as a ‘conduct which caused or was likely to cause harm, harassment, alarm or distress’, ‘which, without necessarily being a criminal offence, can by its cumulative effect generate a climate of tension and insecurity’ (UK Crime and Disorder Act 1998: sect. 1,1; European Commission 2000: 6).⁴ Whereas social-democratic and managerial theories of urban crime were *cold theories*, emphasising either social structures or rational decision-making, affective theories are *warm*, in that they emphasise emotional and affective forces composing the milieu – forces which, as we have seen above, Laborit attributed to the working of the limbic cerebral system.

What interests us here in particular are the unpredictable effects produced by the affective turn in urban management. One of the places where the contradiction materialises most clearly is, for instance, the approach known as ‘new prudentialism’ (Dean 1999: 162). New prudentialism is a criminological discourse that alerts potential victims and stirs them up to constant preparedness against victimisation. In new prudentialism, an ethos of self-responsibilisation charges the attainment of immunity on city users themselves and requires them to constantly rehearse their capacity to perform and provide for their own security – *Don’t become a crime victim*, as a widespread sign in the London underground reads. The urbanite is thus stimulated to *become aware* of the risks that are intrinsic to each environment s/he crosses. Understandably, awareness becomes ingrained in the urban atmosphere and contributes to reshape it deeply in terms of a widespread attitude of alertness and suspicion that inevitably feeds back onto the milieu itself. Outsourcing preparedness onto the citizens stimulates risk awareness and provides detailed procedural guidelines (probably of hypothalamic type) under headings such as *It’s a smart idea to be prepared for emergencies!* (Hay 2006). Evidently, the diffuse vigilantism propounded by new prudentialism runs contrarily to the idea of *trust* which used to be a pillar of the welfare state psycho-social build-up. Consequently, it also inevitably brings back onto the stage the old hyperaesthesia of Simmelian memory.

Atmospheric-affective approaches do not lead straightforwardly to schemes of either total empowerment or total control. For instance, the logic of self-responsibilisation that characterises new prudentialism is inevitably accompanied by practices of de-responsibilisation. Constant preparedness is, in fact, inevitably tied up with *delegation*. Realistically, urbanites have little hope to effectively control their own environment. Urban space is a governed space infused with regulations, protocols, norms (Brighenti 2010; Pavoni, 2013) as well as, increasingly, a range of software-encoded technologies (Graham 2007; Kitchin and Dodge 2011). All these technological and legal proxies are *actants* to which the responsibility to react under unexpected circumstances can be, and in fact is, delegated. Even the necessity to deal with feelings of distress and discomfort tends to be delegated to legal proxies. Consequently, stress derives from neither responsabilisation nor de-responsibilisation *per se*, but from their constant, unforeseeable and uninterrupted back-and-forth. For instance, a theory of public traffic organisation such as *Shared Space* functions by explicitly playing on the balance between self-responsibilisation and de-responsibilisation. Shared Space is a set of design principles that recommend removing the usual visual and material proxies in the street (including traffic signals, zebra crossing, street lights,

⁴ See for instance *Deneys Reitz v SA Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union 1991*, where a workers’ protest was forbidden on the ground that it was infringing the right to peace and quietness of residents (Van der Walt 2007).

curbs etc.). This approach emerged in the Netherlands and has become increasingly popular especially in the UK (Hamilton-Baillie 2004, 2008; Shared Space Project 2008). *Prima facie*, Shared Space could be grouped with the aesthetic and affective theories exposed above – but with some interesting differences. At least three different rationales seem to be at play in shared space theory. The first one is a *visual-ecological* argument: a higher quantity of signs to be perceived decreases their effectiveness. The second is a *self-responsibilisation* argument: urbanites on the move should take into account the wider environment that surrounds them. The third is a *citizen-empowerment* type of argument: it enables countering the overarching power of traffic engineers by redistributing decisional power about trajectories of navigation in urban space.

In Shared Space design, generating and maintaining a feeling of uncertainty is an explicit purpose – ‘safety through ambiguity’ is the leading motif. What Shared Space theorists criticise is the vicious circle whereby offering greater protection paradoxically leads to an increase of risk propensity that negatively compensate any gain in safety which the ‘disburdening devices’ were designed to provide in the first place (Adams 2004). Signage and instructions removal, so runs the argument, redistributes the burden of risk and re-equilibrates the power ratio between drivers and pedestrians as well as other actors traversing public space. Counter-intuitively, Shared Space is supposed to be conducive to overall higher safety: traffic *self-organises*, reaching the optimal speed in function of the precise conditions of the local surrounding space. Advocating a multitude of simultaneous actors and functions inside the same space, Shared Space is based on an anti-modernist attitude seeking to de-segregate traffic flow by type and promoting mixed spatial use.⁵ In this sense, Shared Space appears to employ an environmental design approach that is symmetrically opposed to that of other affective- atmospheric approaches, and in particular the criminological theories recalled above. If the latter employ environmental design to minimise anxiety, in Shared Space the idea is to re-insert a *homeopathic quantum of anxiety* in order to trigger the attentive responsiveness of urbanites. In short, it is a ‘re-burdening’ enterprise, whereby stress is not pre-emptively eliminated but rather exploited to produce a more equal and mutually sympathetic public space. On its turn, Shared Space is not devoid of potential shortcomings. Its proponents rely on an understanding of urban space that is largely de-politicised, sustained by a certain libertarian iconoclastic brio. Simply removing the habitual systems of stimuli disburdening may not be enough to materialise a romantically irenic communal form of interaction, short of taking a larger framework of power relations and hierarchising factors seriously into account.⁶ Nonetheless, this approach illuminates a more general quandary concerning all those situations in which *taking care of oneself* and *taking care of others* in a single environment are unavoidably entwined. As other invitations to dismantle the apparatus of delegation, Shared Space opens up an epistemological space for conceiving an alternative view on urban vulnerability, and offers an interesting way to explore the peculiar tension between disburdening (de-responsibilising, delegating) and re-burdening (responsibilising, ‘prudentialising’) in the contemporary city.

⁵ However, it should be recalled, not all modernists were strictly in favour of traffic segregation; so, the playgrounds designed by the modernist architect Aldo Van Eyck in Amsterdam in the 1950s were not fenced, and kids had the opportunity of enjoying their game space while never overlooking its invisible boundaries onto the vehicular traffic street.

⁶ In summary, we may identify three main shortcomings of Shared Space. First, it tends to underestimate power relations and thus the potential for certain categories to be excluded and discriminated (most notably blind people, evidently disadvantaged by a model that strongly relies on visual clues). Second, it tackles the effect of traffic politics disparities such as spatial segregation without challenging directly its main cause, namely the predominance of car culture (Imrie 2013). Third, its de-politicised understanding of the urban often leads to prioritise de-contextualised aesthetic principles over strategic and contextual political questions.

The issue of urban vulnerability, it should be clear by now, cannot be solved easily by unilateral strategies. Romanticising accounts of disorder, chaos, thorough unpredictability cannot be endorsed light-heartedly. Theoretically, such accounts fail to take into account the quest for socio-biological immunity; historically, they hide the fact that unbridled re-burdening directly leads to a type of heroism akin to a Fascist ethos. Neo-ascetic, heroic contempt for any sort of bourgeois comfort inevitably resonates with a Jüngerian-styled celebration of all those extreme ‘iron storming’ situations typical of a war-dominated outside. All forms of contemporary religious-political radicalism and fanaticism share a remarkably similar tendency. Probably, the utter despoise of comfort propounded by belligerent attitudes is not the only way to reject the anaesthesia of comfort. Perhaps, this requires complexifying the very notion of comfort beyond simplistic dichotomies. Comfort, we suggest, can be better explored through a *three-fold* classification. First, with reference to its etymology, comfort has to do with *soothing* and *strengthening* (*cum-fortis*). In this sense, comfort is tied to the ontological necessity of immunity, i.e. the need to find a safe milieu wherein one is persevered and can nurture relations (as the *cum*-prefix may suggest – a *strengthening-with*). Second, comfort is a phenomenological *mood* whose characteristics may vary widely; in this sense, comfort is not pre-determined – I can feel comfortable in a dirty shack and uncomfortable in the hall of a luxury hotel, and vice versa. Third, comfort addresses the historical condition of a urban, patterned globalisation of comfort bubbles. In the socio-historical configuration of a comfort society, being at ease is placed inside aesthetic, normative and semiotic scaffoldings that shape experience. ‘Comfort – writes Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016: 158) – denotes belonging, and belonging exists across shopping malls and political battles alike.’ The contemporary logic of comfort has largely prioritised relax and retreat over assertion and confrontation. By contrast, a joyous, ‘Spinozist architecture’, as proposed by Lambert (2013: 38) would prompt an increase of the capacity of feeling and acting (*potentia*), even at the price of ‘challeng[ing] the body, put[ting] it in danger and leav[ing] it without any other alternative than to react to this delicate situation’. Spinozist architecture, specifies Lambert, would dissociate from modernist comfort and its ‘weakening of the body’, asserting that ‘*comfort and joy are not synonyms*. We might even wonder if they are not antonyms.’

From this perspective, the suspect arises that contemporary comfort is, in fact, a *betrayal* of the original meaning of the word, which, as said above, was grounded in a process of *strengthening-with*. If the boredom-stress circuit of contemporary comfort cannot be really challenged by a revival of authoritarian dogmatism, then it is perhaps possible to follow the lead of Laborit, Sloterdijk, Lambert and others, placing emphasis on the magnification of one’s *positive* role in the *creation of the urban world* and its three-dimensional milieu. In our view, the problem with the contemporary society of comfort is not that it alienates an allegedly authentic, reciprocal and egalitarian interaction. Rather, it is the peculiar logic of responsabilisation and delegation and its tendency to defuse our capacity to act that needs to be challenged. The recent debates around so-called ‘safe space’ policies in university campuses offers another case where a provision originally designed for the protection of minorities has been gradually degenerating into a shield against any ‘uncomfortable’ experience incurred by students.⁷ The problem is that, as remarked by Oxford University vice-chancellor Louise Richardson, ‘education is not meant to be comfortable’⁸ – or, as Simmel put it (see above), freedom is not necessarily comfortable. Provided this is done in a strategic and heuristic, rather than moralistic sense (as on the contrary

⁷ Ian Dunt observed: ‘The introduction of tuition fees has meant that students increasingly see themselves as customers who are entitled to comfort while on campus.’
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/06/safe-space-or-free-speech-crisis-debate-uk-universities> (Accessed 26 Feb 2017)

⁸ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/24/safe-spaces-universities-no-platform-free-speech-rhodes> (Accessed 26 Feb 2017)

happens with the heroic and Fascist critique of comfort) modernist comfort can be exposed as ultimately inadequate. If the search for ontological immunity cannot be condemned as such, the question to be faced concerns *how to tune the urban being-togetherness* in an enriching, viable way. In a wide-ranging search for conceptualisations of the urban affective experience that may provide alternatives to relax, disburden and discharge, the notion of *animosity* might offer some interesting suggestions, embodying an excess vis-à-vis the society of comfort that does not simply oppose comfort as such, and instead points towards a different direction.

On Animosity

From Simmel to Milgram, the main concern of urban theorists has been traditionally related with the preoccupation that the features of *indifference*, *reserve* and *retreat* could potentially disintegrate the social bond. So deep was the fear of urban anomy, linked to the imagery of a city of suggestible, merely imitative automata, that Simmel pushed himself to attribute a ‘protective’ social role to *antipathy*. In particular, he observed, antipathy among strangers – which he depicted as a ‘latent adumbration of actual antagonism’ – enables them to keep reciprocal distance in an *active*, rather than passive mode. In the context of our discussion of urban stress, we believe that there could be still something fresh to learn from Simmel’s insight, but that we may also need to reframe antipathy in different terms. Let us just consider the following two short *antipathic* scenes.

The first scene takes place in the UK, at a Tesco supermarket. Four old ladies are slowing down the queue, chatting, laughing and sharing food brought from outside the store, with the condescendence of the till operator, who appears to be their friend. The scene is reported by Bonnett (1996: 28-9), who remarks how ‘impeded teenagers express passive contempt; a virulent but immobile hatred ... the teens, whose sphere of transgression is so different, so spatially and socially removed, are appalled and concerned.’ The second scene is even more complex. It takes place at the common table in the eatery of a department store in Sydney, and is recounted in the first person by Hage (2013). An old lady abruptly addresses the author: ‘Do you mind putting your hand on your mouth when you cough?’ Hage is enraged. He finds the woman’s complaint unpleasant and aggressive. ‘Things happened very fast – he writes – Very quickly, instantly, my embarrassment gave way to an aggressive combativeness.’ ‘Look – he retorts – if you are old and lonely, there must be better ways of socializing.’ The old lady does not reply but, after a while, Hage realises she is quietly sobbing. The people at the table look at him with reproach. Uncomfortable and embarrassed, he eventually packs up and leaves.

Both scenes highlight the contradictions of the role of antipathy in public interaction. In the first, it is a proverbially transgressive group, the teenagers, who are led into a politically conservative rage towards the transgression put in place by a proverbially most disciplined group, the old ladies. Is, perhaps, exactly such a role switch that immobilises the teenagers? Or, is it the atmosphere of the supermarket, with its delegations to socio-technological protocols, that inhibits immediate action? In any case, animosity here remains implicit and mute. Whatever the level of stress, bursting the bubble of comfort proves to be a difficult act. In the second example, the spatial-commercial device known as the ‘common table’ makes explicit the tension between the thirst for community and the threats to immunity entailed by being-in-common. Stuck in what she is probably experiencing as an alienating place, the old lady tries to challenge this feeling by breaking one of the constitutive rules of the place, namely the right to be left alone. From this point of view, what she might be doing is, as Hage himself retrospectively hypothesises, trying to construct a public space that is currently lacking (‘She was still snatching a bit of optimism at the very place where society was at its cruellest as it were’). However, we may ask, is there really any allegedly authentic, harmonious public domain that would lay beyond the predicament of

alienation and clumsiness? One can doubt it. In fact, there is no public domain except *in* the predicament of alienation and clumsiness. This is also why, insofar as it cultivates a dream of non-conflictive authentic relations, interpersonal antipathy mostly leads to a standstill. That standstill is, after all, precisely the protective shield Simmel alluded to. Animosity usually tends to be understood in this way, as for instance does Valentine (2008), who sees it as an expression of low-level incivilities, as such requiring to be overcome so as to translate urban encounters into ‘meaningful contacts’. Although advanced to criticise the romantic and celebratory afflatus of mainstream interpretations of urban cosmopolitanism and their rhetoric of hybridisation, mixing and difference, we believe that eventually similar perspectives also end up cultivating a very similar dream of a post-conflictual co-habitation in the urban domain, only differing in the methods proposed to achieve it. It is in order to avoid this impasse that we propose to qualify further the notion of animosity, in a way that distinguishes it from antipathy and direct confrontation while also granting it a status as an affect quite distinct from sympathy. In other words, animosity cannot be reduced to the typical ‘fight or flight’ ethological mechanism.

What, then, is the difference between antipathy and animosity? As hinted by Bataille (1929) (see the quote above opening this text), animosity might form a prelude to revolt. As such, it may be massively more stressing than a merely ‘adumbrated’ feeling of interpersonal antipathy. Animosity is a form of social, more than personal, unrest. In common with antipathy, however, animosity shares the fact of entailing stress of a specific type: it is an *active, creative stress*, rather than the merely reactive, passive stress that characterises, on the one hand, urban hyperaesthesia and, on the other, comfort bubbles. Just like Spinozist architecture, it nourishes and amplifies the capacity to feel and to act. For Bataille, (traditional) architecture is petrified power; correspondingly, animosity embodies a Luddite moment of incipient uprising – the French revolution. But it is exactly in the society of comfort that such quantum of hostility assumes a peculiar significance in itself, being *at once*, through its very expression, an insertion of conflictiveness within a supposedly non-conflictual space. In our view, what is interesting is that animosity is a form of disquiet that cannot be thoroughly reduced to established recognisable formats, such as conflict. We should not miss its peculiar *preluding* character. In this sense, animosity can also be distinguished from revolt and revolution. Contrary to the latter two, animosity cannot be counted as either a wholly political notion or a moral virtue. Nonetheless, we hypothesise, it could constitute an aspect of social life at large that, in a meaningful way, is introductive to politics and morality. The *animose* stance is a feeling that cannot be fully captured by other, more straightforward notions such as aggression, fear, and stress. Rather, it addresses the prelude to an impetus – most clearly, yet perhaps not necessarily, impetus of hostility – that is simultaneously *internal* and *external* to a body or, put differently, simultaneously *phenomenological* and *ecological*.

Urban atmospheres, as discussed above, emerge from a ‘coming together of people, buildings, technologies and various forms of non-human life in particular geographical settings’ (Conradson and Latham, 2007: 238). At the same time, they are always to some extent ‘autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with’, resisting from being reduced to a ‘totality for us,’ traversed as they are by an exceeding potential (Anderson, 2009: 80). It is the latter that notably characterises Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994: 164) definition of affects as ‘beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived [experience].’ As Colebrook (2014: 89) notes, ‘affect becomes a genuine concept when it poses the possibility of thinking the delay or interval between the organism as a sensory-motor apparatus and the world that is (at least intellectually) mapped according to its own measure.’ This means that affects have a socio-material dimension exceeding the individual psychological ‘emotion’, as for instance Löfgren (2008) and Wilson (2011) note vis-à-vis the ‘mood’ or ‘atmosphere’ of irritation, respectively in train and bus travels. More precisely, affects may be understood as impersonal lines of flight that traverse and exceed urban socio-material formations themselves: ‘although firmly rooted in the *here* of the

body, the affect portends to its virtual becoming, in its excess. This excess, collectively yet autonomously, is the atmosphere.’ (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2013: 8).

Understood as such, animosity may constitute a valuable key for conceptualising the city of unpleasant feelings in a non-dichotomous way – beyond, that is, the stress/comfort binary. Animosity could thus provide us with a prism for conceptualising what, in urban life, appears to be a constitutive, if contradictory, excess vis-à-vis, on the one hand, the ‘natural’ stimulations of urban hyperaesthesia and, on the other, the normative, delegation-based architecture of comfort bubbles. On the one hand, animosity is an impersonal affect that originates in the architecture of the social field, rather than in any single individual. On the other hand, it is only within an individual body that an *animus* can be felt, recorded, engrammed, retained and, eventually, actualised.⁹ In this sense, animosity is an ecological relationship which however maintains full phenomenological significance in localised processes of subjectivation. In Laborit’s terms, it corresponds to the important missing linkage between the limbic and the neo-cortical cerebral systems.

Like antipathy, animosity defuses the overarching atmospheric engineering and concurrent delegation strategies aimed at managing the stress/comfort quandary. In turn, animosity, while certainly not amounting to a full-blown unified relational project, may propel a response to the systematic *disarmament of courage* that is ingrained in the system of delegation. Disarmament against disarmament, the *animose stance* recalls a Nietzschean homeopathic operation that may help in attaining a new courage. As the ancient meaning of *animosus* indicates, there is a certain audaciousness, or boldness, to animosity, a ‘being spirited’ in which both the impersonal quality of an affect that ‘takes us’, as well as its conscious orientation towards a given action, are simultaneously expressed. This also resonates with the ancient Greek notion of *menis*, i.e. rage. *Menis* refers to both an invasive affect, a higher force to some extent uncontrollable, possessed by the hero (as in the proverbial Achilles’ rage), and at the same time the boldness through which emotion is actualised into a set of actions (Sloterdijk, 2012[2006]). While we do not intend to overinflate animosity into an epical dimension, least depict it as a single solution to the problem of urban coexistence, we should not overlook that, socially speaking, courage means taking responsible action vis-à-vis the environmentally unexpected. Likewise, cannot we see in the old lady’s gesture described above the actualisation of an animosity against the comforting sphere of delegation that seems to contradistinguish many institutionalised urban spaces? In her case, animosity appears as simultaneously libidinal and rational, phenomenological and ecological, resting on ‘a kind of visceral resonance with that which is being judged,’ one which requires ‘courage’ (Hayes-Conroy and Martin 2010: 273). At the same time, we do not wish to explain away animosity by framing it as an instrumental tool for whatever it is posited beyond itself – this is incidentally the difference with an understanding of animosity as either a ‘negative’ aspect of urban interaction to be overcome through socio-legal normative strategies, or a ‘positive’ aspect against the numbing effect of political correctness, which is a well-known refrain in the contemporary rhetoric of the far right. Animosity can be surely strategised into political action, escalate into aggression, be repressed into self-control, regress into passive neurotic stress, or simply dissolve into the noise of the social. Before that happens, however, it belongs to a more subtle and ambivalent dimension, foreign to the grand *bouleversements* of revolt and revolution, pertaining instead to the everyday tuning of the urban experience. Animosity belongs to the territory of those ‘tiny catastrophes that make up daily life’ (Kracauer 1995[1963]: 252). Its ambivalent boldness may signify both *courage* and *vehemence*. As such, it remains a troubling

⁹ For an interesting account of this interplay between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ dimension, see McCormack’s (2008: 426) definition of ‘affective atmospheres’ as ‘interspersions of affect (as a pre-personal field of intensity), feeling (as that intensity registered in a sensing body) and emotion (as that felt intensity expressed in a socio-culturally recognizable form)’.

presence in the social field, as – *inter alia* – the increasing stigmatisation, moralisation and medicalisation of the feelings of rage, anger and conflict in general reveals. So, animosity is certainly stressful, but in the original, almost lost sense of *strengthening-with* we have evoked above. If every community entails a search for co-immunity (Esposito 2002), then commonality unavoidably brings with itself a co-strengthening excess. Consequently, we should say that, not simply may animosity emerge against a given configuration of togetherness, but rather, *togetherness itself is a type of animosity*.

Conclusions

In this piece, we have started from Simmel's classic thesis that the modern city is, 'naturally', a psychic-stimulating environment for us *Unterschiedswesen*, or diversity-driven human beings. However, as we have seen, the ways in which stimuli overload and adaptation strategies can be conceptualised are varied. Indeed, the current interest by neuroscientist for the otherwise old puzzle of urban stress itself hints to the elusive nature of the phenomenon. To speak again with Spinozist lexicon, there is a complex *geometry of passions* that welds together urban comfort, stress, boredom, depression, and anxiety. Historically, a shift of emphasis seems to have occurred from the classic conceptualisation of hyperaesthesia to the contemporary preoccupations with the design of comfortable atmospheres. Such atmospheres, we have observed, are actually comfort bubbles that ultimately fail to do away with stress: whereas for Simmel stress anaesthetised urbanites, Sloterdijk has rather pointed out that it is comfort itself that stresses them.

However, we have cautioned to distinguish different types of stress, according to their respective passive or active dominant note. Also, adaptation strategies to stressful environments are not merely a matter of personal taste or individual choices. We have reviewed various generations of urban design and urban criminological approaches to highlight how the issue has been dealt. To understand the mix of spontaneous practice and design approaches, we have argued, an ecological approach attentive to the urban-environmental composition should complement a phenomenological approach attentive to inter-subjective experience. This is why we have investigated extensively the fundamental tension between *disburdening* (delegating) and *re-burdening* (responsibilising) strategies.

To better tackle the magmatic stratum of dissatisfaction that seems so coessential to urban life, in the final part of the article we have focused on the notion of animosity. We have explored how animosity may enable urban theory to break with the circle of urban hyper-aesthesia and anaesthesia. As a type of disquiet that cannot be reduced to established recognisable interaction formats, animosity shares resemblances with antipathy, a device that lets urbanites keep reciprocal distance in an active, instead of passive, mode. Once we observe the stress generated by animosity, however, we notice that it exceeds a merely reactive dimension. While we have carefully distinguished animosity from a full-fledged political or moral virtue, we have pointed out how it may provide us with a ground for developing alternatives to the *disarmament of courage* that characterises generalised systems of delegation as well as to the pointless *heroic cult of courage* that is the mark of contemporary radicalisms and neo-fascism.

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