Thinking cities/the urban through elsewhere: comparative tactics for a more global urban studies[1]

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1. *Urban studies as experimentation*

With many scholars eager to throw aside the multiple constraints on theory-building practices lingering after a period of Anglo-American hegemony in urban studies, there is much creative energy for formulating new tactics for conceptualising the urban, and for new concepts of the urban to emerge from any (ordinary) city. Acknowledging the restricted terms of knowing the urban which shaped the geography of interpreting cities over the last decades of the twentieth century, and recognising that if there is to be a conceptual engagement with "twenty-first century" cities it needs to take place on a radically different foundation, **urban studies today demarcates a mode of experimentation**. Many more aspects of the practices and insights of scholars have been opened to critique and creative exploration from urban experiences elsewhere than has conventionally informed conceptualisations of the urban. Surprises and new possibilities for thinking the urban emerge from many different sources: different cities, regions, trajectories, forms and practices press on taken-for-granted assumptions amongst scholars, swerving analyses, undermining the usefulness of concepts, turning them into something else, or inspiring quite different starting points. In addition, theoretical innovations chart a range of analytical manoeuvres in support of a more global urban studies including: comparative imaginations (Nijman, 2008; Ward, 2010; McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011); versions of regional (or global South) strategic essentialism authorising new subjects of urban theorising (Roy,2009; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014); Lefebvre's planetary urbanisation (Merrifield, 2013; Brenner and Schmid, 2014); Deleuzian-inspired conceptual innovation (Simone, 2011; Jacobs, 2012); Latourian and De Landa-inspired assemblages approaches (Farias, 2010; McFarlane, 2011); Spivakian

[1] This paper has been a while in the writing, and I have to thank a number of people. Neil Brenner for suggesting I read the Grundrisse, Mathieu Hilgers for sending me Dialectical Materialism, Maliq Simone for long ago making it clear I should give Deleuze another chance, and Christian Schmid for discussing abstraction and Lefebvre with me. Jamie Peck's concerns regarding the too-easy dismissal of Marxism encouraged me to extend the argument in this direction. Sue Parnell and Ananya Roy have each been helpful interlocutors in the development of this paper.

charting of "worldings" (Roy and Ong, 2011; Simone, 2001); and political economists committed to thinking with differentiation and hybridisation (Peck, Brenner and Theodore, 2009). Conceptualisations of the urban today have the potential to multiply speaking positions and to draw manifold elements of cities into the practice of theorising the urban (for interesting collections of work see Jayne and Edensor, 2012; Lanz et al., 2013; Pieterse and Simone, 2013). There is much work underway, therefore, which is establishing tactics for a more global urban studies.

However, the urban world presents both conundrum and opportunity in building conceptualisations. Any attempt to theorise the urban in a world of cities immediately places insights gained in one context in relation to a multiplicity of urban experiences. While this is only a specific case of the more general problem of developing concepts through particular observations across multiple settings or instances, it gains a certain specificity in relation to the particular spatiality of the urban, notably the strongly interconnected nature of many urban phenomena (I will return to this below). In general, the possibility to say anything more encompassing about the urban, aspects of cities, or urban processes, as opposed to discussing one "case"[2] or particular experience, rests on understandings of[3]:

- the relationship between one instance and many (perhaps repeated) instances of phenomena;
- the wider purchase of the concepts generated in relation to that instance, and the status of those concepts (how far do they stretch, how far can we trust/use/revise them); and
- the methodological tactics and philosophical conventions which allow navigation amongst different instances in the process of building conceptual understanding.

These are the core elements of a comparative imagination – working with concepts, and questioning their applicability, across a range of different cases. In this paper, then, I set out a preliminary version of what a reformatted comparison might entail, one which can be put to work to support a more global urban studies.

Mindful of the limits of conventional forms of comparison (Robinson, 2011), especially the restrictions it places on comparability across diverse cities, I want to pare comparison back to its most minimal expression, and retrieve from there some tactics for building understanding and conceptualisations through

[2] Raewyn Connell proposes a definition of "theory" as "speaking beyond the individual case"

[3] At base, these issues reach back to attempts across millenia to understand the connections between phenomena and our concepts of them, and on accounts of how we come to know the world - a black hole of philosophy awaits unsuspecting urbanists posing these questions! I am anxious not to privilege these sources of insights – there are other routes to discuss these issues; but it seems to me it is difficult to avoid engaging with the debates and concepts which set the terms for much contemporary method and scholarship (Marxism; Deleuze). And we should note that this takes place in a context where most social scientists today are significantly deskilled in relation to the philosophical terms in which they are framed.

engagements with an urban world. There are other methodological innovations which can launch new understandings into conversations about cities – some of these would emerge from negotiating the complexity of specific urban contexts, perhaps drawing on a more ethnographic practice. I will draw this into the discussion later, but generally here I want to attend to the structure of conceptualisation and research practice which puts specific urban cases (outcomes, processes, experiences) into conversation with others in order to extend the ways in which we can understand and talk about the nature of the urban (in both its multiplicity and complexity); which establishes ways to keep conversations going about cities in a world of cities by opening more opportunities to think through elsewhere; and which requires that such conversations be intrinsically open to revision, making space for insights starting from anywhere.

Comparison, at a minimum

At a minimum, I suggest that we could reimagine comparisons as involving the broad practice of thinking cities/the urban[4] through elsewhere (another case, a wider context, existing theoretical imaginations derived from other contexts, connections to other places), in order to better understand outcomes and to contribute to broader conceptualisations and conversations about (aspects of) the urban. Thinking comparatively can highlight the differentiation of outcomes, it can bring into view the distinctive (or shared) processes shaping a certain urban outcome, it can put to work theoretical insights drawn from other instances or cases, it can insist on the incompleteness of analytical insights brought to attention from different contexts. Moreover, it can suggest new objects of analysis by displacing ethnocentric assumptions which arise from the inevitable locatedness of all theory. In the case of cities, the opportunity (or requirement) to think comparatively is ubiquitous by virtue of the multiplicity of urban outcomes, or the simple fact of having to think cities in a 'world of cities': any act of urban theorization from somewhere is by necessity a comparative gesture (Robinson, 2011), putting a perspective informed by one context or outcome into conversation with concepts invented and circulated elsewhere.

[4] There is much debate at the moment in urban studies consequent upon a revival in attention to Lefebvre's thesis of the complete urbanisation of society. In this frame, the disappearing city (in the sense that the urban can not (no longer) be defined territorially) might inspire a rethinking of the spatial vocabularies of the urban – as, for example, in Brenner and Schmid's (2011) proposition of concentrated and extended urbanisation. In the meantime, as the debate proceeds, I talk about cities and urban outcomes (any relevant settlement pattern or extended process) interchangeably. That geographical conceptions of the city stress territoriality in conjunction with flows and interconnections, that we have many accounts of phenomena like "kotadesa" (or desakota) and circular migration, makes the novelty of this approach a little more muted that in some accounts. I am therefore using the term, "urban outcomes" here to indicate some specific urban space, or process. If the term city is under erasure, for the moment I am hoping this term would refer to specific examples of the wider range of spaces and processes we are interested in. also, still needs comparative perspective.

Theorizing cities can benefit from a comparative imagination, but comparative methods need to be refitted to support a more global urban analytical project, including a substantial reconfiguring of the ontological foundations of comparison. For example, what might be considered a 'case' needs to be redefined to avoid the restricting and territorializing trap of only comparing (relatively similar) 'cities': we might rather compare, for example, specific elements or processes in cities, or the circulations and connections which shape cities, thus rendering urban experiences comparable across a much wider range of contexts, and building research strategies which are adequate to the complex spatiality of urban forms (Robinson 2011; Ward 2010). Comparators - the "third term" which establishes the grounds of comparability of cases (Jacobs, 2012) - need to be selected or constituted (Guggenheim et al., 2014) so they are relevant to a diversity of urban contexts, rather than implying the need for relatively similar cities to build a comparison, as has been conventional (Kantor and Savitch, 2005). So, for example, a comparator which inscribes an intellectual politics placing wealthier cities in a necessarily different category of urbanity from poorer cities offers an a priori (and usually rather sloppily defended) exclusive approach to defining the urban, and is not very effective for supporting a global urban studies[5]. Instead, new grounds of comparability need to be defined which enable all kinds of reasonable comparisons, and which can result in stretching theoretical concepts to the breaking point required for the reinvention of urban studies for global analysis, rather than simply reinforcing parochial and limited understandings (cf. Pierre 2005).

More generally, for a renovated comparative method the status of the case itself needs to be reimagined in relation to both the wider empirical processes shaping particular outcomes and the potential for the case to inform conceptualizations which is an important ambition of comparative strategies. This is essential to ground an adequate post-structuralist comparative method (whether inspired by post-Marxist analytics or wider philosophical debates) which certainly moves beyond quasi-scientific explanations and understandings of causes but which also establishes an alternative to a view of the world in which (often pre-given) wider structures are drawn on to explain complex specific outcomes. Thus, in terms of the "encompassing" approach to comparison which most explicitly seeks to link together cases for comparison on the basis of their empirical embededness in circulating and stretched out social relations ("systems" such as slavery or capitalism), it is necessary to revisit both the specification of the wider process (is it open to conceptual interrogation and reformulation, does it vary in form from place to place) and the scope of the "case" (what exactly is it a case of, how are the multiplicity of features of this case related to the wider encompassing

[5] The idea of the "global South" while offering strategic potential in terms of "voice" and diverse theoretical traditions carries very similar dangers for an a priori and potentially conceptually confused distinction amongst cities, perhaps precluding consideration of urban processes which are part of the same empirical or analytical field (see Robinson, 2014; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014, for some debate on this).

process?). Here McMichael's (1990) important contribution on the mutual interactions amongst cases and wider systemic processes is important (see also Tilly (1984), Brenner (2001) and Robinson (2011)). And finally, in terms of the individualising and case study method, what is the status of the case in relation to its ability to contribute to wider theoretical conversations? Is any case whatsoever suitable for building conceptual insights? How might such conceptualisation proceed?

In the rest of the paper I weave together classic and more recent innovations in comparison from within urban studies with a wider philosophical analysis of the issues at stake in reframing the architecture of comparison for understanding the urban, now. The paper stands then as an invitation to practice global urban studies differently - comparatively. It also explicitly develops a new vocabulary and methodological grounding for doing urban comparisons. The following section develops this invitation and methodological quest firstly in a Marxist political-economy lexicon. I then consider some of the potential inherent in the actually-existing vernacular comparative practices of urban studies, and finally I draw on Deleuze's philosophical project, in which he seeks to understand how concepts emerge, in order to develop some new vocabularies for urban comparative methods. The final section of the paper explains how this new vocabulary of comparative method can be put to work through a review of some recent experiments in the field of global urban studies.

2. *Reformatting comparison*

a. Cases, contexts, abstraction

At stake in reframing comparative methods are the conceptual challenges associated with working across specific observations to develop concepts which can communicate beyond a single case. What is the meaning and status of the single case or instance, in relation to other instances, to the concepts used to discuss them, to the wider processes shaping their distinctive form? Pressing away at this issue draws urbanists into a conversation with some core philosophical debates, such as what is the relation between concepts and the world; or what is the nature of abstraction. Certainly, adjudicating amongst the many contentious debates in this area is far beyond the purview of a single paper. Moreover, the limited philosophical training of contemporary urbanists, myself included, restricts the possibility for sustained engagement with these issues (although see Goonewardena et al, 2008, for example). My goal in this section is to draw on some foundational methodological texts in a political economy tradition, and then in the third section, to offer a reading of Deleuze's systematisation of a contemporary post-Kantian approach to understanding how concepts are formed. This is to

indicate some alternative tactical directions for comparative urbanism. Much further work will of course remain.

There is a rich repertoire of terms to appreciate the relationship between numerous instances of empirical and observed reality and associated concepts. For example, we might describe our observations as particular cases of wider (common, general, or universal) phenomena, e.g. one human subject amongst all of humanity, or one particular instance of a conceptually identified phenomenon such as labour, or one distinctive form of a more complex widespread process such as urban agglomeration. For urban studies a particular case of a universal phenomenon, in a determinate relationship to a specified universal, or general type of that phenomenon is also profoundly shaped by a range of other processes, to produce distinctive, hybrid and contextually dependent forms of something found more widely. At the limit, this produces an outcome which even exceeds determination by the specified universal. Thus particularities (specific instances of a universal) are made distinctive, and can be imagined to be rendered as singularities, specific concrete phenomena, by their instanciation in the context of the diverse range of processes and relationships which shape or produce that specific instance (Stanek, 2008, p. 64). A singularity, then, would invite us to begin thinking from, for example, "'places' considered as natural, in their merely physical or sensory reality" (Lefebvre, 1991: 16).

Thus, to take the example of the individual, Lefebvre (1968 [1940]), following Marx, insists that individuals are not "'uniques', the same everywhere, with rigid and necessary relations between them, but real beings, at a particular stage of their development, joined to each other by relationships that are complex, concrete and fluid." (p. 63). This imagination of a full, unalienated humanity was a very important manoeuvre for Lefebvre who countered the alienation of people through capitalism's production and consumption relations with the vital and sensuous, "actual and active" process of living, with the idea of "total man" (Lefebvre, 1955), and opposed the alienation of space by "state, capital, rationalist knowledge, and phallocentric symbolism" with the production of space as "oeuvre" (Kipfer, 2009, pgs xxiv; xxxii)[6].

In this section I want to highlight two different modes of abstraction which are at play in Marxist thought more generally, as well as in Lefebvre's analysis of space, and of the urban. I select Lefebvre here based on his detailed exposition of dialectical materialism as method (1968 [1940]) and because his open, heterodox Marxism has played an important role in shaping this tradition in urban studies and geography. The first mode of abstraction is very well set out by Stanek (2008) – (certain forms of) space can be seen as a concrete abstraction, mirroring Marx's theorising of actually existing abstractions – abstractions in practice –

[6] "The true subject of the Becoming is living man. Yet around and above him the abstractions acquire a strange existence and a mysterious efficacy; Fetishes reign over him." (Lefebvre,2009 (1940): 85).

characteristic of Capitalism (money, commodities, labour). Thus private property, or abstract space is an actually existing abstraction, a one-sided form of space foundational to the operation of space under Capitalism.

But for Marx, and for Lefebvre and Marxism in general, there are other (more or less Hegelian) modes of abstraction which have posed important challenges for analysis throughout twentieth century Marxist thought, and which turn out to have significant consequences for how cases are treated in urban comparison. Here, the process of abstraction is tied to the production of a more generalised "concrete-in-thought" – as opposed to an "abstraction-in-practice" (or concrete abstraction). The operative concept for me here is the idea of a "concrete totality" which I want to argue remains a methodological challenge for Marxist approaches, especially in urban studies and geography, not resolved by the idea of a concrete abstraction or the commitment to analysing capitalism. In their restatement of a Marxist urban theory in response to McFarlane (2011), Brenner et al. (2011) note that "assemblage thinking opens up the prospect for thinking space as a relationally overdetermined plenitude"; they suggest that this needs to be linked to critical "geopolitical economy" to be effective (p. 237). Indeed such a view of space as "overdetermined plenitude" can be deduced directly from the problematic of a concrete totality from within Marxist theory and has posed a significant interpretive challenge within this tradition.

Paraphrasing Marx's introduction to the notebooks which have come to be known as the "Grundrisse", Lefebvre (2009) observes that "the concrete is the concrete because it is the synthesis of several determinations, multiplicity made one"[7]. By contrast, abstractions are one-sided dimensions. As a result, following Marx Lefebvre deduces that "this whole must be recovered by moving from the abstract to the concrete" (p. 75). This can take the form of deciphering dialectically the "totality" formed by, for example, the two sides of a commodity (as use value and exchange value), or, for example, by the interdependent concepts of production, consumption, distribution and exchange, which mutually determine and cannot be thought without each other ("they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity" (Marx, 1993, p. 99). In addition, all instances of any particular phenomenon could be seen to form a part of a lateral totality (across time and space) of that phenomenon or concept (such as labour), determined at a level of generality, with abstraction working to identify these different instances as part of a totality. In his discussion here, generalities, such as "production in general" (p. 88) or "labour in general", which gather together all historical and different instances of a phenomenon have a limited conceptual lutility. They do not allow any "real historical stage of production to be grasped" and might be inclined to confuse historical development with analytical precision: rather than becoming

[7] "The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse" (Marx, 1993: 101).

more complex with time, for example, leaving simple forms in the past, he argues that the emergence of the terms themselves, as simplifications or abstractions, is directly linked to their actual historical and empirical simplification as abstractions-in-practice. Marx thus resists this move to explore "labour in general" and rather builds towards his famous alternative approach, the "concrete abstraction" of labour as exchange value under capitalism, which in his later work becomes a starting point rather than an end point of analysis:

> "this abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference... Such a state of affairs is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society – in the United States. Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice." (p. 104)

In the *Grundrisse* Marx also explores the limits of starting analysis with an empty abstraction based on the empirical entirety of any one phenomenon and indicates the need for this to be thought rather as a rich complexity of relations, a "concrete totality" (Marx, 1993, p. 100-101).[8] Following Hegel's critique of empty empirical abstractions (Osborne, 2004), he suggests that a simple descriptive abstraction needs rather to be understood through numerous careful abstract determinations, moving "analytically to ever more simple concepts", from where the journey would be retraced to the empirical phenomenon (his example is "population"), but "not as the chaotic conception of the whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations" (p. 100). The concrete then is always for Marx (and Lefebvre) a "concrete-in-thought". Here, then, Lefebvre's canny interpretation of abstraction as an "abbreviation" of the concrete makes sense: "Categories and concepts are elaborations of the actual content, abbreviations of the infinite mass of particularities of concrete existence" (p. 92). However, arguing that the materialist dialectic begins with content (and is not contained in the mind as in Hegel's formulations), Lefebvre suggests more broadly that there are perhaps only "concrete abstractions" (p. 76), abstractions emerging from practice in the very broadest sense, and he goes on to postulate a wide-ranging methodological programme inspired by the numerous abstractions which are produced in social practice and where critique and reflection can place this in relationship to totalities of experience or interpretation. Thus, "the whole exists concretely" (p. 114): "This sum-total, organised by the praxis and in which the

[8] Lefebvre, 1968 [1940], p. 83). – starting with the categories, (such as exchange value, abstract labour, money, capital), "each category has its place in the explicative whole which leads to the reconstitution of the given concrete totality" (ie starting here with concrete abstractions).

unity of the real is recovered, no partial determinism being able to ever wholly shatter it, is the truly concrete" (p. 123)

Marx and Lefebvre of course indicate that abstractions and conceptualisations need to be worked up in relation to specific epochs; and (especially Lefebvre) propose a dynamic, open totality, with active human subjects shaping history, and a theorisation responsive to the specific material "content" encountered. But in a theoretical world suffused with post-colonial and post-structuralist critique, philosophical reflection has to confront its Euro-centricity (Spivak, 1988) and the need for multiple starting points to theorisation. Peter Osborne suggests that in Hegelian terms even an analytically "good" abstraction in the sense of an adequate apprehension of a "totality" has to be a "bad" abstraction in the sense of being one-sided, by virtue of the multiplicity of possible concretes-in-thought which might be proposed by "a plurality of social subjects" (p. 27). Thus Marxism has had to grapple not only with the general practical limits of seeking to apprehend a concrete totality, but also with the impossibility (and inadvisability) of seeking to grasp anything like *a* totality, in a world where multiple determinations of related outcomes must be acknowledged.

Martin Jay (1984) offers a detailed reading of the contested adventures of the concept of "totality", and the different Marxist and post-Marxist debates which shaped engagements with this idea – what concepts ground the possibility of comprehending the totality of capitalist society (the working class?), which elements of the totality are determinant (the economy?), and how might one conceive of an open totality? For example, Lefebvre's dynamic open sense of historical possibility, (Adorno and) Benjamin's fragmentation and multiplication of totality in constellations.

I want to signpost here, from within Marxist urban studies, the idea of a concrete totality as multiple, partial and open, the concrete being infinitely complex and interesting, "inépuisable" (inexhaustible), characterised by a tangle of relations[9] (Lefebvre, 1955, p. 64), and to embrace the important commitment to building understandings with the content – the matter - of experience.

Together these concerns emerging from within Marxism can support a position that potentially one has to consider beginning again with building abstractions specific to different contexts. I also take from this the necessary openness of even concrete abstractions to the particular i.e. particular labours, capitals, even under capitalism, show huge variety (as abstract labour and as lived labour), hence the "varieties of capitalism" school of analysis. And furthermore, as one seeks to understand a concrete totality the multiplicity of relationships, the infinity of the concrete, draws one towards explaining a "singularity", indeed overdetermined by

[9] "le phénomène (immédiat, donné, present devant nous) est toujours plus riche, plus complexe, que toute loi et toute essence" (Lefebvre, 1955: 60)

a multiplicity of analytical processes, rather than a particular aligned with a pre-given universal.

For comparative analysis we can pose some useful questions in relation to this idiom of analysis. Firstly, what abstractions might one work with? Taking some of the classical concrete abstractions of Marx and Lefebvre (money, labour, abstract space), contemporary anthropological work might alert us to the way in which even a powerful "abstraction-in-practice" can quickly lose purchase in some situations as even abstractions such as money, commodities and labour operate in a diversity of historical ways (Taussig, 1997). Secondly, the plethora of processes at work in any given concrete totality, and the historically open nature of such totalities, have over time drawn Marxist theorisations increasingly towards a conjunctural, incomplete and non-determinate specification of both abstract and concrete totalities (Jay, 1984; Althusser and Balibar,2009). These and a diversity of post-structuralist approaches have since set analytical agendas which sit more comfortably with this openness and plurality (Jay, 1984). Thus Marxism has itself had to engage with these questions directly, including within critical post-colonial studies (Chakrabarty, 2000). While Michel Foucault suggested in 1975 that "It is impossible at the present time to write history without using a whole range of concept directly or indirectly linked to Marx's thought" (Foucault, 1980: 53; cited in Jay, 1984, p. 520), which also rings true for urban studies and geography, even today, the decades in between have offered an array of initiatives to build non-totalising and yet still critically motivated and often politically committed theoretical and philosophical analyses. Urbanists and geographers, including Marxist geographers, have pressed the politically transformative potential of their theoretical and empirical work, in the face of the plurality of the social world and the fragile uncertainties of their concepts. In many political moments and contexts, it was indeed strikingly impossible for knowledge to be political without radically embracing diversity and non-closure – and here my own South African experience is instructive where race and class jostled in a tight analytical and practical entwining with gender and urban social mobilisations to insist on robust but subtle theorisations of transformation (Adler and Webster, 1995).

John Pickles (2014) traces these Marxist concerns with theorising totality and grappling with conjunctural specificity directly to the dominant British spatial and cultural analysis of Doreen Massey and Stuart Hall. Thus the imagination of an "open sense of place" draws specific instances into relationship with other contexts through tracing the extensive connections and trajectories which make up a specific place (Massey, 1994; 2005). Such a conjunctural analysis of space, inspired to some extent by Althusser and Poulantzas (via Jessop) offers then a full engagement with the concrete as "singularity" and multiplicity (I will return to this in the third section below). I would argue that this does not militate against practices of enquiry which mobilise productive conceptualisations, but it does indicate the importance for Marxist theory of being critically and reflexively aware

in theoretical practice of the potential limits of an abstraction both in relation to its starting point, the content it begins with (e.g. euroamerican capitalism), and in relation to the concrete totalities it subsequently encounters.

b. Interlude: A comparative urban vernacular

In comparative urban research, a productive tension between wider concepts (universals, concrete abstractions) and particular urban outcomes has informed the vernacular practices of comparison (as opposed to the strictures of the quasi-scientific formal method). Thus the format of wider concepts and shared processes working out differently across different local contexts conventionally structures the possibility of comparative enquiry. Shared features provide the opportunity for thinking with the variety of a phenomenon to generate conceptual insights (Kantor and Savitch, 1998; Wacquant, 2008; for a more extended treatment, see Robinson, 2015a; b). Shared processes affecting many different places [fiscal restructuring; changing international division of labour; shared policy or rule regimes] or concrete universals [like states, urban social movements] are seen to be present, if differentiated, and to be shaping outcomes differently in different places: in conjunction with the specific features of each place the outcomes are different in each locality. By comparing these outcomes we of course learn something about the specificity of each locality (Tilly's (1984) individualising comparison), but we can also compare and analyse the intervening (localised) processes in each place which affect the specific outcome, as well as learn more about the wider overarching process. This variety then provides researchers with many excellent "natural experiments" (Diamond and Robinson, 2011), the basic potential of the comparative imagination in social science.

An excellent example of this in urban studies is Susan Clarke's (1995) study of "restructuring" processes in 8 US cities. She explored institutional, policy and political changes taking place in response to the crises engendered through processes of deindustrialisation. This is a carefully composed and nuanced study, with the explanatory labour focussed on the differential impacts of industrial restructuring in each locality, articulated through the variety of political responses in each city. Her analysis draws out how the balance of political interests in each place (community, labour, business, for example) and organisational form of collaboration as well as the agendas of local political elites shape the kinds of responses and then potential future growth paths of each city.

This example can help us to approach how the particular spatialities of the urban might impact on the operationalization of a comparative imagination, and also to draw out how the assumptions regarding the relationships between concepts and phenomena affect vernacular comparative practice. Here, for example, we see the

postulation of a process affecting many places in the world, "restructuring": the reorganisation of industrial production, with the "new international division of labour" made possible by changing technologies of communication, deskilling and spatial fragmentation of the labour process, and huge differentials in labour costs around the world, in the context of new trade and currency regimes. This wider process is seen to work out differently in different cities, shaped by the specific histories and combinations of economic and political activities in that place. The imagination at work, then, is of a wider process, which is somehow conceptualised as "a" process, working out differently on the ground, in a hybridised way. A similar imagination subtends the argument that "neoliberalisation" shapes each locality, only instantiated differently in each case. Although Peck, Brenner and Theodore (2009) make an important move to propose a recursive link between circulation/localisation and differentiation of neoliberalisation processes, this resolves into a sense that differentiation – as experimentation in localities – is itself a key feature of the logic of the wider process, supporting its functional (if contradiction-ridden) relationship to potentially resolving capitalist crisis tendencies. Here is an opening to revisit the ways in which Marxist analyses are able to be radically open to conceptual revisability through exploring different cases, both revising what the nature of neoliberalism might be as a result of this differentiation, and at the limit proposing that new concepts might be required (Ferguson, 2010; Robinson, 2011b).

This imagination that posits a duality of case/empirical observation and social processes occupying some other dimension and carrying great explanatory power, only hybridised in contact with localities, has been rephrased in thinking spatially about globalisation (Massey, 1994). Beyond the "global"/"local" dichotomy which retains something of the generalised/hybrid structure, the specific set of flows, networks, connections, influences, circulations which add up to what had been called "globalisation", offers an alternative way to understand the connections between specific places and elsewhere. Specific channels can be charted (Tsing, 2000); people, things and ideas can be traced; and the ways in which these come together to compose a place, a specific outcome, can be understood "genetically" – we can trace the specific historical events and influences which explain particular urban outcomes; we can explore the trajectories of phenomena, their "assemblage" and co-ordination. Rather than positing a unified process, such as restructuring, or neoliberalisation, it should be possible to name and trace the production and effect, for example, of certain rule regimes for trade; the politics of the creation and circulation of ideas that shape governance practices; the techniques and regulations that generate financial practices; the bundle of geopolitical concerns that direct flows of aid, trade, arms and fighting or fleeing bodies.

To compose these as more general processes – capitalist restructuring, neoliberalisation – may well be helpful for some analytical purposes, such as to

define and demarcate wider trends, or to interpret an effective shift in practices, or to characterise a period, for example. But postulating these as singular external processes, only hybridised in interaction with different contexts, establishes a pattern for explanation which reduces the capacity to approach the diversity of actual historical influences shaping distinctive outcomes (we already have a causal alibi in mind in the supposedly overarching process identified previously or elsewhere). This also significantly undermines the possibility that experiences in different places could shape and transform conceptualisations of these wider processes, or identify new or different relevant agentful historical assemblages. This is especially important since these conceptualisations very often reflect a located view: "capitalist restructuring" entailed significant growth and expansion of cities in many parts of the world – but the conceptualisation and analysis of restructuring in urban studies has been articulated largely through US and European cities which experienced certain forms of industrial decline and set about searching for other opportunities to renew their economic fortunes. Massively expanding urban contexts, such Chinese cities, Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul, and many others might also inform this analytic. Similarly, the many cities around the world whose branch plant and ISI economies have been decimated by the more recent changing global trade regime (like many in Brazil, India, South Africa), or the many cities around the world, notably in Africa, whose systems of social support and governance were torn apart by SAPs - these all belong in the frame of these investigations too. At the very least, the wider systemic processes need to be subject to interrogation and reconstitution based on empirical investigation in different contexts.

Even in its post-colonial idiom (for example, Chakrabarty, 2000, who sees History I – the analysis of capitalism – as immune from his postcolonial critique founded on geographical and historical difference) an imagination which preserves the idea that wider processes, or more strongly, structures (such as global capitalism) derived in analysis can be identified locally in a hybrid, differentiated form, generates a view of many places as residual to theorisation, marking only the hybridization of processes derived (and already conceptualised) from elsewhere. This both retains the centrality of conceptualisations informed by only some contexts, and reduces the study of different places to a form of 'defanged empiricism', unable to transform understandings of these wider processes and leaving conceptualizations relatively intact (see Chaudhury 2012; Connell 2007).

Here, then, we confront the significance of the case in the comparative imagination. Is it helpful to see the case either as:

- an example of a general concept, or wider process (here is "restructuring" in action; here we can identify "neoliberalism"), that is, as a particular for a specified *and pre-theorised* universal, or;

- as a 'context' (a concrete totality) in which circulating trajectories or processes or widely spread phenomena (concrete universals) are hybridized (but perhaps not themselves understood differently) - that is, local context adds only empirical variety but makes no analytical difference?

While both of these manoeuvres lead to a more nuanced understanding of processes and concepts, in their hybridity or their particularity in different cases, neither of these alternatives directs us to a strongly revisable theorisation[10], to the opportunity to initiate theoretical insights from new starting points. And both do little justice to the open concrete totalities which might gesture towards the complexity of the urban/space. Taking off from the conjunctural post-Marxist spatial analytic of globalisation discussed above (and by extension of global urbanisation), the following section considers an alternative starting point for conceptualisation.

What if cases were approached as singularities? If cases are considered to be singularities they can be seen as distinctive outcomes on their own terms, not already interpreted as specific instances of a wider process, or a universal category. They would be opened up for conceptualisation through a wider array of available interpretations, related cases or emergent concepts. This can lead us to a focus on building understandings with and across cases through what I will call, after Deleuze and Guattari (1994), "generative" comparative tactics, focussed on generating concepts. In addition, I suggest that in Deleuze's philosophical efforts to characterise how we come to know the world, we can also find inspiration to approach cases through their genesis within the context of the multiplicity of processes and events which generate singularities, alongside many other inter-related singularities - much as in the revised view of globalisation I have outlined. This starting point for thinking the urban, through its interconnections, specificities and repetitions, we could call "Genetic" comparative tactics.

These two tactics for a renewed urban comparative imagination – generative, and genetic - do not exhaust the potential of thinking cities with elsewhere, and certainly not the broader challenge of building understandings of any specific urban outcome. Moreover, a Deleuzian sensibility should lead us quickly to ask some meta-questions about whether and on what basis the emergent singularities or individual entities we are interested in understanding constitute a moment that might be thought of as "urban". In addition, in the world of social science, at a pragmatic level very often our objects of enquiry are well known, and many of our concepts serve us effectively. But like Brenner et al. in the quote below I think that in the current moment when urban studies is urgently seeking to build

[10] When, for example, is a state not a state; or neoliberalism hybridised out of existence? When does money no longer stand for the form of equivalence amongst (capitalist commodities, and rather indicates a zone of magic (Taussig, 1997). Would new concepts/abstractions emerge through beginning with the content of a distinctive context?

understandings of an "urban" which is both conceptually unstable and rapidly transforming empirically, the opportunity to think with singularities, with Deleuze, is very promising. Reformulating comparison along these lines could offer a more sustained commitment to theoretical revisability, and would provide scope for any case, any city, any urban outcome, to be a starting point for conceptualisation, and to make a difference to those concepts.

c. Singularities, repeated instances, concepts

> "Could it be possibly here, faced with the extraordinary challenge of mapping a world-wide yet internally hierarchized and differentiated urban ensemble that the conceptual and methodological gesture facilitated through assemblage approaches becomes most productive?" Brenner, Madden and Wachsmuth (2011: 237).

The nature of the urban world, composed of many different centres, cities, settlements and circulations, has produced a certain possibility for the comparative imagination, as discussed so far; it can also provide some direction for how we might start to reframe comparisons. Perhaps most significant are two key and related features of the urban:

(1) cities are highly interconnected with one another;

(2) across cities, urban outcomes are repetitive, even as they are at the same time distinctive.

The best example I have seen which illuminates this is Jane Jacob's (2006) discussion of the serial production of the residential high rise. Here the distinctive achievement of each repetition – almost-the-same – through globalizing circulations and specific assembling of diverse elements to produce each building provides an insight into what it might mean to think with the productivity of the virtual in the sphere of the urban (Farias 2010: 15). The achievement of urban modernity in the repetitive architecture of international modernism emerges from the relatively unpredictable multiplicity of circulations and manifold elements able to be assembled into each construction – buildings which are both repeated and yet produced as original objects, with an equally original yet partly repeated and interconnected set of meanings crafted locally, each time (King 2004): 'the making of repetition – or more precisely, repeated instances in many different contexts – requires variance, different assemblages of allies in different settings' (Jacobs 2006: 22). For Jacobs, each instance *produces* the global *effect* of international modernism in her comparative research on the residential high rise: each instance is a singularity, emergent from an array of interconnected practices, ideas and

relationships, and not an example of an already given global process (Jacobs 2012). To my mind this is a significant intervention – not least directing us to reconsider how we understand the "repeated instance", which is such a significant feature of the urban landscape – from architectural design to gated communities; from marketing images to low income housing finances, pavements, market stalls, and numerous other examples.

The global/local distinction, then, is erased in favour of attending to the specific interconnected processes creating outcomes, as Jane Jacobs demonstrates. And thus the elements of the urban (elsewhere) which might present themselves for (comparative) analytical reflection would be distributed across multiple "cities", as many differentiations of related urban outcomes. Thinking with both the interconnections and the differences, then, places a multiplicity of cities and urban outcomes within the same analytical frame, and provides fruitful grounds for methodological experimentation.

In my view this also offers a way to bring the spatiality of the urban into methodological imagination – rather than the practice of relying on cases, composed of wider processes hitting the ground in different ways, assembling a path-dependency which then grants local history and specificity an agency in reshaping or swerving (or being overwhelmed by) wider forces. Instead, comparative practices could engage with urban outcomes through tracing their ***genesis*** by means of specific connections, influences, actions, compositions, alliances, experiences, across the full array of possible elements of urban life: such as material-social-imaginative-institutional. Alongside this, we could arrive at an understanding of a "virtual" urban – which could be something like all the possibilities we have for understanding or determining the nature of specific urban outcomes.

The "virtual"[11] for Deleuze seeks to capture the multiplicity of conceptual-and-empirical elements (arranged through relations) which come into thought and which enable determination of any of a perhaps infinite variety of related but specific outcomes (perhaps much as the equation describing a curve in mathematics produces an infinity of specifiable singular points; or genetic information produces any number of different but specifiable inter-related individuals). Insofar as we can identify a virtual terrain of Ideas which is concerned with the urban, this would be equivalent to placing all cities within a potentially shared analytical terrain. There is also scope to benefit from some intuitive resonances with empirical forms of the urban, as in the Jane Jacobs example

[11] Joe Hughes, in his very helpful Guide to Deleuze's Difference and Repetition observes that we can understand "the virtual as the field in which problems – or Ideas – are progressively determined" (p. 112). This is not a virtual to come, in which the possibility of the present is to be fulfilled and is unspecifiable (Lefebvre works with such an approach to virtuality), but an emergent, genetic and historical virtuality, inspired by our intuition or observations, and marking the potential for any number of different, related instances to emerge into our understanding.

above, where a multiplicity of flows and connections, processes and practices can be traced to understand the emergence of many different, repeated instances of urban phenomena. Could an urban "virtual" index both the virtual composed in Deleuze's schema to suggest the Idea as a multiplicity of possibilities/rules to bring objects (any urban outcomes) into representation (see below), and the modes of becoming of urban outcomes, in which an interconnected array of urban processes and practices could be seen as productive of "any city whatever" (Simone). Cities, though, are not only produced through the wider interconnections and assemblages that Jane Jacobs highlights, but the urban is also made in a Simone-ian vein through the active associations, practices, imaginations, alliances and heterogeneous stitching together of possibilities within and across cities. These constitute the genesis of specific urban outcomes.

As a caveat, I would suggest that in seeking to engage with the singularites[12] that are specific urban outcomes, it would be helpful to extend beyond the actor-network theory-inspired focus on materialities and assemblages. To capture the emergence of urban outcomes the heterodox Marxist, Henri Lefebvre, inspires a concern for appreciating the incredibly complex object, "space". The "production of space" involves a multiplicity of processes (which he sought to conceptualise through a three-dimensional dialectic, see Schmid, 2008), including: fabrication, financing, design, experience, signification, practice, associations, imagination, unpredictable emergence. Urban "space", and by implication, "the urban", is an almost impossible object to comprehend. It does not only operate through the coming together of interconnections and flows of material phenomena, as an assemblage imagination might be suggesting (McFarlane, 2011) but draws on a much richer canvas (and spatiality) of understanding and explication. In this case, other images of virtuality are required, not simply the extensive interconnected spatiality of the urban, but also the array of possibilities for constituting the urban through creating meaning in/of the city, making a particular "urban" in and through experience, constituting the field of the urban through all the possibilities of individual movement across the city (Ferrari, 2013), or the rubrics for making connections across heterogeneous elements within spaces, or (miraculously) seeking to piece together unlikely alliances (Simone, 2011, 2013). The "urban" then might be the entire field of possibilities which are potentially instantiated in any city whatever (Pieterse and Simone, 2013); this field and the genesis of specific urban outcomes, is certainly far richer than a flat materiality (Allen, 2009).

[12] I use here the term "singularities" in its conventional philosophical sense to refer to specific phenomena not entrained in a universal or wider process . Deleuze uses the technical mathematical sense, in which singularities are transformations in a series which can determine a distinctive entity – in Deleuze's schema, the singularities emerge in relation to elements/relations in the Idea (the virtual), to enable determination of a phenomenon – which is anyway a "singularity" in the first sense.

The field of the urban resonates well with Deleuze's (1994) exploration of "*Difference and Repetition*" – intuitively from the perspective of the broadest scope of this work, in the sense that we can imagine an urban "virtual" which could produce a multiplicity of singular outcomes, repeated but different. This would both draw all urban outcomes, all cities, into a shared analytical field, and insist on attending to difference and always being alert to the need to multiply the field of analytical possibility[13]. If we are directed by Deleuze to rethink how to understand repeated yet differentiated outcomes, it is in the context of his much wider project of trying to re-craft philosophical interpretations of how we come to know the world in its emergence – how do we come to represent an object?

In an incredibly complex formulation (and only one element of a vast philosophical contribution) in *Difference and* Repetition Deleuze sets out to recast the classical confrontation between a knowing subject and an impenetrable world. An important point of engagement and divergence for his work is the Kantian manifold (translated in English as "the diverse") which comes into human understanding as "diverse" pre-existent entities, which can come to be known through the syntheses (apprehension, reproduction, recognition), categories (universals), and on the basis of the unchanging schema of space and time (1994, p. 356)[14]. But Deleuze famously indicates that "Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse" (Deleuze, 1994: 280). Deleuze draws this manifold into a much more intimate interaction with conceptualisation, in which space and time, for example, are emergent in processes of conceptualisation and individuation (see Flaxman, 2005). Rather than seeking to conceptualise diverse pre-given entities through a representational idiom, he orchestrates a vast repertoire of philosophical endeavour to provide some reformulations and elaborations of the Kantian syntheses whereby Ideas/concepts are generated.

This philosophical project does not present us with a manual for comparative urban practice, or for social science method – neither is it an effective description of the way the world is. Rather, we find in this work a contemporary rubric (full of divided subjects and shifting materialities, for example) for appreciating what might be at stake in coming to know a dynamic, emergent world. At the core of this account are the many ways in which the idea of difference can be put to work

[13] We can say this kind of thing at a very abstract philosophical level – in practice the analytical field of the urban is indeed rich and diversified, differentiated by topic, decades of theoretical endeavour, as well as being potentially limited and truncated in its relevance to different cities. I do not seek to flatten the complex terrain of social or urban theory – but I think at this level of generality we can insist that the field of possibilities for understanding the urban is both analytically and empirically interconnected across the multiplicity of possible outcomes.

[14] Deleuze observes the play on the invented word, "*erewhon"* (Samuel Butler), which might apply to the generic schemata as they move unchanged from place to place, but which could also be rendered "here now" and inform the ambivalence he reads in Kant's discussion of the schema of space and time, which might "take flight and point beyond themselves in the direction of the conception of differential ideas", "irreducible both to the universality of the concept and to the particularity of the now here" (p 356; note 7).

to disturb and offer some alternative imaginations for how we come to understanding, in contrast with the representational model of concepts which mirror, of fail to mirror, the world. The story begins with the contractions of difference as intuitions are drawn on by a fractured subject which tries (and fails) to produce understanding. In the tracks of Kant he portrays this as a series of syntheses based on the repetitions which this search for understanding involves in the realms of habit (the present), memory (constituting duration and the past) and then ranging more widely across the imagination and thoughts. Drawing on repertoires from science, biology, mathematics, psychoanalysis as well as philosophical debates inspired by Kant, Nietzche, Bergson, Leibniz and others, Deleuze postulates a process of conceptualisation through a series of complex manoeuvres which recast Kant's subject-centred formulations, arriving at the "Idea", or the virtual. But then he adds a distinctive but parallel set of processes whereby matter is drawn in to understanding as "intensities"[15] (a sense of matter remaining after the first set of syntheses) are explicated and individuated.

Thus he articulates a dual process of "different/(c)iation", whereby the determination of an entity brings together the conceptual process of differen-t-iation, seeking to make a determination of a phenomenon within a virtual field, and the dimensions of the sensible with the qualitative and extensive emergence of an individuated, differen-c-iated, entity, which is accompanied by the production of the "spatium", the constitution of depth, of space (on this see also Dewsbury and Thrift, 2005). Together with the subject's awareness of the intensities remaining after efforts at formulating ideas have drawn off difference, then, a final (asymmetric) "synthesis" is postulated which sees Ideas[16] and sensibilities brought together to arrive at a represented object, from "a sensibility 'bubbling' with intensities and a thought 'rumbling with Ideas'" (Hughes, 2009: 168)[17]

Deleuze's philosophy offers us some new patterns for appreciating how concepts of things and the things themselves might be understood as entwined: suggesting that concepts emerge from recursive engagements with an active world, presenting itself to us, posing problems for our memory, habitual practices and finally our imagination and coming to our understanding as concepts through a series of failed efforts by a fragmented subject and a dispersed self to resolve these (extra/intra/inter-) subjective processes, arriving at an always incomplete apprehension of phenomena with residual "intensities", and unconceptualised

[15] (intensities being the sense of matter which persists after different/ciating entities – "Intensities pull Ideas outside of their virtuality; Ideas give form to intensity") (Hughes, p. 168)

[16] In Difference and Repetition Deleuze counterposes representational concepts to "Ideas" (p. 360) but later (*What is* Philosophy) reverts to "concepts" to imply what he defined there as ideas. (DandR Guide).

[17] There is much that might be inspiring from the insistence of these intensities, the need to approach urban outcomes afresh in their distinctive, compelling, unconceptualised emergence. Pieterse (2013) mobilises some of this imagination in his quest, along with Maliq Simone, for vocabularies to understand the "rogue urbanisms" of some aspects of cities in Africa.

differences that are drawn off from emergent concepts which continue to bubble through (disturb) our concepts.

This is philosophy, not method. But since much of our method has been inspired by alternative philosophical imaginaries, Deleuze's approach to concept formation should give us pause for thought. One of the insights social scientists might draw from these philosophical propositions would be to be open to reimagining the architecture of the active processes of conceptualisation which are at work in contributing to our understanding of the phenomena we engage with. And Deleuze offers us an account of how that might proceed which draws on and works with the production and productivity of differences – the active working across related and divergent phenomena, attending to the ways in which difference is drawn off from efforts to conceptualise, appreciating that concepts could be thought of as multiplicities. Ideas are produced through encounters with empirical phenomena, and brought to bear on sensibilities (to matter). But the production of a "virtual" field of interpretation also involves working in thought and imagination with intuitions, and their repetitions in memories. It involves drawing connections and associations across different outcomes, both using and un-grounding available concepts in the search to understand new singularities, to seek to determine what it is we encounter.

Overall, his approach is to provoke the generation of concepts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). In a Deleuzian (1994) idiom we might consider then that the urban manifold in its many expressions 'makes itself known to us', as Simone (2011) puts it. This generates new problems for us to reflect on, prompting processes of conceptualisation. In the case of thinking cities (in a world of cities, in the context of a wider field of "the urban"), we are very quickly drawn to bring the experiences and conceptualisations of other cities or urban outcomes to bear on any specific problem we are confronted with. We become aware of the multiplicity of interconnected processes generating urban outcomes, acknowledging that different urban outcomes often have a shared genesis and validating the need to think them together; and we might find in the realm of conceptualisation (theoretical debate; other cases) good ideas elsewhere to help to think the new context with, to differentiate, to subtract from. Whether through genetic or generative tactics - tracing the emergence of the phenomenon, or thinking with elsewhere - conceptualising specific contexts is placed in relation to the wider urban world. In this imagination, which is not to prejudice the specific methodologies for exploration or questions to be explored, nor the nature of the theoretical repertoires adequate to the entities we seek to come to an understanding of, conceptualization is a dynamic and generative process, subject to rules of experimentation and revisability, embedded in wider conversations, but with the potential to start anywhere (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994).

The key comparative ambition to explain outcomes can benefit from re-framing the meaning of the 'case' as not simply an example (perhaps hybridised) of singular and analytically pre-given overarching processes (Jacobs, 2012), but as distinctive although often interconnected outcomes (singularities) which propose to us opportunities to interrogate and conceptualise the wide range of dynamics constituting the urban. This offers us a starting point for a quite different geography to conceptualisation – and to the comparative imagination. We can imagine a "genetic" comparative tactic, inspired by the core spatial form of the urban as interconnected but differentiated, as inspiration for such a mode of comparativism. The methodological practice here is genetic in the sense of tracing how a specific urban outcome both emerges and comes into representation. And we can imagine a "generative" comparative tactic, in which a virtual field of conceptualisation can be provoked and enriched through bringing different singularities, or cases, into conversation, as inspired by the problems thrown up for/by us. Conceptualisation might be thought of as beginning anywhere, with any singularity[18], but always emerging through building connections with and identifying differentiations across other related instances – both genetically related i.e. outcomes emergent from interconnected and related processes, and conceptually generative i.e. understandings built in conversation with other existing conceptualisations, emergent in relation to other phenomena and processes. Both instantiate a minimalist but productive understanding of comparison as thinking through elsewhere. In practice genetic and generative approaches are not alternative strategies, but work well within Deleuze's formulation of the "virtual", as co-existing and inter-twined tactics.

Furthermore, we can gain some purchase on questions such as, *How far can concepts stretch? When should they be abandoned?* Most importantly for the project to promote a more global theoretical conversation about the urban, able to start anywhere, the conceptual repertoire of thinking with difference provides a strong indication of openness to revisability, and to an affirmation rather than negation or disregard (in assertions of pure repetition) of difference - as a result of the "multiplicity which belongs to the idea" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 336). Thus, on the one hand, following Deleuze's own terminology, we find that as concepts stretch to new cases or are imagined as repetitions, difference is "drawn off" – much difference risks becomes unconceptualised[19]. We might be left with:

> - concepts without difference: they might be imagined to remain inviolate as a concept across many different instances – and the processes of generating "lateral totalities" or "abstraction" (both as abbreviation and as concrete abstraction) or "universalization" would all invoke this dynamic;

[18] And it is worth noting that in this spatialized imagination of singularities, they are neither isolates, or alone within a conceptual field.

[19] "Repetition, by contrast, is represented *outside* the concept, as though it were a difference without concept, *but always with the presupposition of an identical concept"* (Deleuze, 1994, p. 339).

- equally we would have much difference without conceptualisation, a point AbdouMaliq Simone (2014) makes in advocating a manoeuvre to trace trajectories of "black urbanism" to initiate conceptualisation in urban situations where conceptualisation has not been much pursued.

Thus, a two-fold practical strategy emerges (if my reading of these debates is productive):

(1) It is very reasonable to begin processes of conceptualisation anywhere, with any given singularity, or in any concrete totality, and to develop conceptualisations in relation to (any available) other concepts and also to inter-related phenomena through the empirical exploration and proliferation of connections and differences.[20]
(2) Concepts emergent from specific cases will start to lose purchase, as "difference" is drawn off. Concepts therefore are well imagined as deeply revisable, and as sites of multiplication. [21] Whereas in conventional comparisons the "grounds" for comparison seek to stabilise the associations amongst cases, here the postulation of concepts across cases can encounter a profound "ungrounding", and might contribute to practices of "subtraction" from extant conceptualisations, extending the multiplicity of the virtual field of Ideas, or launching emergent interpretations.

Conceptualisation, then, can productively take place through attention to multiple inter-related (conceptual or empirical) urban outcomes, or through placing singularities[22] in conversation and collaboration with elsewhere through various comparative tactics (again, both empirical and conceptual), in the interests of multiplying analyses, and revising useful concepts.

We are returned to the minimalist definition of comparison, then, as "thinking cities/the urban through elsewhere". Such a mapping of the relationship between outcomes and conceptualisation as I have explored here calls for different tactics from those proposed in the quasi-scientific and universal-particular (or wider processes/hybridised outcomes) model of comparison. Luckily, the field of the urban has provoked a range of experimental comparative tactics which demonstrate the potential of this formulation.

[20] Connection with the urban now – multiple possible narrativisaions; multiple citations of Asia?
[21] Jane Jacob's comments on a method of "subtraction" from theories or concepts on the basis of each additional case is perhaps relevant here. But needs to be combined with a positive generativity of concepts Links might also be drawn with the tasks of identifying the limits of phenomena or entities (also concepts) under a Deleuzian influence.
[22] Singularities: (guide) "give the Idea its concrete form and consequently represent a stage of "complete determination".(p. 183) .. "they formalise the differential relations… they bring an end to progressive determination in a form which characterises complete determination" (p. 140). By itself the virtual is useless, the object is "constituted only in differenciation, in the complex interplay between Ideas and Intensities".

3. Some comparative tactics

I have proposed to reimagine comparison as involving the broad practice of thinking cities/the urban through elsewhere (another case, a wider context, existing theoretical imaginations, connections to other places), in order to better understand outcomes and to contribute to strongly revisable broader conceptualisations and wider conversations about (aspects of) the urban. Inspired by Deleuze (1994), I suggest that urban comparisons might be thought of as "genetic", tracing the interconnected genesis of repeated, related but distinctive, urban outcomes as the basis for comparison; or as "generative" where variation across shared features provides a basis for generating conceptual insights supported by the multiple, sometimes interconnected, sometimes disjunct, theoretical conversations which enable global urban studies.

I hope this will provoke some potentially innovative methods - but I like to begin any discussion of potential comparative tactics for enacting this "thinking through elsewhere" by advocating that perhaps the most useful comparative tactics in urban studies is the case study, brought into creative conversation with a wider literature. In many ways this format, the case study – whether understood as a city, a specific urban phenomenon or form, or wider circulating urban processes - brought into conversation with theoretical debates and other cases, is well suited as a model practice for global urban studies. It insists on taking seriously the scholarly output of people working in different places, thinking through that work to inform one's own located analysis, and in turn, suggesting new lines of theorization based on the new case study. The call for a more global urban studies is in some ways well formulated as an insistence on more critical 'planetary' reading practices, including attending to untranslatabilities and analytical disjunctures (Jazeel 2014).

The intrinsic comparativism of urban studies can also be put to work more purposively, and here the repertoire of comparative strategies has been expanding through attention to relational comparisons (Hart 2003; Ward 2010) and to the need to formulate comparative methods which are adequate to the specific spatialities of cities (Robinson 2011). Thus the project of 'composing' comparisons can be reconfigured to map better on to current understandings of the urban. So while the territorialized figuring of the individual 'case' as a city is clearly redundant (see Wachsmuth, 2013), instead we would seek to put a comparative imagination to work to consider: the range of urbanization processes and connections which stretch far beyond the physical form of cities; the diverse array of often inter-related social and spatial forms which emerge in different urban settlements; the repeated instances and circulating phenomena (such as policies, forms, visions) which insistently draw differentiated urban outcomes into the same frame of analysis.

We might draw analytical insights by considering cities through the specific shared connections which shape each, highlighting the impact of different histories and contexts, as Hart (2003) pioneered in her consideration of the effects of rural dispossession on small industrializing towns in northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, through tracing the largely Taiwanese industrialists who chose to locate there in response to a late-apartheid industrial incentive scheme. Nik Theodore's (2007) discussion of casual day labourers in the US, whose organising tactics are inspired by political experiences in various South American countries, provides another suggestive example of thinking comparatively with connections.

We might compare the webs of relations themselves, which creatively draw cities into practical engagements with circulating policies, economic networks, transnational political influences, or direct engagements with actors from specific other cities, as Söderström (2013) does in his comparison of the differing relational networks shaping two 'cities in relations' emerging from relative isolation: Ougadougou (political and developmental networks) and Hanoi (economic and investment networks).

And the proliferation of repeated instances across cities provides a basis for a locationally promiscuous research agenda to inform a global conversation about many aspects of contemporary urban life (for example, on neoliberalism, Goldfrank and Schrank 2009; on gentrification, Harris 2008; or Jacobs 2006 on the residential high-rise).

More creative alignments are also in the frame for stimulating comparison: Simone's (2011) tracing of imaginary (but also at times quite material) arcs across Africa and South-east Asia; Oren Yiftachel's (2010) imaginary "south-East" world region from which to speak an extrinsic analysis of violence, segregation and "gray" spaces to other urban experiences. It should be possible to multiply methodological tactics to allow one to navigate amongst different instances in the process of building conceptual understandings of the urban. The trajectories might be quite happenstance, appropriately enough, operationalised as an instanciation of a "virtual" urban through the individual journeys of researchers. The political technologies and claims of urban citizenship in Calcutta, or Zanzibar, for example, more than repaid the conceptual encounter staged through personal trajectories ending with San Francisco or Hartford, Connecticut, respectively, in the writings of Roy (2003) and Myers (2014).

Reformatting comparison to support a global urban studies has many possible practical tactics for proceeding, but as elaborated in Table 1, a useful initial schema derived from the discussion in this paper might be:

- *composing* bespoke comparisons across diverse outcomes or repeated instances to generate conceptual connections;

- *tracing* genetic empirical connections amongst cities to inform understandings of different outcomes or to compare the wider interconnections and extended urbanization processes themselves; and
- *launching* distinctive analyses from specific urban contexts or regions into wider conversations, not least through reading strategies to set case studies on the path towards conceptual innovation.

Table 1 Schema of comparative strategies and tactics

TABLE ONE

	Comparative Strategies	
Methodological Tactics	Genetic "interconnections" "repeated instances"	Generative "shared features" "difference"
Tracing	Begins with interconnected or serial cases; following connections; or interrogating the connections themselves.	Compare different connections to explore (e.g.) conceptualisations of mobility, localisation, power.
Composing	Genesis of urban outcomes is not only about interconnections, but about whatever processes are producing specific and often repeated/differential outcomes. Composing studies across different instances might illuminate their shared genetic production.	A classic comparative study for variation-finding, but used more loosely to stimulate the invention and extension of, or subtraction from, concepts across related or un-related cases. Often based on shared features across different cases, variety of outcomes encouraging conceptual generativity.
Launching	Starting anywhere, with any singularity, inserting analysis of this case into wider conversations, possibly through tracing emergent links and shared influences with other singularities or cases.	Proposing concepts from one context to be put to work elsewhere.

4. *Conclusions*

The pragmatic implications of the analysis I have presented here are considerable. In my mind, we have permission to walk away from many of the strictures of framing methodologies which have shaped comparative investigations of the urban these last decades. Starting anywhere, with a mind to treat urban outcomes as singularities,and urban theory as multiplicity, means being open to placing under potential erasure insights which might have worked well once, somewhere. It could of course also mean openings for exciting afterlives for these theories, and enable a multiplicity of new constellations of the narratives which we inherit (Benjamin, 1990; see Robinson, 2013). For example, as Adorno is swerved to enthuse thinking in Bangkok (Korff, 1986), or inspiration is found in Agamben for thinking the emergent urban in some cities in Africa (Simone, 2004).We can be inspired to generate concepts through the initiation of conversations from relatively unconceptualised urban experiences, such as blackness (Simone, 2014). We can use a comparative imagination to slowly build new conceptual apparatuses required to make sense of and collaborate in actions to shape the futures of the poorest urban contexts (Fourchard and Bekker, 2013 offer an excellent example of this in African context; cf Parnell and Pieterse, 2014). An important agenda is to expand the scope and conceptual potential for a more global urban studies by initiating purposively the unexpected comparative itineraries which have to date relied on the personal ties of researchers (Myers, 2014; REFERENCE). Finally, I see an important challenge in recasting places such as London, or Los Angeles, as destinations for theory, inspired to think their distinctive pathways from elsewhere.

Thus a reformulated comparativism can start theorising anywhere, imagine any city as a destination for thinking from elsewhere, if that seems productive, and find openings for new analyses in the certain knowledge that conceptualisation is fraught with both uncertainties and potentialities, disjunctures and analytical proximities. Our inspiration then can be to seek opportunities for thinking the urban with elsewhere, in order to multiply and to unground analytical insights. Comparative experiments of various kinds can help to identify the more productive manoeuvres, initiating encounters across any urban contexts and processes whatever (Simone, 2013), along traces and leaps of connection, actual or invented. The potential is to inspire thinking both with actual connections (genetic, in which we are “invited” to think with the spatialities of the urban) and through conceptual leaps (in which we invent proximities and links, drawing places together within the realm of a more topological spatiality). A reformatted urban comparativism insists on keeping open the possibility to draw any urban places and

experiences and events into sometimes overlapping, sometimes disjunct, but always revisable conversations about the nature and future of the urban.

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