Policy mobilities as comparison: urbanization processes, repeated instances, topologies

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Following on from calls to reformat comparative urban methods to support global urban studies, this paper draws inspiration from policy mobilities to explore how the genetic interconnectedness of urban processes and outcomes can be mobilised methodologically to critique and extend concepts in urban theory through comparison. What might be the scope and tactics for a practice of comparison through connections, which can start anywhere and build comparisons and analytical insights across a very great diversity of urban experiences? This paper explores three possible ways to take this forward. Firstly, tracing a specific connection, such as a policy link, from one context to another or across a number of different contexts contributes to understanding specific urbanization processes. Secondly, following connections brings into view the range and variety of processes and outcomes in different contexts. In the highly transnationalised world of urban policy this method potentially links a very wide variety of diverse urban contexts and draws attention to a multiplicity of repeated instances of urban forms. Finally, the paper considers the potential to work with the array of transnational processes shaping distinctive policy outcomes and development paths as they come together in one specific place — to explore how "elsewhere" is folded in to localised growth paths. Thus, comparative practices could follow policy mobilities to explore the potential of a more topological imagination of thinking across different contexts, and bringing a diversity of urban contexts into analytical conversation. Along these lines, the invention of concepts and understandings of the urban might emerge anywhere, and perhaps find wider relevance across different situations. Following the trajectories of policy mobilities is thus not only a pathway to inventing new methods but also potentially new grounds for theorizing the urban.

Keywords: comparative urbanism; policy mobilities; repeated instances; topological space.

Comparando a mobilidade das políticas públicas: processos de urbanização, instâncias repetidas e topologias

Em resposta à urgência por reformatar métodos urbanos comparativos que proporcionem embasamento para estudos urbanos globais, este artigo se inspira na mobilidade de políticas para explorar como a interconexão genética de processos e resultados urbanos pode ser mobilizada metodologicamente para criticar e estender conceitos na teoria urbana por meio da comparação. Quais poderiam ser o escopo e as táticas para uma prática de comparação por meio de conexões, que comecem onde quer que seja e que construam comparações e insights analíticos em uma grande diversidade de experiências urbanas? Este artigo explora três maneiras possíveis de levar isso adiante. Em primeiro lugar, o rastreamento de uma conexão específica, como um link de políticas, de um contexto para outro ou entre vários contextos diversos, contribuindo para a compreensão de processos específicos de urbanização. Em segundo lugar, as conexões seguintes colocam em evidência a grande variedade de processos e resultados em diferentes contextos. No mundo altamente transnacional da política urbana, esse método conecta potencialmente uma ampla variedade de contextos urbanos e chama a atenção para uma multiplicidade de etapas repetidas de formas urbanas. Finalmente, o artigo considera o potencial para trabalhar com o conjunto de processos transnacionais que moldam resultados de políticas e caminhos de desenvolvimento distintos à medida que eles se juntam em um lugar específico — para explorar como "o outro lugar" se mistura a caminhos de crescimento localizado. Assim, práticas comparativas poderiam seguir a mobilidade de políticas para explorar o potencial de uma imaginação mais topológica de pensamento em diferentes cenários, e trazendo uma diversidade de contextos urbanos para conversações analíticas. Nessa linha, a elaboração de conceitos e entendimentos do urbano pode surgir em qualquer lugar e, talvez, encontrar maior relevância em diferentes situações. Seguir as trajetórias da mobilidade

de políticas é, portanto, não apenas um caminho para criar novos métodos, mas também potencialmente novos fundamentos para a teorização do urbano.

Palavras-chave: urbanismo comparativo; mobilidade de políticas; etapas repetidas; espaço topológico.

Movilidad de políticas por comparación: procesos de urbanización, repetición de instancias y topologías

En respuesta a la urgencia de encontrar nuevos formatos de métodos urbanos comparativos que fundamenten los estudios urbanos globales, este artículo se inspira en la movilidad de políticas para explorar cómo la interconexión genética de procesos y resultados urbanos puede movilizarse metodológicamente para criticar y extender conceptos en la teoría urbana a través de la comparación. ¿Cuáles podrían ser el alcance y las tácticas para una práctica de comparación mediante conexiones, que comiencen dondequiera que sea y que construyan comparaciones e insights analíticos en una gran diversidad de experiencias urbanas? Este artículo explora tres formas posibles de llevar esto adelante. En primer lugar, rastrear una conexión específica, como un enlace de políticas, de un contexto a otro o entre varios contextos diversos, contribuye a comprender procesos de urbanización específicos. En segundo lugar, las conexiones siguientes ponen de manifiesto la gran variedad de procesos y resultados en diferentes contextos. En el mundo altamente transnacionalizado de la política urbana, ese método vincula potencialmente una amplia variedad de contextos urbanos y llama la atención sobre una multiplicidad de instancias repetidas de formas urbanas. En tercer lugar, el artículo considera el potencial para trabajar con la gama de procesos transnacionales que configuran resultados de políticas y vías de desarrollo distintos a medida que se unen en un lugar específico —para explorar cómo "en otro lugar" se combinan a vías de crecimiento localizado—. Así, prácticas comparativas podrían seguir la movilidad de políticas para explorar el potencial de una imaginación más topológica de pensamiento en diferentes escenarios, y llevar una diversidad de contextos urbanos a conversaciones analíticas. En esa línea, la elaboración de conceptos y entendimientos de lo urbano puede surgir en cualquier lugar y, tal vez, encontrar una mayor relevancia en diferentes situaciones. Seguir las trayectorias de la movilidad de políticas es, por lo tanto, no solo un camino para crear nuevos métodos, sino también, potencialmente, nuevos fundamentos para teorizar lo urbano.

Palabras clave: urbanismo comparativo; movilidad de políticas; instancias repetidas; espacio topológico.

The imperative to think the urban comparatively — "with elsewhere" — catches some of the core challenges of understanding global urbanisation. But the discrete territoriality of the conventional comparative imagination is a poor fit with complex, networked and dispersed spatialities of the interdependent urban territories, or the extended, even planetary, urbanisation processes which characterise contemporary urbanisation (Robinson, 2011a). Furthermore, analytical concerns regarding how perspective and positionality frame theoretical debates, as well as longstanding awareness of the specificities of particular urban places, cities, territories or transcalar assemblages, set a formidable methodological agenda. Navigating between the spatialities of concept formation and those of emergent urban realities, the comparative imagination and method require significant reconfiguration. Policy mobilities and connections amongst cities give us some important clues as to how this can be achieved.

This paper will outline how the genetic interconnectedness of urban processes and outcomes, perhaps best exemplified by the prolific flows associated with urban policy formation, can be mobilised to critique and extend concepts in urban theory through comparison. The proposition is that there are good grounds for comparisons to make use of interconnections in order to draw understandings of urbanisation across strong differentiations (Robinson, 2016a). This has the potential to enrich interpretations by attending to a wide range of urban situations. By stretching comparative analysis globally through working with connections, lively, productive and relevant insights into the nature

of the urban can be generated. This paper will outline how connections, and especially connections in the form of policy mobilities, can be mobilised for a reformatted comparative imagination.

Establishing the "grounds" or justifications for comparison in the interconnections amongst "cities" is only a starting point for comparative practice (Robinson, 2016a, 2016b). If we wish to move beyond the horizon of a scientist view of causality, isolating variables to explore explanatory factors across different cases by limiting variation (see Steinmetz, 2004), it is necessary to explore how exactly we can work with the exciting, experimental, perhaps unexpected (Myers, 2014) comparisons which emerge through tracing connections amongst urban contexts. What might be the scope and tactics for a practice of comparison through connections, which can start anywhere and build comparisons and analytical insights across a very great diversity of urban experiences?

One possible tactic is to *trace* a specific connection, such as a policy link, from one context to another, or across a number of different contexts, which will reveal elements of the flows and interactions which make up the process of urbanisation as such (the first section of the paper considers this), and also bring into view the range and variety of processes and outcomes in different contexts. In the highly transnationalised world of urban policy this method could potentially link a very wide variety of diverse urban contexts, and draw attention to a multiplicity of repeated instances of specific urban forms. The second part of the paper below explores how we might work with this feature of urban processes to build understandings of the urban.

Another tactic is to pay close attention to the array of transnational processes shaping distinctive policy outcomes and development paths as they come together in one specific place — to explore how "elsewhere" is folded in to localised growth paths (Robinson, 2013, 2016b). Drawing on analyses of policy mobilities in this sense means attending to the prolific ways in which cities are connected through myriad flows and appropriations, in both familiar and unpredictable directions. This perspective signals that it is important to move beyond a materialist focus on tracing specific connections which has driven much "spatial" thinking in urban studies and geographical analysis (Massey, 2005; McFarlane, 2011). As the final section of the paper considers, circulations, then, are not specifically about traversing physical distance or following traceable connections, but might often be more convincingly understood through topological accounts of space (Allen, 2016) which direct us to attend to the specific spatialities at work in the drawing of people, ideas and activities into proximity or presence, into closer relationships, or not (Allen, 2008). We might therefore be more interested in how we "arrive at" urban policies, than how they "arrive" somewhere (Robinson, 2013, 2016c). Along these lines, the invention of concepts and understandings of the urban might emerge anywhere, and find wider relevance in different situations. Following the trajectories of policy mobilities is thus also a pathway to theorizing the urban.

1. CONNECTIONS AS URBANIZATION PROCESSES

In the first instance, following connections directly illuminates the tracks and processes of urbanisation — infrastructure, people, ideas, practices, material flows. They trace the urban; they are cases of the urban. In so far as urbanisation is not about bounded territories, but about a complex spatiality of extension, strongly networked concentrations, dense and sprawling settlements, operational landscapes and technical, social and cultural practices which reach across different

kinds of places, methodological innovations which move beyond observations in one place are essential to trace and understand these dynamics (McCann and Ward, 2011; Brenner and Schmid, 2015). For our purposes here, this subtends two kinds of "thinking with elsewhere" — the need to understand urbanization processes intrinsically requires that analysis and methods stretch across many different contexts; and "provincializing" planetary urbanization requires that we work with the multiplicity of such processes (not simply global capitalism, for example) and explore differentiated connections comparatively.

This kind of "thinking through elsewhere" has been proposed in anthropology, for example, as "multi-sited" ethnography drawing researchers to trace the circulation of phenomena across the diverse landscapes they entrain (Marcus, 1995). The "case" then becomes the circulation itself, rather than a particular outcome. In urban studies, the recent eruption of studies of policy mobilities exemplifies this (Peck and Theodore, 2015), analyses of operational landscapes in the framework of extended (planetary) urbanization (Brenner, 2013) — the urban infrastructures which subtend concentration even as they sprawl across the globe (pipelines, electricity pylons, shipping routes), the migrant circuits which tie "township" and "village" in one social field (Mitchell, 1987), or which tie wealthier and poorer contexts together through a diasporic urbanism (Sinatti, 2009; Shatkin, 1998; Theodore, 2007). Urbanization is not (only) about territorialisation, and intrinsic to its analysis is the capacity to work with the many different lines of connection, spaces of extension, and circuits of practice which constitute urbanization processes.

Methodologically, Peck and Theodore discuss the "distended case study". Their title pays homage to Burawoy's (2014) "extended case study", in which national and international processes are seen to play a role in the "structuration" of cases, and thus the case study extends out to encompass processes at these scales. He also discusses "connected comparisons", but by this he means comparisons of processes which are intrinsic to the case — such as processes of deracialisation initiated by employers, and those initiated by the state (in his case study in Zambia). In moving to propose the "distended" case, Peck and Theodore isolate a sequence of interlinked processes of policy formation, stretching across numerous contexts. Along the way, policies and practices diverge from their starting positions, and what is mobile is transformed. They articulate some of the challenges of such work as "traveling within cosmopolitan policy networks without becoming another creature of those networks; of making sense of fast-moving 'best practices' without losing sight of prosaic practice; of taking account of phenomena like policy tourism and policy tradeshows without succumbing to explanatory dilettantism, or some kind of methodological tourism, [just] tripping around from site to site" (Peck and Theodore, 2012:25). Of course one has to be in a certain phase of life and institutional position to be doing such tripping — in well resourced institutions, certainly, but also as part of the well-resourced developmental practices which offer connecting opportunities to ex-centrically located scholars.

Following connections cuts across territorial divisions and invites different contexts into mutual reflection: this has been very important in discussions considering how to bring the experiences of cities in contexts shaped by socialist pasts and a multiplicity of post-socialisms into a wider analytical conversation about the urban. Various commentators have sought to bring these, perhaps twice-sidelined cities (once by western-oriented urban studies, once by a post-colonial critique focused on

"global South", China, and poorer country contexts) into analytical relationship. Part of the difficulty has been the territorialized imagination of "post-socialism" as a container, a demarcated regional "other" (Tuvikene, 2016). Here, tracing the many lines of connection which tie emergent dynamics of urbanization in this region to global trends - such as those of property investment, urban design, economic flows, borrowing from valued political systems (Hirt, 2012; Gentile, 2018) has the effect of de-territorializing post-socialism, and offering this as a concept which might be put to work in articulating the after-lives of socialism, as well as multiple lines or new potentialities which emerge in continuity or opposition with socialist pasts, highly varied across this putative region (Tuvikene, 2016).

The multiple interconnections shaping urban places also have the potential to evoke new kinds of objects of enquiry, beyond the territorialized and discrete centralities of the conventional city form. Here global suburbanism or planetary perspectives allow us to observe emergent phenomena/territorialisations which constitute disassembled forms of urbanity, dispersed unevenly, perhaps unpredictably, across the landscape of urbanization.

So, for example, a highly varied array of suburban or peripheral urban sites, reveal and shape contemporary urbanisation processes in many contexts, but do so in a dynamic and transnational urban world which also reshapes the configuration and meaning of such sites themselves. Thinking with the variety of suburban places has enriched global urban studies, and indicates the generative potential of comparative reflections (Hamel and Keil, 2016; Harris and Vorms, 2017). More than this, though, we also need to look to the empirical interconnections which bring suburban places across the globe into relationship with each other — and which provide an excellent example of the necessity of thinking the urban with elsewhere, in a genetic mode.

Keil (2017) brings together some of the insights of a large scale comparative project (Global Suburbanisms) in some evocative propositions around the idea of the "global suburb", which he suggests is about a "multifarious connectivity" (Keil, 2017:47), leading to "new assemblages of the global that surround our cities" (Keil, 2017:48), replete with new centralities. He links this to emerging concepts of "extended urbanisation" (Monte-More, 2013; Brenner and Schmid, 2015) and Lefebvre's (1974) famous hypothesis of the "complete urbanisation of society". In this context, he coins the proposition that "it is time to bid the (conceptual) white picket fence farewell" (Keil, 2017:52).

It is important, then, to look not just from the sprawling edges of the city, but from its exteriority. This draws our attention to the many power-laden processes which shape urbanisation, and which are so quickly relevant to scholars used to working in poorer country contexts — considering, for example, international agencies, donor organisations, sovereign lenders. Thus the politics of transnational circuits requires careful attention. Here we have the models of "policy mobilities" to draw on, as well as the rhythms and cadences of globalised and liberalising economies, say in the financial and information circuits which drive the classic advanced producer services clusters (Bassens and Van Meeteren, 2015). These circuits are by no means uniform — and tracing connections, explaining urbanization processes, necessarily must address the differentiation of mobile practices, investment flows, or material connections. This challenge also holds true for "extended urbanisation": initially linked for Lefebvre to the industrialised urbanisation processes spreading "*le tissu urbain*", and urban society, across wider areas, including beyond the patchwork metropolitan regions. This analysis has worked well for South America's (still?) industrialising and resource extraction economies (Monte-More,

2013) — but such a socio-materialist analysis of urbanisation requires reconfiguring for (different) contemporary socio-economic globalisations: the ambition of a resurgence in attention to "planetary urbanisation" with ideas about "operational landscapes" and questions of the impact and limits of "urbanisation processes" extended, and intimately related to and punctuated with concentrations, across the globe (Brenner and Schmid, 2015).

In a second format of doing seeing connections as urbanization processes, we can bring in a directly comparative perspective by provincializing and differentiating understandings of connections and circuits. Here there is a significant opportunity for a comparative imagination to explore and think across the many different processes constituting urbanisation. Different kinds of connections can be contrasted, or assessed, such as, the divergent trajectories of flows of specific policies (Peck and Theodore, 2015), or the different kinds of networks or relations — in the case of Söderström (2014), comparing contrasting sets of political and economic relations which draw two different previously isolated urban areas (Hanoi and Ougadougou) into wider articulations with global processes in quite divergent ways — one through a geopolitical articulation through city to city interactions, policy learning and alliances (Ouagadougou) and once through intensifying global economic connections through close relations with neighbouring Asian countries.

In comparing different circuits, the complexity of what is travelling needs careful attention. Here, arguments suggesting the importance of theorising with the fellow travelers of neoliberalisation (Peck and Brenner, 2009; Collier, 2009; Ferguson, 2010) brings forward the significance of a comparative imagination to work across differentiation of mobilities. Thus tracing any particular circulating phenomenon or process necessitates close attention to what might be travelling along with it and understanding "hybridization", for example, as not simply a consequence of localization or territorialisation but as already present in that which is mobile (Parnell and Robinson, 2012).

A pioneer in such research, comparing different networks, is Kris Olds' (2001) *Globalization and urban change: capital, culture and pacific rim mega-projects*. Inspired by multi-locale fieldwork emerging in anthropology in the 1990s, and a post-colonial sensibility to move beyond binary concepts of North and South (Old, 2001:7), he set about tracing two Asian-centric networks associated with mega urban projects in Shanghai (Pudong New Area) and Vancouver (One Canada Place), which involved fieldwork in those two sites but also in various nodes in the flows of finance (Hong Kong), and design (Paris), for example. Inspired by John Law's influential (1994) article on the global as "small" and particular, and a geographical perspective on the inter-related nature of places, he aimed to bring "both the local and global into view simultaneously". Although proposing a "non-comparative comparison", perhaps as a territorialised idea of comparison prevailed at the time, he offers careful insights concerning the two different kinds of connections and outcomes which emerged around the two developments, concerning different ways in which global reach was performed by key actors in the development (through close family networks and longstanding collaborations; or through formal and distanciated working relationships), different practices of localization and networking (deep local connections; technical and ephemeral interactions), and the importance of many different globalized processes, running through the two localities, which were crucial in shaping urban development outcomes.

Olds' book proposes that "global" cities, such as Shanghai, Vancouver, London, Paris, host many of the resources needed for mobilizing transnational networks of urban investment and design, extending

"global city" analysis to the ways in which many different processes interconnecting cities find sites of localization, producing centralities in various urban places. Circuits of investment (including in urban property development) are associated with specific localizations which foster and enable the intelligence and practical capacities to direct transnational investments (Bassens, DeRudder and Witlox, 2012; Halbert and Rouanet, 2014). Most attention has been paid to the processes of global switching, and financialisation, but it is clear that across the range of urban outcomes and processes, many different globalizing processes need to be attended to — including, for example, developmental and geopolitical circuits, as Söderström's (2014) study of the political international associations sought by Ouagadougou brings out. Attending to these interconnections and flows might also inspire different geographies or territorializations of urbanization, such as Susan Fainstein's (2001) provocative suggestion, in an unusual comparative move, to treat New York and London as one urban space, associated with and shaped in a strong way by shared phenomena and processes associated with the global city functions which she sees as having a privileged location in these cities.

An important way in which policy mobilities can bring comparative perspectives into few, by exploring connections as urbanization processes, is to look at direct city to city links, and networks of city governments. This provides a productive optics through which to identify the proliferation of city connections, including scope for identifying more accurately how city managers and policy makers learn from different contexts, including learning which tracks from "southern contexts" to the "north" (Campbell, 2012; Porto de Oliveira, 2017; Peyroux, 2016), and potentially encourages rich south-south partnerships, perhaps within the context of wider transnational networked learning (Bulkeley, 2010) or targeted programmes of city twinning (Habitat articles). Here we will encounter many cautions against rushing to distinguish hard barriers between northern and southern circuits of knowledge, as while it is clear there are differentiated circuits of policy and knowledge (with an often severe segmentation of developmental interventions in the poorest cities), tracing these helps us to see that they bleed across apparently different categories of city. For example, in the case of city strategies technologies of strategic visioning from the US (private sector led), EU (public sector policies) and international development policy (involving external agents of development) draw different urban contexts into shared circuits of policy innovation encouraging city visioning and long term and city-wide strategic planning (Robinson, 2011b, forthcoming). Even as it is tempting to delineate strong differences in urban policy and institutional environments (Watson, 2014; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014; Parnell and Pieterse, 2014), the many cross-cutting lines of policy circulation and interconnections suggest that in the field of academic analysis, sharp delineations might also be misguided.

2. CONNECTIONS PRODUCING REPEATED INSTANCES

In Charles Tilly's (1984) initial formulation of encompassing comparisons which justifies drawing different places in to an analysis because they are mutually entwined in large scale processes, such as slavery, capitalism, or perhaps for our purposes also neoliberalisation and a range of urbanization processes, wider connections bring localities or places into view. Classically, he observes, "It places different instances at various locations within the same system, on the way to explaining their characteristics as a function of their varying relationships to the system as a whole." (Tilly, 1984:83).

Philip McMichael (1990) extends these insights most helpfully, placing the "cases" revealed through such connections into a dynamic relationship with their production through the very wider social [systemic?] processes i.e. it is not possible to predetermine the form or nature of the particular case being considered as they are mutually produced along with the wider processes.

While we want to thicken and diversify understanding of the connections themselves, as discussed above, in this section I want to press at the nature of the "cases" which are imagined as being entrained in the encompassing, or incorporating, processes or connections. Following the core Deleuzian insights I developed in Robinson (2016a), I propose we can reconsider the nature of the case as such, both in terms of what constitutes a case, and what cases stand for conceptually.[1]

The first point to make is about orienting ourselves to the "repeated instance" as the form of the case — thus the case as a singularity, which initially stands only for itself, rather than as a representative of a wider universal process or pre-given category. Cases are, however, in the Deleuzian idiom, and in the context of globalized urbanisation, genetically interconnected with many others (Robinson, 2016a). The concept of "repeated instance" refines the nature of the "case", proposing to treat cases as "singularities", specific but inter-related outcomes of a shared virtual field – in the case of the urban, all the possible urban outcomes which the interconnected processes of the production of urban spaces might entail. In this view, singularities can be embraced, not as stopping points for conceptualisation (Jazeel, 2017) but as starting points for the kinds of modest universals — ideas, concepts — which can open themselves to necessary difference. Certainly, the spectacular throw of the dice against the sky of chance, opening up all of chance (Deleuze, 1994:354-355), all that might be possible about the urban — the virtual in the "eternal return" of Deleuze's analysis — may fall back only once in such a post-representational world, in unique but not un-related outcomes. But it has many falling stars to keep it company, many close, related, effective analyses about which it is worth having a conversation.

How can we use this productively as "method"? How might it be possible to both look closely at each highly specific instance, while seeking to understand some significantly "big" or "extensive" processes (Jacobs, 2008)? How can we avoid a fascinating but limited focus on exhaustively naming and documenting (already theoretical and conceptual practices) the complex emergence of each instance in isolation (Jazeel, 2017). What might we do pragmatically with many instances of interconnected processes? What can be done with the assemblage of multiple, and potentially numerous, cases of repetitions in a practical empirical research project to creatively build relevant but modest concepts? Here I propose four possibly starting points.

Identify the instance(s): As we consider the emergence of repeated instances in the urban manifold, we need to attend to the precise nature of the territorializations which tracing connections arrives at, not just a "place" or a "city" or "locality" but, perhaps: a building (Jacobs, 2006), a project (Pinson, 2009), a distinctive policy. An important corollary of tracking connections to identify "repeated instances" is that a "case" is most unlikely to be a city (although it may be a practice or an outcome linked to an administrative or governmental unit with a certain territorial extent, of course) — so

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[1] I am however eager to hold on to the Marxist insights which underpin much of urban studies — and develop this further in Robinson (2016a; forthcoming). For reasons of space here I focus on the Deleuzian insights which can help us appreciate the potential to work with the case as "repeated instance"; this formulation is also very well suited to the empirical problematic of policy mobilities.

there is no *a priori* format for "territory", "place" or "localization" of flows and connections. Indeed, "cases" may not be spatial entities, but social formations or processes. In each case, inspired by the empiricist treatment of Deleuze's philosophy in ANT/STS, a socio-technical approach can reveal an assemblage of actors and materials, ideas and practices, which, as allies or contestors, are involved in the realization of particular outcomes (Jacobs and Kearns, 2012; Deville and Hrdličková, 2016). Importantly, such cases cannot be judged in an *a priori* way to be an example, or a given particular, of a pre-identified wider process (Jacobs, 2006; Robinson, 2014). How can we nonetheless place them in relation to other instances and wider circulations?

Empirically additive: Following the connections across multiple instances can, however, tell a cumulative or additive story of urbanization processes through the vantage points of a multiplicity of outcomes. This could involve attending to the repeated instances of, for example, mass housing development (Jacobs and Strebel, 2007; Schmid et al., 2016), satellite cities (Murray, 2017), or of a certain timing and form of policy implementation, say, transit improvements (Wood, 2014) or child benefit payments (Peck and Theodore, 2015). Thus through adding cases, insights would be gained of the unfolding, differentiation, or unevenness of urbanization processes and outcomes.

Jacobs and Strebel (2007) use the notorious/celebrated case of "Red Road" housing estate in Glasgow, UK to open up the "black boxing" of the residential high rise, which might assume the globalization of the form through transfer and repetition of a stable technology, to undertake a more nuanced tracing of design and building elements and technologies, as well as the very specific political and material conditions — literally the ground — of the development. Thus, the very particular, craft production of what seems like iconically repetitive modernist towers in Glasgow — and in their second case in Singapore — is revealed. Although beginning its journey in national and local imaginations of modernist replicability, the institutional context of contracting, limited technical capabilities of professional contractors, and a political desire to build to high densities on a small site, lay behind what became an innovative, but in the longer term, not very effective or reproducible set of building techniques. Thus, rather than being evidence of globalization of modernist housing, each residential high rise, while it might look so familiar, becomes a repeated instance; highly interconnected processes lead to repeated, but strongly differentiated outcomes, whose emergent effect — what they add up to — is not entirely predictable, might not be what was anticipated. Here, then, might be an alternative rubric for the "syndrome" of neoliberalisation, for example, in which the "name" or effect of the circulating policies is (a) to be determined, (b) likely to be differentiated, and (c) might arrive at something quite different than neoliberalism, through entering other circuits (such as developmentalism, or a developmental state, for example — Ferguson, 2010; Collier, 2010; Robinson, 2011c).

Analytically subtractive: While tracing the cumulative outcomes of repeated instances for comparative analysis it is important to attend to the second (virtual) series progressing alongside the genetic emergence of multiple cases. This is associated with coming to an understanding of a phenomenon through drawing on the "virtual" of ideas – all the possible in ways in which we might explore and consider responding to the phenomenon presenting itself to us for interpretation. This is an important element in Deleuze's account of generating concepts. Thus, keeping open our perspective on what "repeated instances" add up to in an analytical sense means working across the many cases — working with multiples (Jacobs, 2012) — such that we have in mind all the possible concepts that

could help us make sense of the instances in their multiplicity as they come into view. One of the beneficial effects of repeated instances is that they have the potential to draw scholars and observers across numerous academic and interpretive contexts, and therefore traditions, language communities and theoretical approaches, into conversation. This opens up the possibility for learning from ideas and practices embedded in different situations, extending and enriching potential analyses.

Jane Jacobs proposes a method of "subtraction", to work with the multiplicity of repeated instances. The invitation of this perspective is to move beyond relatively straightforward and sometimes fairly lazy analytical habits of accumulating cases to support an extant theorisation, or to pick out yet again a familiar process or empirical dynamic which seems to be at work across many cases. She argues instead, "(t)o work with multiples (many cities, other cities, ordinary cities) not as addition (one more city case in a project of building general theory) but as subtraction (reading urban difference in the name of producing alternative futures)" (Jacobs, 2012:906). She insists that, "creating the conditions to see multiplicity (through say, multiple cases), is a commitment to work against the dissimulation of singular, over-coded, explanatory frameworks" (Jacobs, 2012:906). In this sense, working with repeated instances is an invitation to theoretical subtraction - in some circumstances providing the resources to subtract from powerful, circulating concepts such as neoliberalisation. More generally this practice would also encourage the extension, innovation and invention of concepts.

For example, we could return here to the interrogation of global suburbanism. As Keil (2017) proposes it, starting with the physical excentricity associated with places called "suburbs" in some parts of the world — we can review a multiplicity of urban outcomes which provide starting points for insights. But into what? The suburb as a known entity? Or to stimulate insights into urbanization processes whose reference points are not the "cities" within which they might be embedded, but the wider, circulating processes and practices which constitute any possible (extended) urban outcome, Thus starting in peripheral, expanding parts of urban areas, we are in a position to review a series of repeated phenomena, noting their prolific interconnections to other instances. We open up the possibility for identifying quite different kinds of repeated (urban) objects, no longer settled as "suburbs" but all sorts of possibilities gathered under the sign of ex-centric expansion for creative analytical reflection (see also Harris, 2012). This could include satellite cities, new towns, peripheral urbanization (Caldeira, 2016), mass housing, informal settlements, displaced urbanization, new industrial centres, and many others.

If we track back to the Deleuzian inspirations for Jane Jacob's insights here, this wide-ranging comparative exercise on the "global suburb" might encourage some qualifications of the nature of repetitions. I would argue that we need to guard against false repetitions. Here, repeated instances which are not the result of interconnected processes but of analytical and conceptual naming are not "repeated instances" of the kind I am proposing here. Gentrification, for example, although proposed analytically as a "global", or even "planetary" "process", is not the result of necessarily interconnected transfer (cf. Smith, 2002; Lees, 2012): I would suggest it cannot be seen as a process at all, but as conceptualisation of a certain kind of urban outcome which is most commonly transferred as a concept (rather than as policy or purposeful practice — although it can certainly perform as a policy goal or desired outcome, and as a focus for opposition). Gentrification is an analytical term which insists on the co-presence of certain "shared features" of urban change to be applicable (class change; displacement; physical transformation).

Comparative experiments around the concept of gentrification are better understood, then, within the rubric of generative comparative practices (Robinson, 2016a; forthcoming).

Deleuze invites us to consider "bare" and "clothed" repetitions as markers of how repeated instances might be treated analytically. "Bare" repetitions are emptied out of difference, difference is drawn off as each repeated instance is encountered and a concept is left unclothed, unadorned by the necessary differentiation produced through each repetition, travelling as an invariant concept (1994:359). Jane Jacobs puts this key Deleuzian insight well: "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). "Clothed" repetitions emerge within the realm of ideas as always shaded and transformed with the specific features of differentiation. In the process ideas or concepts are "clothed" as they are produced in relationship with specific outcomes. Inherited ideas are disturbed, extended, found wanting — perhaps reaching a point where their relevance is deteriorated and we approach the "difference" encountered as the starting points for new conceptualisations. This brings us close to the value of thinking with specific cases in a more Marxist idiom, where the particular "concrete totality" opens up to an inexhaustibility of possible analytical and empirical starting points for thinking (Lefebvre, 1955).

Every case matters: Along the way, as connections reveal or are part of the production of particular instances, it will be possible to shift perspective more definitively from these circulating phenomena to attend to specific urban outcomes and territorializations. Following connections can be a significant element in productively explaining distinctive territorial urban outcomes, and can be especially productive in inspiring thinking across and with the differentiation of outcomes associated with specific links, flows and connections. Treating each singularity emergent within an interconnected multiplicity of cases as a distinctive starting point for analysis leads us to ask: what perspective or insights does this case, or the next case, bring to understanding? In this last approach, we then have multiple analytical starting points with which to bring interpretive enrichment to other such instances, for each case to raise questions of the other and to contribute to enriching and thickening the analysis of each case (Akrich and Rabeharisoa, 2016).

A further manouevre is invited by attending to the specific case, which is to identify new starting points for understanding — perhaps the difference so far unconceptualised. Thus potentially quite different grounds emerge for bringing cases into comparative conversations. This moves the methodological approach potentially more into the realm of generative comparisons: identifying concepts or processes which might draw us to compose a comparison, across a selection of cases to inform conceptualisation. Focusing on the fullness of any given case, its internal multiplicity and heterogeneity, invites new starting points for wider analysis. For example, while we might begin by following the globalizing circuits of financialisation, we might find ourselves presented with a multiplicity of actors and processes assembled in emergent territorialized and transnational political formations (Halbert and Rouanet, 2014; Weber, 2015). Thinking across this multiplicity could inspire new formulations of urban politics and its changing territorializations (see Shatkin, 2017, for example), starting with any of the many different actors and processes shaping and contesting specific urban developments across the numerous urban contexts shaped by financialized circuits and flows.

Summary — repeated instances: To return to the question opening this section, what it is possible to do, then, with multiple repeated instances within a comparative imagination? As natural experiments for destabilizing concepts, repeated instances drag the connections and processes of

urbanization into the multiplicity of differentiated empirical outcomes. At this moment it is possible to work analytically with these repeated instances to: (a) *by addition* allow urban processes and outcomes to be approached as an empirical multiplicity, adding up to or providing starting points for insights into urbanization processes whose reference points are not the "cities" within which they might be embedded, but the wider, circulating processes and practices which constitute any possible urban outcome; (b) *by subtraction* undermine, develop or reinvent concepts which follow the traces of genesis; and (c) *by attending to each case* bringing into conceptualisation the particular and diverse processes allied in the production of yet another instance, perhaps to think across and with their diverse formats in different contexts, treating each singularity as a distinctive starting point for analysis.

3. TOPOLOGICAL "CONNECTIONS"

The urban condition is one lived in the midst of "multiple elsewheres" as Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) so elegantly described it for Johannesburg. What does this mean for methodologies of knowing the urban; what can it mean for conceptualising urbanisation? We might find ourselves thinking the urban across a tangle of connections: Following connections within a particular context brings a variety of a processes or phenomena into view, say, local political formations, or social differentiation. Thus, as explored in the final section above, following connections might also invite us to compose comparisons in a more generative mode around the differentiated outcomes of certain genetic processes: wider analytical reflections on shared phenomena, such as governance, often deeply path dependent and localised, would be useful to building analyses of urban politics beyond the single case. Certainly this is not only about the "local" as we also need to be mindful of the call above to attend to the multiple fellow travellers of circulating ideas and practices (so difference is not only found in places), and thus heed Buckley and Strauss's (2016) observation that analysis of "context of context" and wider processes should encompass more than political economy/capitalism. However, while the analysis of urban policy mobilities provokes us to explore specifically how it is that elsewhere makes cities, and how cities work with multiple elsewheres to produce distinctive (particular) outcomes, I suggest we can press this further than the material production of urban space through networks or connections *per se*. What I have in mind here are the effective spatialities of the relationalities which such connections subtend or enable (Allen, 2008, 2016). In terms of our thinking about comparative methods this topological viewpoint could perhaps help us extend our repertoire for critical comparative urban thinking.

There is a tendency in writing about urban policy mobilities to grapple with the complexity associated with the proliferation, speed and extensive transformations wrought by and to policies in motion. Peck and Theodore's succinct introduction to a collection of papers on policy mobilities expresses the complexities of these spatialities of policy mobilities very well:

> The spatiality of policymaking is not flattened into some almost-featureless and inert plane or transaction space, marked only with jurisdictional boundaries, across which transfers occur, but in terms of *a three-dimensional mosaic of increasingly reflexive forms of governance, shaped by multi-directional forms of crossscalar and interlocal policy mobility*. In this context, policies

are not simply transiting intact between jurisdictions, but evolve through mobility, while at the same time (re)making relational connections between policymaking sites. [Peck and Theodore, 2010:170; italics are mine]

In the same way, perhaps, as with the complex interscalar and recombinant spatial language needed to recount the geographies of globalisation and which increasingly fails to quite capture the spatial relationships at work (Allen, 2008), there is a need for urbanists to examine in some detail what exactly is included in the often rather sweeping and all-encompassing concept of the "relationality" of places which urban policy mobilities brings so clearly into view (Hart, 2003, 2016). Exactly what kinds of relationships are these? And how might we adequately formulate the spatialities at work in shaping them? My concern here is with the overwhelmingly materialist — in the sense of "matter" — emphasis of much relational thinking, which frames spatial relationships as trajectories and physical connections or direct flows which come together to make distinctive places (Massey, 2005).

Rather, we can consider that ideas and practices arrive from elsewhere or emerge in particular contexts in all sorts of ways — through forgotten conversations at meetings, long distant reading of publications or reports, unpredictable friendship and collegial networks, as well as formal or informal associations in which taken for granted understandings might be confirmed. It is important to consider, contra the ANT focus of much discussion of policy assemblages and mobilities, that the infrastructure of policy transfer (as with many other aspects of urban life) is significantly immaterial (see Simone, 2001, on the idea of ephemeral publics; Saunier, 2002 in relation to policy circulations). We are drawn then to explore how cities inhabit one another imaginatively, setting memories on the move, and inspiring ambitions (Bunnell and Das, 2013). This highly internationalised landscape — this topology — of intricate and subtle engagements across cities offers us methodological inspiration, including encouraging us to work with the relations of proximity and presence shaping policy transfer and adaptation which are not easily reduced to physical flows which can be traced on a map or particular objects or elements which can be "followed" (Robinson, 2011b, 2013). Rather than pulling us back to the physical routes and points of physical co-presence and alliance-building that enable flows (although these, as with the details of trajectories, are certainly relevant and interesting), the concept of topological space (Allen, 2008, 2016) opens up some new imaginations for thinking the urban.

My proposal for starting to question this form of materialist relationality, inspired by analysis of policy mobilities, is to suggest that we invert the problematic — both our question and our methodology. Rather than tracking connections, and following where they go, which seems to be the preferred mode of operation in urban policy mobilities studies (Peck and Theodore, 2010), I suggest that we might take as our optic the question as to *how urban policies are arrived at*, rather than tracing how they arrive from elsewhere. It is in seeking to answer this question, I think, that topological spatial imaginations become essential to our analyses, and the effective work of the urban in relation to elsewhere — its mediating function — becomes more clearly evident. Topological spatialities are concerned less with tracing physical mobilities and connections and more with exploring ephemeral processes of presencing and proximity, accounting for the interminglings of interiority and exteriority, or exploring how institutions and agents might secure influence at a distance. These are, I would suggest, crucial if we are to be able to investigate many of the spatial dynamics operative in determining

policy outcomes. Considering how "parts of elsewhere" make up local places (Allen and Cochrane, 2007:1171) has the potential to stretch our analytical capabilities and vocabularies.

I want to argue, then, that the "arrival" of policy ideas from elsewhere is something of a misdirect in explanatory terms — the assumption that policy ideas even arrive is rather misplaced — at the very least we lose sight of the policies that were already there, or which never arrive, that are thwarted or ignored, or run aground amidst alternative agendas or stern resistance, or become something completely unrecognisable, or whose influence is quite forgotten (Robinson, 2012; Jacobs, 2011). I want to rather open up the potential for thinking with elsewheres to bring figure a sharper focus on the incredibly messy, often untraceable, processes of policy formulation (Robinson, 2011b), including some of the ephemeral dynamics underpinning the differentiations of repetition (Jacobs, 2012). It will hopefully illuminate the spatialities not only of how policy ideas are arrived at in the midst of the many elsewheres but also inspire some innovative approaches to forging comparisons through (topological) connections.

In exploring city strategies, for example, I have argued that we can consider the many different and complex ways in which those elsewheres are made present (Robinson, 2011b, 2013). Drawing from my own research experience (and in this paragraph on Robinson, 2018), international policy circuits are an everyday presence for Johannesburg's officials, through their own professional training, internet and institutional connections. Policy development draws selectively and intelligently on key ideas and practices prominent in different settings around the world (Robinson, 2013), or packaged for circulation (Wood, 2014). Ideas are available easily on the internet — arriving in Johannesburg as quickly as anywhere else — and trajectories of learning include maintaining close contact with local and international academics, officials who have themselves recently returned from studies abroad, or commissioning desk top studies of key areas (Silverman et al., 2005). Face to face discussions with peers while on trips or in international policy settings can make a strong impression and provide leads for further research or implementation. Although ideas shared may be familiar or relatively slight, chance discussions can help to focus practices. A former city official from the office responsible for preparing Johannesburg's Growth and Development Strategy noted, for example, that on a trip to New York City, where they were discussing "PlanNYC", New York's long-term plan, they discussed their public consultation process. He

> took home [that] they just simplify the stuff, even this [GDS] document you have was deliberately simplified — and still people find it dense… They were saying to us if you want to engage with stakeholders and citizens across the board you have to take stuff in a form they can engage… we hadn't finalised this consultation process, so we got back and that was at the back of my mind… [Interview, former city official, 2011]

More generally, though, apparently international learning can be embedded in ongoing recursive interactions and policy development where the exact origins are unclear (Wood, 2014). Phil Harrison, himself a former city official as well as senior scholar notes, for example, that although South Africa had long experience in *in situ* upgrading of informal settlements (van Horen, 2000), and academic knowledge about the Brazilian experience was widespread, two study tours to Brazil and Peru (1999)

and to Brazil in 2008 "led more immediately to the adoption of new policy" (Harrison, 2015:216) in this area.

The question which arises, then, is, how are urban policies 'arrived at' in the midst of here and elsewhere? The experiences of policymakers involved in the development of various versions of Johannesburg's long-term city strategy between 1999 and 2011 are instructive (for a fuller treatment, see Robinson 2011b, 2013). One of the key architects of Johannesburg's 2006 Growth and Development Strategy explains how policy ideas came together for him in this process:

> The way the stuff works in truth is that a small team of people and almost always one or two individuals within that team are engaged in policy debates more generally, read incredibly widely on all sorts of issues and it just becomes part of the amorphous mass of their thinking… but if you were to say now where did that idea come from, you'd say well it came out of the work we were doing in this particular department but in truth actually the idea probably came from somewhere else. [former city policy writer, Johannesburg, July 2009]

In this view, the policy and analytical ideas which are 'in motion' within a trajectories perspective are already there. They didn't 'arrive'. Policymakers in Johannesburg have already made their own many of the different available ways of thinking about and intervening in cities. These might have been learnt from academic or policy literatures, but they are often seen as already profoundly local. Concepts might be borrowed at one moment, only to be thought of later as newly invented locally. Or policy ideas which arrive from somewhere else might also be the result of long and politically tough policy processes, as with the collaborative format of citywide strategic planning in Johannesburg which was hard-won over decades of anti-apartheid struggle only to arrive again fully formed from the Cities Alliance (Cities Alliance, 2006; Robinson, 2008). Policy ideas might have wider circulations and histories, but the relevant histories and processes by which they come to policymakers' attention might be entirely localized. For example, urban sprawl is a common feature of many twentieth-century modernizing cities, but in Johannesburg it is also a specific apartheid inheritance, and addressing its consequences for the urban form has a distinctive and political charge, to do with race, and the reliance of the city on the property taxes of the middle classes (Beall and Parnell, 2002). Or, indeed, policy ideas might be self-consciously reimported as new from a different context to reinvigorate policy options which have been displaced locally. This is arguably the case with the idea of *in situ* upgrading in Johannesburg, initially very important in late and post-apartheid urban planning, and then brought 'back' from Brazil as the contradictions of post-apartheid's formal housing developments became apparent in the late 2000s.

In relation to the broader project of conceptualizing mobilities, we have noted the dependence of policy transfer and adaptation on spatialities of proximity and presence which are not easily reduced to physical flows which can be traced on a map. Circulations, then, are not specifically about traversing physical distance or traceable connections, but might often be more convincingly understood through the concept of topological space (Allen, 2008). Rather than pulling us back to the physical routes or the co-presences and alliance-building that enable flows (although these, as with the details of trajectories, are certainly relevant and interesting), topological accounts of space direct us to attend

to the specific spatialities at work in the drawing of people, ideas, and activities into proximity, into closer relationships, or not (Allen, 2008). Empirically, certainly we need to attend to the topological imbrications of places, otherwise disjunct, through processes, such as off-shoring, or hedging, credit swaps and financialisation, bring different elements of cities and economies into perhaps unexpected proximities which require more than physical metaphors of circulation, infrastructure or operational landscapes to catch (Allen, 2016).

Thus simply focusing on things that move — mobilities — might lead us to ignore some of the important ways in which elsewhere shapes cities. In policy circulations, then, one has something altogether organizationally looser (untraceable, even) than the heterogeneous networks pursued by actor-network theorists, or even the generic relational geographies which subtend contemporary accounts of space. Allen and Cochrane (2007:1163) draw our attention, suggestively, to "the mix of distanciated and proximate actions that constitute more recent forms of networked regional governance." However, it is to the language inspired by Johannesburg, and other cities in Africa often written out of the scripts of worlding cities, the "embeddedness in multiple elsewheres" (Mbembe and Nutall, 2004:348) of cities like Johannesburg that we could turn to consider the many different complex ways in which those elsewheres are made present, and also forgotten, so mixed up they cannot be traced, stubbornly sticking to national tracks of policy influence, hanging around to haunt policy making without being able to be named (see McCann, 2011). The different ways in which elsewheres shape strategic policy making deserve more attention: they might never arrive, be ignored, be imagined, be retold a lot, be worked on with great effort, be already here, imaginative recompositions, pure repetition, multiple ownership of ideas (already mine, overdetermination), be used in drawing comparisons, forgetting, losing sight of interiority and exteriority in a delirium of localism (or deferential internationalism) — these, then, are some of the topologies of transnational urban policy.

Can these topological spatialities of policy mobility inspire us in terms of how we narrate the urban — how we "arrive at" theories of cities? Firstly, I would prioritize the insight that the procedures and relationships through which urban theory is generated, coordinated and disseminated are as political and power laden as those which frame the circulations of other forms of urban understandings. We, too, are the circuits of urban policy; the producers of the mobile and agile stories which both retell cities and remake them, which presence themselves in cities in unpredictable ways. As such our practices and circuits demand as much attention as those of the powerful institutions, policy makers, and gurus we love to criticize! The politics of our own relationships with elsewhere should properly concern us. Secondly, we can be inspired by policy makers' agility in reworking and reimagining urban futures to learn that it is possible to reconceptualize the "urban." Rather than new geographies of theory (Roy, 2009) which suggest a static distribution of ideas across different places, once again potentially incommensurable (Parnell and Oldfield, 2014), we need to look for new geographies of theorizing which destabilize the terms of the urban and set in motion conversations towards an ongoing reinvention of the term "urban." This chimes with current ontological debates within urban studies. Confronted with the profound exteriority of the production of cities, we are drawn to think with specific, connected "elsewheres". Within this framing, and given the wider challenge of defining the physical object-extent of the urban, the urban is practically an impossible object. As Maliq Simone

(2011:356) puts it, "the urban is always 'slipping away' from us, always also somewhere else than where we expect it to be."

But the presence of "elsewhere" in framing how we think about the urban also resonates with the more topological composition of place. Thus, as we anticipate a practice of theorizing which is committed to such an open sense of what the urban might be, we can return to the final challenge which theorists share with policy makers, that of producing our understandings of the urban through particular cities but always in relation to elsewheres: to speak of an "urban" beyond the single case necessarily entrains elsewhere, brings into the frame of reference a "world of cities" (Robinson, 2011a). The analytical impossibility of the object-urban, therefore, is not only to be located in ontology as such, in its physical and extended form, but also in the challenge of building a theorization of the urban across a world of different, differentiated cities and a multiplicity of connections, flows and extended urbanization processes. Thus, in a world where urbanity is reimagined and remade in a myriad different contexts, the spaces and forms of the city which "press" on our interpretations will be diverse, differentiated, for example, through the creative compositions of here and elsewhere, or through the always differentiated repetitions which are the outcomes of the sociotechnical achievements of far-reaching urban processes and their imaginative re-workings (Jacobs, 2006). An open and revisable conceptualization of the urban, willing to work with, puzzle through and make room for the differentiation and diversity of urban life is essential. As is the case for the policy makers we have considered here, our interpretations and interventions in the cities we inhabit and work with, read about and learn from, will increasingly take place in a global, differentiated but interconnected plane of analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

The practices of comparative urbanism, then, might learn from the work of policy mobilities, and "arriving at" policies. Certainly I hope we will continue to trace the provenance of different conceptualizations of the urban (especially to (dis)locate hegemonic ideas); we could also be alert to the ways in which ideas of the urban might have been packaged to travel better (to have impact, set agendas or catch the imagination — as with the concept of global cities, for example). In this the voices and insights of numerous scholars in many different places who work very hard to engage with, critique, and localize certain prominent traveling ideas should be carefully attended to, to inspire more sustained comparative reflection and theoretical revision. The creative and agentful work of conceptualization which is carried out across diverse specific cities indicates a terrain of political obligations — of inclusivity, of respectful scholarly debate, and inclusive publishing regimes (Parnell and Pieterse, 2016). But it also signposts the possibilities of the comparative imagination. Some of these possibilities might include: cutting across here and there to compose analyses through surprising — perhaps at first sight hilarious — affinities — such as the initially astonishing but now quite sensible idea that one might take analyses of informality and ungovernability to think through wealthier contexts — see Le Galès (2011); Tuvikene, Neves Alves and Hilbrandt (2017); doing the very hard work of imaginatively recomposing and grounding dominant policy terms in relation to specific histories and political moments; or allowing a ferment of untraceable ideas to produce something new and resonant. And there is also of course that well-known academic condition, forgetting where

you first heard something which you love to think of as your own, which highlights the unpredictable processes of learning. The ontological and geographical impossibility of the object-urban invites us to work in these and many other creative comparative ways along the tracks of the cities we think through — to work with both their topographical and topological spatialities — to be open always to reframing our conceptualizations (after ANT) of how they have come to be or, following Lefebvre, what they might become (Schmid, 2008). The torsions of topological spatialities evident through these exteriorised perspectives draw us to reconfigure not only the meaning of global or local, but they also ask us to consider anew the specific territorialisations of the urban, and to review the trajectories and geographies of conceptualisation. The ways in which we are drawn, or "lured" through "fragments" of urban space, as Colin McFarlane (2017) so evocatively puts it, directs analyses of the urban beyond the territorialised starting points indicated by the old shorthands — Toronto, Sofia, Oslo… which abound in our studies — and by the new territories, cases of expansive or intensifying developments (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). Where are the starting points of thinking the urban? Not a city, not a centre, not a suburb. Rather, I think, both methodologically and analytically, we need to deconstruct the urban to locate it again.

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