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The void

Urban wasteland as political space

VON SCHÉELE, CECILIA

2016

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
VON SCHÉELE, CECILIA. (2016). *The void: Urban wasteland as political space*. [Doctoral Thesis (monograph), Department of Political Science]. Lund University.

Total number of authors:
1

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The void

Urban wasteland as political space

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The void

Urban wasteland as political space

Cecilia von Schéele



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
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To be defended at Edens hörsal, Lund. Date September 16th 2016 and time 10:00.

Faculty Opponent
Senior lecturer Nils Hertting, Uppsala University

Organization LUND UNIVERSITY	Document name DOCTORAL DISSERTATION
	Date of issue September 16th 2016
	Sponsoring organization
Author(s) Cecilia von Schéele	

Title and subtitle

The void. Urban wasteland as political space

Abstract The rugged field and group of trees between housing estates or next to the railroad tracks, the left-over space of deserted industrial areas, the vacant demolition site of a central city block – they could all be termed 'urban voids'. However, they are often anything but voids, in a literal sense, as they are not empty, or deserted. Yet they are 'urban voids', lacking an evident function, or a definition according to a plan. It is a category of urban space constructed as a nothingness, even though the very same space is often used for a variety of purposes. The aim of this thesis is to show how the urban void becomes as the constitutive outside of the City. It investigates the difference *made* between well-defined urban spaces (known by names such as 'street', 'park', 'parking lot', 'housing block') and the *other* kind of space.

The production of the void – either it is made a no-space, devoid of any meaning, or a mesmerising rabbit-hole leading to another world – is here understood as fundamentally political. With a relational conception of space and an anti-essentialist conception of politics and the political, the author conducts a deconstruction-inspired analysis of the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of space. The Derridean notion of an undecidable provides a figure of thought that hinges the analysis together with a particular way of understanding how dominant discourses on the City and conceptualisations of the urban void interact to determine each other. It does not present a "truer" version of the urban void, but aims to shake up the dominant modes of conceptualising the phenomenon.

The analysis engages a variety of texts – whether in the shape of what one might call 'theory', or 'empirical material', or a TV-series, or a novel – and the thoughts provoked by working with those texts, have been edited into a montage. Fieldwork – in Athens (Greece), Berlin (Germany), Brasília (Brazil), Malmö and Stockholm (Sweden) – interviews, analyses of policies and plans, and close readings of academic literature from a range of different fields, have generated material for the study. The editing of a montage is, however, more than a mere methodological tool or a way of writing; with Rancière's notion of 'indisciplinary thought' it politicises the way of making the analysis by engaging a variety of perspectives and material in different forms that transgress disciplinary boundaries.

The thesis not only writes the urban void *into* politically relevant space, but also represents it in a way that makes it obvious *as a* politically relevant space. It brings the 'no-spaces' out of an (assumed) obscurity, yet at the same time de-mystifies the (same) fascinating places, in hope of a less polarised and more nuanced discourse on the urban wastelands. Only then can the existence of the urban void as a category of left over space be questioned, and the thesis concludes by opening up for future inquiry the question of what kind of city could become from a point of view where the urban void is just another kind of space.

Key words: urban void, urban wasteland, urban planning, urban politics, space, rhythm, undecidable, montage, Derrida, Massey

Classification system and/or index termes (if any):

Supplementary bibliographical information:		Language English
ISSN and key title: 0460-0037: The void. Urban wasteland as political space		ISBN 978-91-7623-926-1
Recipient's notes	Number of pages 254	Price
	Security classification	

Distribution by (name and address)

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DOKUMENTDATABLAD enl SIS 61 41 21

The void

Urban wasteland as political space

Cecilia von Schéele



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Cover photo by the author
Layout by Agnes Florin

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Faculty of Social Sciences | Department of Political Science

ISBN 978-91-7623-926-1 (print)
ISBN 978-91-7623-927-8 (pdf)
ISSN 0460-0037

Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University
Lund 2016

Acknowledgements

These words form the beginning of this book, however they mark the end of the project that it results from. As I write them, on a warm summer's day, I am by my self – there is no one else here. Yet, I do not feel alone. The thought of the people who in the course of my doctoral studies and of writing this thesis came to be important dispels any such feeling.

First, I want to thank my supervisors: Björn Badersten, for the generosity with which you have given your time – to long discussions on any analytical problems I encountered along the way and to the many close readings of my text(s) – for knowing the tricks by means of which to overcome a writer's block, and, not least, for your incessant encouragement. One could not wish for a better supervisor. Martin Hall, for your support, and for knowing when extra such was needed, and the difficult questions that made me sharpen my arguments.

You are many at the Department of Political Science in Lund who, at various stages of the project, have contributed questions, comments and suggestions. The ways in which we colleagues as a collective engage in each others texts, with agreements or disagreements, is what I find the finest trait of academia, and I am so glad to have been a part of that. I would like to express my gratitude to all of

you, and I also want to mention in particular Johannes Stripple, Catarina Kinnvall, Dalia Mukhtar-Landgren, Jonna Pettersson, Ivan Gusic, Anna Sundell Eklund, Linda Nyberg, Klas Nilsson, Ted Svensson, Petter Narby, Josef Chaib, Erik Ringmar, and Ylva Stubbergaard, who have read and commented on different versions of drafts for this thesis. I am also grateful to Mattias Kärrholm, from the Department of Architecture and Built Environment at LTH, who acted as the opponent at my final seminar and contributed a careful reading and invaluable insights. Thank you!

My fellow PhD candidates, I would like to thank all of you for being a source of inspiration, in hard work as well as at bike/party-parties. My generation: Sarah Anne Rennick, Niklas Altermark and Tony Ingesson, thank you for being my team when we first started our doctoral studies, without you I would have been Bambi, and would not have had half as much fun. Rickard Andersson, Petter Narby, Jonna Pettersson, and Niklas (again) thank you for including me in mind-bending philosophical discussions and giving me the courage to believe I could do political theory, and for the friendship. Thank you Linda Nyberg, Vanja Carlsson, Josef Chaib and Niklas (once again) (hey Nick!), for our animated dinners where the critical public administration nerd in me could thrive. And, Linda (again), thank you for the feminist companionship and the friendship.

For helping out with the logistics, thank you Kristina Gröndahl-Nilsson, Stefan Alenius, Helen Fogelin, Margareth Andersson, Amir Parhamifar, for making my life as a PhD candidate so much easier than it might have been. Linda Grandsjö, thank you for being the librarian always coming to my rescue. Thanks also to Crafoordska Stiftelsen and Fröken Hanna Roos af Hjelmsäter testamentsfond, for the financial support that made it possible for me to do the fieldwork in distant cities.

Friends at other places. Ida Sandström, thank you for our time together and collective research process in Pristina, without which I would not have ended up puzzled by the spaces that seemed either/or, a confusion that years later sparked the first ideas for this project. Maria Teder, the way in which we entered Lefebvre land at first a little lost, but together, meant much to me, as did our interdisciplinary space and place discussions. Anna Hult, our numerous workshops (yes, the coffee also needs to be mentioned), commenting each other's texts, and talking about planning, Massey, and the City, they have been important, and I hope that they will not end with our respective vivas. Emet Brulin, thank you for, during these last quivering months when I was finalising this thesis, reading it sensitively and helpfully, and for your kind words on my work. My friends outside academia, there must be no doubt that you have been vital to me in this process of learning. Thank you for showing interest in what I do, and making me talk about it, so that I could understand what it is that I do, and, at other times, knowing when it is ouzo'clock.

For making this text a pleasure for the eye (and the thumb and all the other parts of the body involved in reading), I owe gratitude to Agnes Florin. Thank you for your diligent work on the layout and the type-formatting. I am also grateful to Petronella Zetterlund, for the translation from Spanish to English of Héctor Hernández Montecino's poem, thank you! For help with the proofreading, I am indebted to Jonathan Ridenour, Asimina Diamanti, and David Sandström, thank you!

My parents, Carl and Annika von Schéele, have in many ways been important to the work presented here. They have always, since I was a child, encouraged my creativity, irrespective of whether it was doing art in soured milk (this was early 1990's, don't worry), or writing poetry, or researching for a film documentary. Academic

research has much to do with, and demands, creativeness, as it is involved in the play with problems, in their reformulations, and in the search for ways to deal with them. This, the call to be creative, is one of the top things that have made my doctoral studies so much fun, when it has been fun, as it most often has. Thank you mamma och pappa for having spurred this in me, for your incessant interest and belief in my creative abilities. On a more practical, however no less important, note, thank you for providing me with a place to write by giving up some of your own space these past six months, when the office in Lund was, for family reasons, no longer an option. My dear mother-in-law, Birgith Lundberg, thank you for giving me the time to write by taking care of our daughter with love and energy when both we parents had to work.

Adam Nilsson, the love of my life, thank you for all the things I cannot describe in words, and for your endless support – when there were celebrations and when everything was difficult and at all the moments in between – without which I would not have been able to write this book. Last, but not least (even though you are still a little child), Frances, my beloved daughter, thank you for being you.

Stockholm in August 2016
Cecilia von Schéele

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Ödetomten, Malmö, Sweden.

1 Beginnings

The rugged field and group of trees between housing estates or next to the railroad tracks, the left-over space of deserted industrial areas, the vacant demolition site of a central city block, the narrow but warm and dry space behind bushes beneath a concrete stairway – they are the urban wastelands. Sometimes in bloom, sometimes used by passers-by – to take a short cut, as a temporary place for home, as an atelier – sometimes just a place where empty milk cartons and plastic bags whirl round in the breeze. They are the left over spaces of the urban fabric, places with no articulated function, places waiting to be defined. Or perhaps, defined by being undefined. It is a timespace that emerges when and where the authorised designation of urban space is invalid, where the ordered city – for a while – becomes un-ordered. A moment of "undefinedness" and a space in transition, spatially as well as temporally. The indeterminacy gives them an ephemeral and unordered character, in the abstract (the idea) as well as the concrete (the urban structure). It is a kind of space with many denotations, one of which is the 'urban void'.

An*other* kind of space?

In the same way that one might approach an unknown city with a map in one's hands, the development of a city is made lucid by and through urban planning, a practice of which the *raison d'être* is to master uncertainty – it is "the scientific, aesthetic and orderly disposition of land" (Hillier 2010:3). It is about categorising, naming, and putting in place, about what is to be done where, and it prescribes who has legitimacy to define urban space. The urban void, on the other hand, is a space that appears open, open to passers-by, open to anyone interested – a space possible to use. The spontaneous use of the urban void, however, which for a moment defines it as *something* rather than as *nothing*, questions this legitimacy, as it is defined by appropriation (and not according to plan). Furthermore, its function is seldom detectable in formal documents and therefore it makes up a *void* in urban plans (cf. Wikström 2005:50). The urban *waste*land, is also a deviation from the perspective of the City[1] as a 'growth machine', as it lies fallow and is busy doing nothing at all, instead of being developed and thereby generating an increase in its economic value (cf. Molotch 1976). In a conventional reading of urban space, dereliction is thus a sign of waste, and tends to provide evidence of an area's lack, and simultaneously, of an uncertain future (Edensor 2005a:7). The fleeting character of the urban void reinforces that uncertainty, as it seems to emerge and disappear not according to plan, but to an unknown rhythm: it appears as a timespace in flux. Combined with its messy and rough look, it results in a strange appearance.

That the urban void is perceived as such, as a nothingness, as a gap, or as a space between, indicates that it is minoritarian vis à vis other kinds of urban space (Brighenti 2013:xvi). From the point of view of the norm the urban void is an *un*ordered, *un*tidy, and *un*defined space beating to another rhythm – it becomes as a deviance, as an*other* kind of space. It is a kind of *othering*, a way of making it

1. For a discussion on the distinction made between "City" and "city", see p. 20ff.

appear distinctly different from, and an opposite to, what then is to be perceived as ordinary well-defined urban space, and as such it is a way to master the unknown. It is a kind of space in which the interpretation and practice of the city becomes liberated from the everyday constraints determining what should be done and where, and that encodes the city with meanings. Hence, it offers an opportunity for deconstructing imprints of power on the city (Edensor 2005a:4). It is a contested space.

The politics of the urban void

The contestation *per se* is however not what makes the urban void interesting here, as conflict is not something that befalls an originally harmonious urban space: urban space is the product of conflict (Deutsche 1996:278). Cities are intense and heterogeneous constellations that demand complex negotiations and all places are formed through a myriad of practices of quotidian interventions (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]; Massey 2005:154f). Consequently, any urban space is a product of the prevailing social order *and* a producer of this order, and should be understood as the place and medium of political struggle (Lefebvre 1991).

Thus, no characteristic of the urban void should be taken as a given. Please consider once more that it was just stated to be a strange space. Is it really? When passing a place like this in the city, it might not seem strange at all. It is just another strip of unkempt grass, next to an old bus depot; or a lot where a shoe factory has become derelict, or a small grove of brushwood between the last house in the row and the highway. That these spaces then all belong to one and the same category of deviant urban space is instead what seems a strange thing.

This is where it starts, the argument of this book: society, and the urban fabric, is characterised by irreducible chaos and instability, in which we inhabitants struggle with laws and institutions to create

order and stability (Derrida 2005 [1996]:86, Mouffe 2005a:9). This set of practices, such as law-making or the maintenance of social institutions, could be termed 'politics', with reference to Chantal Mouffe (2005a), and in the present context it is used as a concept to frame the organisation of the spatial and temporal configurations of human coexistence in cities. In other words, it organises how we understand the spaces that make up the city. The ordering and categorising of urban space, then – i.e. a desire to master the uncertain – is a form of spatial politics.

Spatial politics is what dictates and sets up the urban order, by which the othering of the urban void can be understood. It becomes an outside – a left-over junk space with no other defining characteristic than as the residual of the regimes by which urban space is ordered – in relation to what is understood to be the inside. Space is here conceived in relational terms and as always under construction, and as such connected to an anti-essentialist notion of politics (Massey 1999:28). With the latter, identities are understood in terms of the result of processes of identification, processes that always imply the establishment of a difference (Mouffe 2005a:15,18). Hence, a relational conception of space acknowledges that the ordering of urban space, like any order, is political and based on some form of exclusion (Mouffe 2005a:18). Furthermore, and in line with the above reference to Mouffe and Derrida, Doreen Massey argues that space should be understood as "the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity" (ibid.), i.e. the existence of a contemporaneous plurality. In other words, things need not be as they seem: instead, other voices can be heard, and everything can be otherwise. The urban void as a 'void' is therefore only a (temporary) closing of meaning, as every consensus is a stabilisation of something that is essentially unstable and chaotic (Mouffe 2005b [1996]:10). The stability attained with politics then, is merely a temporary closing of meaning in a context

where everything is fundamentally open, it is not continual but provisional – there is a chance to change, there are possibilities: "[c]haos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other", writes Jacques Derrida (2005:86). Here, the political is the potential for things to be otherwise. And the central question, of the political, is how are we to live together in this world, society, or city (cf. Massey 2005:151). These two propositions on space, that space is relational and that is the possibility of more than one voice, gives a third one: that space is always in a process of becoming (Massey 1999:28). It is always being made, never finished, never closed (ibid.). And such is the urban void.

Thinking with Massey highlights the necessity of understanding the urban void as a phenomenon that must be thought *together* with, and as a product of, the politics of urban space. Spatial politics, i.e. the laws and institutions that regulate urban development, structure the discourses on the urban void and its relations to the City, and thereby how these phenomena are understood. This concerns not only the urban void and the City as ideas but also how the concrete urban fabric is read. Much of spatial politics is concerned with how chaos can be ordered and how space can be coded, and this means that the production of urban wastelands as 'voids', as a different kind of space, is in no way neutral, but an act of politics (cf. Massey 2005:151). To sum up then, the urban void is not a leftover space in the sense of being external to the organising of the city, but a product of the constant renegotiation of the urban fabric. It is made undefined, and uncertain – it is *othered* (see e.g. Derrida 1988a [1972]; Saïd 1978; Bhabha 1994; S. Hall 1997).

Accordingly, the relation between the ordered urban structure (the norm) and the urban void (the deviant) should not be understood in terms of stable/unstable. The former is not something

coherent, everlasting, against which the latter is projected as fleeting and temporary space. Neither is it ever finished or closed, but constantly in the making. "[M]any of our accustomed ways of imagining space have been attempts to tame it", writes Massey (2005:152) in a sentence that also figures as the epigraph for this introductory chapter, and also as a kind of motto for the thesis. It is a formulation that through contrast highlights the forces involved in the conceptions of the urban wasteland: the violent act of 'taming' implied in the seemingly rather harmless 'ways of imagining space'. Furthermore, it is an argument as to why anyone interested in the political finds much to inquire about when reading the urban fabric, since the production of space is never innocent, but always a question of power. Here, it is about those very forces and what they do to the urban void: in order to tame the messiness of the urban void, it is constructed as empty/void/blank.

Aim

Now please recall the places in the very first sentences of the book, the wastelands where anything or nothing might happen, brushwood growing wild and people passing, or sleeping, or where no people are to be found but a few birds and some litter, or a sculpture: These are not urban *voids*, in a literal sense, as they are not empty, or deserted. Yet they are 'urban voids' – lacking an evident function, or a definition according to a plan, perforating the urban fabric in an unanticipated rhythm of time. What we have is a category of urban space constructed as an emptiness and a nothingness, when the very same category of space is often used for a variety of purposes. It is, it should be noted, the same variety of uses that one might find at other places in the city as well – people resting, people doing art, people cooking, and people walking their dogs. Against this backdrop, the aim of this thesis is to show how the urban void becomes as the constitutive outside of

the City; or, put differently, how the urban void becomes *othered* (cf. Derrida 1988a; Staten 1986 [1984]:16-18). It investigates the difference *made* between well-defined urban spaces (known by names such as 'street', 'park', 'parking lot', 'housing block') and the *other* kind of space.

I argue in this thesis that the production of the void – either it is made a no-space, devoid of any meaning, or a mesmerising rabbit hole leading to another world – is fundamentally political. This in turn, follows from a conceptualisation of the production of space as relational, as the sphere of the possibility of multiplicity, and as never finished (cf. Massey 1999). That means that any space is constituted through interactions and is as such anti-essential, and that any conception of a certain space is merely a temporary closing of meaning in a context where everything is open and might be otherwise (Mouffe 2005a; Derrida 2005). Michael Shapiro asks "[w]hat conceptions, juxtapositions, and soliciting of alternative subjects and thought worlds will disrupt the dominant modes of intelligibility and open up spaces for new political thinking with empowering implications for new forms of subjectivization, for the welcoming of new kinds of […] subjects *into* politically relevant space?" (2013:32). My hope is that, as a deconstruction-inspired analysis of the urban void, this thesis will not only bring the urban void *into* politically relevant space but represent it in a way that makes it obvious *as a* politically relevant space. It brings the 'no-spaces' out of an (assumed) obscurity, yet at the same time de-mystifies the (same) fascinating places, in hope of a less polarised and more nuanced discourse on the urban wastelands. Only then can the existence of the urban void as a category of left-over space be questioned. This thesis concludes by opening up for future inquiry of what kind of city could become from a point of view where the urban wasteland is just another kind of space.

Un-voiding the void – deconstruction

But is this not just a world of words, someone might ask. Of voids and "voids"? What does it matter to the city I live in, if a 'void' is a void or not? One answer would be that the dominating notions of "the city I live in", and the spaces and places that make it, form our everyday lives in that self-same city. And that happens, as earlier noted, through the attempts at taming space that our manner of envisioning it implies (cf. Massey 2005:152). The ways in which space is imagined are political, but often left unthought. Massey illustrates with an example: "The imagination of space as a surface on which we are placed, the turning of space into time […] are […] ways of taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world presents. […] Those who argue that Mocambique is just 'behind', do not (presumably) do so as a consequence of much deep pondering upon the nature of, and the relationship between, space and time. Their conceptualisation of space, its reduction to a dimension for the display/representation of different moments in time, is one assumes, implicit." (Massey 2005:7). It is the overall task of research, I believe, to question what is assumed. And as Massey goes on to argue: "Produced through and embedded in practices, from quotidian negotiations to global strategizing, these implicit engagements of space feed back into and sustain wider understandings of the world. The trajectories of others can be deflected by their relegation to a past (backward, old fashioned, archaic)" (ibid:8).

The disarticulation of such taken-for-granteds, the questioning of prevailing discursive constructions of the 'urban void' and the City, and the creation of new discourses, is a strategy to challenge power relations in the City (cf. Mouffe 2005a:33). The City, here with a capital "C", refers to the city as an idea (in the 'West'), while the city, with a lowercase "c", refers to any concrete city in which we live. Of course, the one is an element of the other and vice versa.



The space between two houses
in Athens, Greece.

Both of these, the City and the city, are "at the same time an actually existing physical environment, and a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart, and so on" (Burgin 1996:28). In the same vein, the urban void is of bricks and mortar (or the lack thereof) *and* of words, and between these there are productive transactions that make up the City/city. Such compilation, representation, and imagination of the urban fabric blur the epistemological and ontological distinctions between the physical and the abstract, and by doing so produce the imagined City/city where we live (Donald 1999:10). This is the reason why the investigation taking place on the pages of this book, as we shall see, constantly moves between different levels of abstraction and various materialities, between the physical and the abstract, yet throughout remains a focus on the deconstruction of the urban void. A Derridean reading of the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of urban space has inspired the formulation of the problem as well as the way of approaching it. In the following, a deconstruction-inspired analysis is introduced as a way (as *the* way of the present thesis) of analysing the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of space. But first, by way of arriving there, a brief example of how language structures our understanding of the urban void and its relation to the City.

The in-between

Language structures our perception of the world. With the help of descriptions and categories we form ways to grasp our surroundings; the City and the urban void are no exception. *Words* help us navigate in the city (in a concrete as well as an abstract sense), as they are a category of thought and experience (Donald 1999:181). Consider e.g. the dichotomies urban/rural, culture/nature, and center/periphery. They are examples of the dualisms that dominate Western knowledge and, as such, also contribute to shaping a common understanding of what a city is, and what it is

not (cf. Grosz 2001:93). The City is urban (not rural), the City is culture (not nature), and the City is center (not periphery). This oppositional structure of knowledge is a form of dualisation of reality that distributes power relations at an epistemological level, and what has defined phallocentrism as well as ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism (ibid.). It marks difference between these opposed terms and orders them hierarchically, so that one is privileged over the other (cf. S. Hall 1997:230). The *other* then, does not exist independently of the sovereign subject who always defines the *other* as what it itself is not (Grosz 2001:94).

The division between the urban and the non-urban has, for example, been expressed in different ways throughout history. The city walls constituted a strong visual manifestation, and were constructed in the Middle Ages to provide security and protection for the people inside, those with citizenship, who enjoyed privileges not available to the rural inhabitants (a society characterised by a much more hierarchical social structure) (Badersten 2002:167). The construction of city walls has become a less common element in urban planning, but immaterial city walls are still in place. The urban and the non-urban still stand in stark contrast to each other.

And now, in a dominating discourse on Western European cities, the mere term 'urban' has come to be used as a figurative measure of the density of cities and stands out as a desirable quality, while 'suburban' equals the opposite of compact (i.e. sprawl) and something that must be fought (cf. Tunström 2009). An example of the desire for high measures of urban density is manifested in numerous Swedish municipal comprehensive plans embodying different variations on the motto of 'building the city inwards' – to become more compact (see e.g. Stockholm 1999; Västerås stad 2012; Malmö 2014). The urban void by its mere appearance (waste-land like, seemingly empty

lots, brushwood growing wild) disturbes the distinction urban/non-urban. It is an inversion of what is conceived as urban, *within* the urban environment, and as such, it incorporates the non-urban into the urban. The urban voids are spatial fragments of non-urbanity in the city, an *outside within*.



A meadow in central Berlin, Germany. This place once was a part of the death strip – forming a part of the Berlin Wall.

Conceptual pairs such as urban/non-urban (or urban/rural) are distinctions that contribute to forming the mere idea of what a city is; thus, they might be understood as constituting the City. By its mere existence as undefined, the urban void blurs such well-known and distinct dividing lines and thereby destabilises that oppositional structure. It challenges established notions of fixed boundaries, not only by its geography, but also by constituting a borderland between nature and culture, public and private, and between the past, the present and the future (Saltzman 2009a:9;

Nielsen 2001:6). In regards to these dichotomies, the urban void becomes a sort of 'in-between'.

> The in-between is that which does not have boundaries in or of itself, but which instead has its boundaries from what it is between. As such, it does not exist as a defined space in the positive, but only as disorder (Sand 2008:94). This in-betweenness is not only abstract, however, but also concrete as the in-betweenness of the urban void could be said to refer to the fact of being surrounded by other spaces that are either more institutionalised, and therefore powerful in an economic and legal sense, or conferred with a stronger identity, and therefore more recognisable and typical (Brighenti 2013:xvi). At the same time, the presence of the urban void highlights these distinctions. The in-between has no full meaning of its own, but instead marks the difference from that which surrounds it (cf. Derrida 1981:221). By virtue of that position, it is the very site for the contestation of the many binaries of Western thought (Grosz 2001:93). As an in-between, the urban void comes forward as a spatial either/or, neither this, nor that. In this sense, speaking with Derrida, it could be understood as an 'undecidable'.

The undecidable

The undecidable – or "hymen", "pharmakon", "supplement", or "différance" in Derrida's words – marks what cannot be defined within a world of dualisms (cf. Derrida 1981:221). That is, the undecidables are the words/moments that mark what cannot be mastered, what is in between the dualisms, the either/or. As the following chapters will show, the urban void is produced as the constitutive outside of the City, yet at the same time, it is the timespace of the City that unsettles the very ways in which the dominant notions of the City are set up. Take e.g. the construction of the urban void as 'un-planned': the urban void becomes un-planned in relation to that which is conceived as well-defined

and according to plan, in a conception of the City as an entity that is possible to plan fully. In that context, the urban void marks the undecidable limit as it is *simultaneously* what confirms such notion of the City – being the 'un-planned' that contrasts the planned and makes it appear as such – and what renders the fully planned entity impossible by appearing in the City as 'un-planned'. With this, the mind-bending formulation of how the undecidables "admit into their games both contradiction and noncontradiction (and the contradiction and noncontradiction *between* contradiction and noncontradiction)" becomes reasonable (Derrida 1981:221).

In the context of the present thesis, the notion of the undecidable is helpful in that it provides a figure of thought to *think with*, to hinge the analysis with a particular way of understanding how dominant discourses on the City and conceptualisations of the urban void interact to determine each other. In what follows, the concepts in question are interpreted, activated, and transmuted – a transformation that potentially could go on eternally (and there is for this reason no aim to arrive at a final meaning for the urban void) (Dixon & Jones 2005:244). The inspiration for the analysis is undoubtedly to be found in Derrida's deconstruction in general and the concept of undecidables in particular.

However, and this needs to be underlined, I have no ambition to contribute to Derrida studies as such; neither is this a book *on* Derrida. Derrida's deconstruction is not something that can be simply put to work as an analytical tool, and, as Petter Narby puts it "[t]he style of writing, that is central to retaining tensions and openings [of deconstruction], and the mastery of the tradition of Western philosophy defy replication" (2014:37). What remains is that Derrida's texts have helped me think and to formulate the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of urban space. And out of the many things deconstruction has come to signify, the

following formulation captures well the ambition of the thesis: "One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualisation" (Derrida 1988b:136). In the following chapters, the idea of the undecidable will figure in terms of a 'constitutive outside', as an 'in-between'/'space between', 'pharmakon', or the 'other'.

Derrida's deconstructive approach implies reading against the grain of supposedly self-evident truths, rather than taking them for granted (Eagelton 2004). Furthermore, these 'truths', which may come in the form of structuring the world as we know it in dualisms such as form/content, full/empty, self/other, etc., are not innocent. Derrida states that "[o]nce there is the exercise of force in the determination and the imposition of meaning, and first of all in the stabilizing determination of a context, it is inevitable that there be some form of repression" (Derrida 1988b:150). Derrida's interest lies within the workings of these forces of signification, in "relations of force [...] in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to this word, which also includes political action and experience in general)" (Derrida 1988b:148). This points to how deconstruction is not a simple play on words (even if there is a certain amount of *play* in the structure... (Derrida [1978] 2001:352, cf. Narby 2014:34), or in any other ways apolitical,[2] but instead is acutely political. That the works of Derrida are conceived of as apolitical is a result of a certain freezing of politics, argues Elizabeth Grosz (2005:58). It is a conception of politics that constrains it to well-known or predetermined forms – the very forms whose stability is contestable through deconstruction (ibid.). What makes his work political, maintains Grosz, is "his readiness to accept that no political protocol, no rhetorical or intellectual

2. So has been argued by e.g. Benhabib (1995); Fraser (1984; 1997); Nicholson (1990); (cf. Grosz 2005).

ploy is simply innocent, motivated by reason, knowledge, or truth alone, but carries with it an inherent undecidability, an inherent [...] repeatability that recontextualizes it and frees it from any specifiable or definitive origin or end" (Grosz 2005:59).

It is in such a political context that the deconstruction inspired analysis of this thesis is positioned. It questions the urban void as a 'void' and hopes to refute the forces that make contested spaces such as the urban void seem 'empty'.

Editing a montage

"A text is not the repository of knowledges and truths, the site for the storage of information [...], so much as it is a process of scattering thought; scrambling terms, concepts, and practices; forging linkages; becoming a form of action", writes Grosz (2001:57). And thus has been the ideal for the present text – to reveal the process that this research on it implies. It does not present a "truer" version of the urban void, but aims to shake up the dominant modes of conceptualising the phenomenon. And as this thesis argues for the maintenance of a critical attitude towards conceptualisation of space, this "shaking up" has not been random. Instead the present text and the form and shape that it produces have been important to the content it represents: The writing of the text as such is understood as a kind of production of space. To take an example from another century, where the representatives of the Chicago School analysed urban issues characterised by a perspective of urban change as something that followed predictable and predetermined patterns, they aimed to present "a unified body of reliable knowledge" (Wirth 1938:24). In this thesis then, which instead works with a conceptualisation of space as relational, as the sphere of the possibility of multiplicity, and as never finished (cf. Massey 1999), I have sought to present in a form that accords with that. This is a form that does not unfold

with any horizontal linearity in the argumentation, where c) follows from a) and b), nor does it present a "unified body" of knowledge. On the contrary, it juxtaposes a plurality of arguments and perspectives so that the relations between these parts also form an argument, a meta argument of multiplicity and becoming.

To capture the becoming of the urban void, the deconstruction-inspired analysis taking place between the covers of this book is made like a montage: I have engaged a variety of texts – whether in the form of what one might call 'theory', or 'empirical material', or a TV-series, or a novel – and the thoughts provoked by working with those texts, into a montage. I have done fieldwork, conducted interviews, analysed policies and plans, and read academic literature from a range of different fields, all of which have produced material to be included in the study. It is a method of "putting together a variety of disparate references from diverse texts or genres of expression" as Shapiro puts it (2013:31). Here, what Jacques Rancière refers to as 'indisciplinary thought' is an important reference. The process of putting together a montage is a way of escaping the division of disciplines, which Rancière understands as a distribution of territories, and a way to control "who is qualified to speak about what" (Rancière 2008:3). The editing of a montage understood as such is hence more than a mere methodological tool or a way of writing; it politicises the way of doing the analysis by engaging a variety of perspectives and material in different forms that transgress disciplinary boundaries. They are references deemed relevant in this present context, contributing to the investigation of the becoming of the urban void as a an*other* kind of urban space, and making heard a discourse where earlier has been heard merely noise (cf. Rancière 1999). As the different texts of the montage present a plurality of voices that together become this very montage on the urban void – the editing as such suggests *another* way of conceptualising the urban void.

Grosz' words have been ringing in my head throughout the process: "Like concepts, texts are the products of the intermingling of old and new, a complexity of internal coherences or consistencies and external referents, of intention and extension, of thresholds and becomings. Texts, like concepts, do things, make things, perform connections, bring about new alignments" (2001:57). To deconstruct the urban void is to dismount hegemonic conceptualisations of the phenomenon and, in so doing, to indicate at another way of understanding it. This implies that the present text needs to bring about new alignments and requires me to unite a variety of elements that hegemonic discourses have separated (cf. Didi-Huberman 2015:26). Sometimes a cross-cutting of this kind can result in rather abrupt shifts between seemingly disparate contexts, as now, when this happens:

"How beautiful a London street is then, with its islands of light, and its long groves of darkness, and on one side of it perhaps some tree-sprinkled, grass-grown space where night is folding herself to sleep naturally and, as one passes the iron railing, one hears those little cracklings and stirrings of leaf and twig which seem to suppose the silence of fields all round them, an owl hooting, and far away the rattle of a train in the valley" (Woolf [1930] 2015).

Next to an island of light, a long grove of darkness, in Virginia Woolf's essay "Street haunting. A London adventure" where the "grass-grown space where night is folding herself to sleep naturally". A sentence in which one finds contrasts between opposites (light/darkness, iron railing/leaf and twig) and maybe, maybe, an urban void (the whole scene in the quote). Here, it illustrates what the montage is built of: contrasts between opposites and urban voids. It is the contrasts and differences that make things visible and give them their critical power in the production of knowledge, writes Georges Didi-Huberman on the montage

technique (2015:26). The montage provides a way of including them (the contrasts and differences) in the text, and if not always articulated – as the spaces between.

Furthermore, as the urban void is manifested in different ways, this putting together enables the text to cross-cut between a variety of those manifestations. The urban void is not simply a physical space, but a phenomenon, an idea (cf. Brighenti 2013:xviii). As an idea, in turn, it is a kind of in-between that oscillates between contradictory significations of gaps, breaks and ruptures on the one hand and links and relations on the other hand (Levesque 2013:24). This not only connects it with the phenomenon of the undecidable (as discussed above), but also underlines the impossibility of capturing, in a single story framework, the fleeting phenomenon of urban void (cf. Derrida 1981). The ambition with this montage has been to make it possible to read the urban void as a prism – a transparent object that enables the light that passes through it to be refracted and display different colours on its other side.

In setting out to edit a montage, Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* (*The Arcades Project*) is an oeuvre one cannot overlook as a reference. (Of course, Benjamin was and is not alone in creating a montage. As Didi-Huberman points out in his montage on among other things the montage in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *La rabbia*, the documentary montage has a long history, whether in film, photography, philosophy, or in visual and poetic history (2015:49).) And it would be a shame to ignore Benjamin's truly inspiring montage. Yet, as needs to be spelled out, there is no ambition here to accomplish a montage that does to the urban void what Benjamin's project did as regards Paris and its passages. And apropos a conceptualisation of space as unfinished (and with a view to ensuring that the form of the text corresponds with a Masseyan conceptualisation

of space), Susan Buck-Morss maintains that there is no *Passagen-Werk*, but a volume of texts in Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften* that bears an abundance of traces of an intended work without being one (1989:47). Irrespective of whether it exists or not, it leads Buck-Morss to state that "[w]e are in a real sense confronting a void" (ibid.), referring to the *Passagen-Werk* in its entirety, which can be taken as a cue to a text on the urban void. Just as the *Passagen-Werk* operates on a level of spatiality, as Teresa Stoppani suggests (2007:545) – e.g. by the way in which fragments form/leave spaces in-between that could be interpreted as a dimension of the passages (like urban spaces between) – I hope that this book will do so as well. The montage is a form in which inconsistencies among different parts do not need to be corrected, or edited away, but where instead the incoherent and the heterogeneous remain qualities – as such, it illustrates the ambiguous urban void. And Benjamin wrote: "But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them" (*AP* N1a,8[3]).

An essay, an attempt

This way of studying the urban void, by editing a montage where the rags and the refuse are put to use, calls for a way of writing that is not simply a matter of reporting what has been explained by the inquiry (cf. Shapiro 2013:25). Writing is here used as a *method* for discovery and analysis (S. Johansson 2013:82). This, according to Shapiro, is a matter of thinking through writing rather than presenting information (2013:25). This fashion of writing is not assertive, but tentative and searching. It is a way of doing research that presents itself as an *essay* – here in terms of "an attempt at…" or "to try" – in the sense that it does not aim to present any particular truer version of the urban void. This does not stem from modesty or a lack of confidence in the project, but refers to a way of conceiving the present project as

3. *AP*=*The Arcades Project*, as regards which it is comme il faut to refer not to page numbers (as the book is merely a collection of un-ordered fragments) but to its coded sections.

an *open* and *unfinished* investigation (which is a way in which a genre characteristic of the essay may be framed) (cf. Melberg 2013:11). Open, in the sense that it is not pre-determined at the outset how it is going to end or what kinds of conclusions it will be possible to draw; unfinished, in the sense that it acknowledges that the undecidable is not a moment to be traversed or overcome, and that the becoming of the urban void is as such not a problem to be solved (cf. Mouffe 2005b:10)

This is an attitude towards the project that echoes Derrida when he states that "I am trying, precisely, to put myself at a point so that I do not know any longer where I am going" (Derrida 1970:267). If it was possible, already at the start, to account for the research process from the beginning to end, would that not mean that the research covers something that is already known, and in that sense would be "information" rather than "research"? (A. Johansson 2013:36). Or a matter of "reporting"? (Shapiro 2013:25). Hence, I wish for this beginning to be that Derridean point, where all possibilities are open, a point from where something new opens up (A. Johansson 2013:40). Then, as this book undoubtedly needs eventually to come to an end and to be sent to print – how is it that it will be *unfinished*? This is a way of emphasising that it is the process that constitutes the result, while the process in turn is the "thinking through writing", that permeates both the text, from the first chapter to the last, and the editing of the montage (cf. Melberg 2013:12). Furthermore, there is no aim to nail down a final definition of the urban void, neither in the beginning (to provide a common starting ground), nor in the end (as a conclusion). Writing, in a broad sense, and as understood with Derrida, is the attempt to close down, to fix a meaning, which is always marred by the failure to do just that, i.e. the impossibility of finally determining anything, yet it is the condition of possibility for writing (Narby 2014:36). This impossible possibility will always leave the investigation unfinished.



And it matters less in the end whether this text may be considered an essay or not, as this argument has less to do with literary genres than with the question of what it is to do research and how it is done. Discussions about what the essay is have inspired me in elaborating those issues. The following quote thus concludes this section: "Composing experimentally, pushing an object of study here and there, interrogating, prodding, examining, thoroughly reflecting on it, tackling subject matter from different sides and gathering what is seen in mental purview and giving name to what the subject matter makes visible under the conditions produced by writing: That is essay writing" (Bense 2012 [1947]:71f).

The southwestern side of Ödetomten, an urban void in Malmö, Sweden, which will be introduced in chapter 3.

Perceived, conceived, lived – approaching the urban void

The montage is organised as a cross-cutting between notions of the City on the one hand and of the urban void at the other hand. But how is the task of editing the montage approached in a concrete, more practical, sense? That is, what is it that *I have done* when I have carried out the investigation of the urban void as an*other* kind of space? Here, Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and the three elements from which he derives it – perceived, conceived and lived – are used as frames to discuss the various kinds of material produced and used in the study (Lefebvre 1991). The conceptual triad provides a view on space that admits into the game both the concrete experience of the urban void (standing at the site doing fieldwork) and its abstract representations of absence/lack of different conceptions of the City. With the conviction that space is a social, political, and material phenomenon, the investigation of the urban void needs to be undertaken in different ways – with different approaches. Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity, and as such, it must be understood in the multitude – as geographical, sociological, political, commercial, urban and national (Massey 1999:28; Lefebvre 1991; cf. Pettersson 2015:116). The triad enables us to understand the struggle over the definition of a certain space, to interpret the conflicting ideals prevailing in the process that constitute that certain space. Together with the conceptualisations of space that the three elements provide, which makes the abstract production of space graspable, the triad has been helpful in the work of reading the production of the urban void: to see the lines of conflict actively producing the urban void.

The triad as such underlines that no single method of generating material alone is enough to capture the urban void. And also, as an understanding of space as a social construct, a process, and of

materia, all at the same time, make up a bundle of entry points to the urban void, the triad has been a way of sorting them analytically (cf. Massey 1999). Before further introducing the conceptual triad, however, "the City" – referring to a phenomenon that has attracted many in trying to define it but here so far has only been called by its name without any discussion – calls for attention. Obviously, the study of the urban void, as the constitutive outside of the dominant notion of the City, needs to be approached through and with the City.

But what, then, is the City?, to speak with Lewis Mumford (1989 [1961]:3). The City, written with a capital C refers, as earlier mentioned, to the city as an idea. It is an idea generated from existing cities, of concrete, traffic lights and parks, but also from the cities of films, novels, and television. Furthermore it is an idea made of academic literature on urban planning and urban theory. In other words, it is a discursive (in a broad sense) conception of the phenomenon. Yet, this is not very precise and the question "what is the city?" still demands an answer. Mumford himself was quick to reply: "No single definition will apply to all its manifestations and no single description will cover all its transformations […]. The origins of the city are obscure, a large part of its past buried or effaced beyond recovery, and its further prospects are difficult to weigh" (ibid.). It is simply not possible to do so either, whether conceiving or explaining the City, in a single definition (Stevenson 2013:7), nor is that an ambition of this thesis. It does not provide a clearly defined Weberian ideal type of the City against which the urban void is projected. Rather, different ways of understanding the City will be discussed and presented and made into arguments in relation to the urban void. In contrast, then, to presenting, in this introductory chapter, a conceptualisation of the City that will be put to work in the subsequent chapters, e.g. as a form of analytical framework later applied in an analysis, in this book

discourses on the City will instead be crafted throughout the text. That is, notions of the City will be read, written, and argued to be dominant, in direct proximity to the analysis of the urban void, and are, as a result, scattered throughout all chapters.

As indicated above, the City and the urban void are concretely approached below with the help of Lefebvre's spatial triad. This conceptual entity of three elements – perceived, conceived and lived – should however not be understood as reflecting different kinds of actual, concrete spaces; it functions merely as an analytical tool. And, writes Lefebvre, this is a distinction that must be handled with considerable caution (Lefebvre 1991:42). That is, the three elements are not to be found "out there" as separate entities. Furthermore, the three elements do not always, or necessarily, form a coherent whole. Lefebvre assumes that they only do so in a case where a common language or consensus is established, and writes about such a possible moment as something desirable that will appear only under "favourable circumstances", which is problematic in a post-structural reading since stability is but provisional, and the undecidable not something to be overcome (Lefebvre 1991:40; Mouffe 2005b:10). However, as Lefebvre also states (1991:46), relations between the three elements are never either simple or stable. And this might be how he should be understood in a post-structural context, not so much by a denigration of structuralism but by opening up to the complexity of the urban and spatiality (Kataoka 2009:76). I read the disconcordance arising from the different ways space is represented and produced through the three elements – the friction – as what infuses hope in the process of spatial production: I read it as the possibility for things to be otherwise.

The three elements have informed my way of generating material for the montage, as a kind of checklist to ensure the inclusion of a variety

of perspectives, and it is as such the triad will be discussed in the following. It should be noted however, that even if it has been suggested that the meaning of the three elements of the triad become clear only in light of the overall context of Lefebvre's theory on the production of space, and can be reconstructed only out of Lefebvre's entire work, I have chosen to use them in a pragmatic way (cf. Schmid 2008:29). They have provided me with a means of structuring the manifold ways in which space is manifested, as discussed above, during the process of deciding what material to include in the study. My material consist of interviews, policy documents and plans, maps, observations, academic literature, TV-series, poetry, and they all provide different kinds of insights into, and information about, the urban void, which I have organised with the three elements. The triad is not, however, put to work in the analysis, in a narrow sense of the word – as I have not applied it in the process of deconstructing the urban void. In a broad sense of 'analysis' however, the production of the material cannot be separated from the work where/when arguments are formed: conversely, they are inherent parts of the same process. Hence, it is not employed in the deconstruction-inspired analysis, as that would create metatheoretical problems in trying to marry Lefebvre's dialectics with a Derridean notion of the undecidable. The latter marks what cannot be included "within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and dis-organizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics" (Derrida 1987:42). In the following then, the three elements are employed so as to frame the various kinds of material included in the study.

Perceived

To elaborate the *perceived* element of space – the concrete and materialised aspects, and not least the (bodily) experience, of space – I have made observations in Athens (Greece), Berlin

(Germany), Brasilìa (Brazil), Malmö, and Stockholm (Sweden). It presupposes the use of the body, notes Lefebvre (1991:40), and explains that the relationship to space "of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or a society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa" (ibid.). This relationship is certainly conditioned, since not only 'space' but also 'body' is psychically, socially, sexually and discursively and representationally produced (cf. Grosz 2002:297). If one is not a (male/neutral) subject moving around the city, like e.g. Henri Lefebvre, but one who moves with *another* body it evidently does something to the study. With Donna Haraway, I would argue for the view from a body, that is "always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body", rather than "the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (1988:589). In other words, any knowledge of the urban void and the City is always situated (Haraway 1988). "Spatial boundaries become psychologically coded barriers: walls, gates, one-way and dead-end streets, decaying buildings, parts of the city where 'you' (normative subject) 'don't go'" (Bingaman et al. 2002:4). Hence, an elaboration of the perceived element must consider "the ways [...] bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto their sociocultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interests of the body" (Grosz 2002:297). That is, there is no ambition to pretend that my own bodily experience of and influence on the study of the urban void does not matter: instead it will, where it matters for the argument, be included.

The study of urban voids, in terms of perceived space, takes into account the moments and memories of street-life, the corners, and the hidden spaces behind (Cupers & Miessen 2002:49). I have been looking for rather little things that reveal stories about its use – litter, art, tents, or skate bowls – as well as people and what they do at these sites. I have also been attentive to the rhythm when making observations: the urban void is not only *seen*, it is also *felt*,

since both the pace of the place and its surroundings constitute it, as do any objects. Rhythms define urban space just as much as its built structures (LaBelle 2008:192). Spaces and places thus posses distinctive characteristics according to the rhythm that produce a particular temporal mixity of events (Edensor 2010:69). And as Lefebvre states, "everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm". To perceive the rhythm of an urban void, one must leave one's armchair and get out into the city, just as one must, in order to find the remnants that reveal the dealing with stolen copper or to meet the people that spend time here/there.

Conceived

How space is *conceived* concerns space as signs and language, and how space is being represented in thought and portrayed in pictures and written documents (Lefebvre 1991:38; cf. Olsson 2008:59). It could be thought of as "[i]ntellectual conceptions of urban areas, produced for analytical and administrative purposes" (Healey 2007:204). Thus, it is urban space as it is being formulated in terms of rhetoric, as a way of expressing or envisioning a desired space, or as place making and the branding of space. It is an element that emerges at the level of discourse, and comprises descriptions and definitions and theories of space (Schmid 2008:37). The disciplines specialised in dealing with the production of these representations are architecture, planning and the social sciences (ibid.). Clues are found in municipalities', or the private actors', visionary documents and plans, and are in other words the space of an authorised 'place-making' process.

I have searched for insights into this element by studying planning documents (texts, as well as plans and maps) and other documents (e.g. municipal applications to the enforcement service seeking the execution of evictions of people living at certain

urban voids, or policy documents promoting the use of urban voids) but also by interviewing planners and private developers. It has furthermore included reading scholarly work on/in planning theory and urban theory. These documents represent the actors that have the upper hand in the production of urban space, and thus have the possibility, in law, to define urban space. As such, they have a crucial role in tracing the dominant space of society, understood here as the hegemonic discourses that make up the City.

Lived

The *lived* dimension of Lefebvre's spatial triad deals with how space is experienced, and manifests itself through descriptions of space, and the ways through which it is given meaning e.g. through expressions and categorisation. "This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre 1991:39). The element is conveyed in cultural expressions of place qualities (Healey 2007:204). It is the symbolic dimension of space and does not refer to the spaces themselves, as Schmid puts it, but to something else: it refers to the part of the production of space through the process of signification that links itself to a (material) symbol (Schmid 2008:37). And it concerns how we conceive of the city's spaces through a certain set of categories, e.g dualisms such as planned/un-planned, nature/culture, public/private.

The material discussed in relation to both previous elements (*perceived* and *conceived*) has provided me with clues on how the urban void is conceptualised as *lived* space. *Lived* space overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects (Lefebvre 1991:39). So this has also included the reading of discourses on the urban void, although there is no coherent literature or field covering it. I have searched for and included in my reading a variety of texts

on the phenomenon. The texts in which the discourses on urban voids prevail stem from different disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, architecture, urban theory, and artistic research, but also occur in subcultural literature on e.g. urban exploration, and contribute with different symbolic versions of the phenomenon. For example, some of the urban exploration literature conveys a view on the urban void as 'virgin soil', which in a post colonial context renders insights to the production of the urban void as an*other* kind of space (cf. Mott & Roberts 2013:10). Another example would be how the counting of different species found at an urban void contributes to a paradoxical notion of how the urban void brings the rural into the urban and thereby disorganises the dichotomy of urban/rural (cf. e.g. Foster 2014). Even if the kinds of spaces discussed in the texts are not always termed 'urban voids', they are framed in a similar way – as urban wastelands, temporarily out of (authorised) use.

Illustrated

The different methods of producing material – conducting observations and interviews, analysing planning documents as well as scholarly texts, reading novels, and closely watching a number of episodes of a TV-series – have provided me with different perspectives on the urban void. In the thesis, these are included/presented either in the form of abstract (in the sense of theoretical) arguments or as concrete (in the sense of empirical) illustrations. These are woven together in the following chapters. The illustrations are: a policy concerning the use of urban voids in Berlin, Germany, a manifest urban void in Malmö, Sweden, the evictions of people living at urban voids in Stockholm, Sweden, and a fictional urban void in fictional Baltimore, US, in the HBO TV-series *The Wire*;,the thoughts on modernist planning that came out of two weeks of walking in Brasília, Brazil, and a park in Athens, Greece, which may or may not be an urban void.

The illustrations referred to are the elements of the montage that present examples from urban voids. Another way of framing these parts could be as 'empirical material'. However, a distinction between empirical material and other kinds (what, then is 'non-empirical material', e.g. 'theory') is not relevant here (cf. Derrida 1997:158). The illustrations are written with the help of a variety of materials. Some of the subjects in the illustrations are hence 'aesthetic subjects', characters in texts (in a broad sense) "whose movements and actions (both purposive and non-purposive) map politically relevant terrain" (Shapiro 2013:xiv). Others are non-fictional and what we might call real, existing in flesh and blood or in broken concrete and weeds. Yet others are conveyed to me through the minds and texts of other scholars. There is an obvious reason why the illustrations include such a wide range of different material: the urban void manifests itself in many different ways.

Outline and argument in brief

This chapter, *Beginnings*, has introduced the urban void as a kind of space that becomes the constitutive outside of dominant notions on the City and has argued that it should be understood, with a relational view on space, as a form of *othering* and as an on-going process of spatial politics. The thesis investigates the differences made between the well-defined kind of urban spaces and the *other* kind of space, and the way in which the study is carried out, as a deconstruction-inspired analysis in the form of a montage, has been discussed above.

Writing the void (chapter 2), problematises the written representations of the urban void and asks what it implies to want to describe the ambiguous that characterises the indeterminate urban void. The argument is that language is key to understanding the becoming of the urban void as an*other* and, therefore, that the

wording of any investigation of the urban void is critical and also contributes to the production of the phenomenon. The chapter examines other scholars' texts on the urban void, and the like, as well as my own attempts at writing the void without voiding it. By way of discussing writing as a form of violence, and with the help of the Derridean notion of *pharmakon* (one of the undecidables), it arrives at the humble conclusion that it is impossible to write the ambiguous with a language built on binaries, yet at the same time it is what *makes* it – as it is in-between the dualisms that the ambivalent comes into existence.

With a focus on the spatial dimension of the production of the urban void, *The space between* (chapter 3), shows how the undecidable limit of dominant notions of the City can be seen as located within the urban void. It does so by exploring a number of examples of the urban void with the City understood as a) dominated by ideas of planning, conceived as a rational enterprise and with great influence on a notion of the Western City and thereby its spatial politics, and b) a 'growth machine', another conception of the City where the spatial politics is all about winning the competition in a market where it competes with other cities over investments and affluent citizens. Four illustrations, namely Ödetomten in Malmö (Sweden), Hamsterdam in the TV-series *the Wire*, evictions of homeless people from urban voids in Stockholm (Sweden), and a municipal policy in Berlin (Germany) promoting the use of urban voids, show how the urban void becomes an either/or in relation to the paradigms just mentioned. They show how the urban void as an*other* kind of space can provide space in the City for exceptions from the rule. In the case of *The Wire*'s (fictional) Baltimore, the voiding of Hamsterdam enables a provisional legalisation of drugs, and in Berlin, the illegal use of urban wastelands is made temporarily legal. In the case of evictions however, it instead reveals a paradoxical need for the City to preserve the undefinedness of the urban void, to order and maintain the un-ordered as such.

In *A moment of indeterminacy* (chapter 4) the focus shifts to that of the time and tempo of the City and the urban void. Through the ideas of waiting and of rhythm and the City, and the phrase "time is money", the chapter explores the beat of the urban void. It returns to Ödetomten and Hamsterdam as illustrations and with their help generates further insights into the coming and going of the urban void in the urban fabric. The chapter shows how paying attention to the temporal ordering of the urban fabric and the urban void reveals the void as a break, not only in the sense of being a rupture in-between valid legal definitions of a place and/or between plans, but also how it breaks up the predicament of its own exclusion. The urban void as such proves to be the phenomenon that makes possible any change in the city and that puts the city in motion, as it provides the particular time and space for a new definition, building or other construction to come in place.

In the last chapter (5), *Endings*, it is argued that there is no end to the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of space, as no meaning of it will ever be fixed – it is just a provisional stabilisation of something essentially unstable. However, this temporary closing of the urban wasteland as an urban void is a product of interrelations, which have been shown in the preceding chapters, between the City and the void, where the latter is understood as the constitutive outside of the former. And as the outside is constitutive, it precludes just that, an exclusion of the outside, as it is impossible to draw an absolute distinction between interior and exterior. Such a perspective underlines a notion of the urban void as inherent to the City, an argument that is reinforced by the fact that there have been urban voids, black holes in the urban fabric, as long as the City has been conceived as a whole. An example of an urban void in Athens, which is not really an urban void (or is it?), is used to illustrate and to leave no doubt that there is no essential core to the urban void. Further, and by way of tracing a narrative of

urban exploration, a pastime and subculture of recreational trespassing derelict and/or hidden urban places, finding its roots in earlier explorer narratives, the chapter shows how this kind of urban space is, and has been, exoticised as a mesmerising *terra nullius*. This should be understood in contrast to the practice of neglect that a perception of the urban void as empty, and a *tabula rasa*, is illustrative of. Yet, they are both practices that impose a difference between the well-defined kind of urban void and the *other*, urban void. There is reason to ask, in the end, what good comes out of the use of this left-over category of space. The thesis thus does not close with a conclusion, but by opening up for further elaboration on the urban void.



A seemingly derelict motorway in Årsta, Stockholm, Sweden. Among other things, it has been used for Sunday strolls and morning runs, drag racing, and the neighbourhood's kids learning how to ride a bike. It is furthermore well exploited as a filming location, as it has been the place for the shooting of scenes in commercials, music videos, films and TV-series.

2 Writing the void

> Filling in the blanks replaces the truth that we don't entirely know with the false sense that we do.
>
> (Solnit 2014:88)

"There is so much we don't know, and to write truthfully about a life, your own or your mother's or a celebrated figure's, an event, a crisis, another culture is to engage repeatedly with those patches of darkness, those nights of history, those places of unknowing. They tell us that there are limits to knowledge, that there are essential mysteries, starting with the notion that we know just what someone thought or felt in the absence of exact information" (Solnit 2014:87f). The urban void, as a phenomenon in flux, defined by being undefined, tells us indeed, to speak with Rebecca Solnit in her essay "Woolf's Darkness: Embracing the Inexplicable" (2014), that there are limits to knowledge. It is one of those places of unknowing, yet, not more of a patch of darkness than any other phenomenon one could write about. There is so much we don't know.

Denoting the urban wasteland

The indeterminacy of the urban void reflects back at its name, perhaps one should write names, in the plural, because they are many: 'Wasteland', 'residual space', 'derelict areas', 'no man's land', 'dead Zones', 'terrain vague', 'a permanent provisional state', urban 'space between', urban 'voids', 'disused space', 'no-places' (Doron 2000; Wikström 2005; Cupers & Miessen 2002; de Solà-Morales 1995; Olshammar 2002; Sand 2008; Bishop & Williams 2012, Wilson 2002). These terms are collected from various scholarly texts on the phenomenon. They all contribute to the idea of this kind of space as an*other* kind of space, as different from ordinary urban space. Furthermore, in the way that most of these terms concretely describe these places, they imply that these spaces are empty and out of use. Almost without exception the phenomenon is denoted with a term that carries a negative connotation (Gabriella Olshammar's (2002) 'a permanent provisional state' is one rare exception). Yet, most works also describe this kind of urban space as bearing a (positive) potential in some way or other. There is thus more than one inconsistency here. One is the friction between how the phenomenon is described, in the texts referred to above, on the one hand and termed on the other. Another is that the urban 'void' and other terms connote emptiness and a lack, while the concrete urban wastelands are seldom conceived as such by passers-by. These inconsistencies are, however, rarely discussed in the texts. I would argue that this in itself reflects an ambiguity that characterises the urban void, as place as well as concept. Just as fleeting in terms of *what is this place for?* as it might appear when you pass an empty lot somewhere in the city, just as elusive of a concept is it to those of us who try to investigate this kind of space, investigate the idea as well as the concrete space.

The urban void is featured as fleeting in a concrete as well as an abstract sense, in relation to what appears as stable and ordered. That it is in flux and not easily captured with any straightforward

definition renders it indeterminate. Or, in other words, the "un-definedness" of the urban void is disorder. As such, the undefined urban space sheds light on the relationship between definition, order, place and power. The act of defining something is to order it, and in the case of the urban void to create a distinction between order and un-order, and it is thus an exercise of power. As order implies restriction, a pattern or structure, un-order is unlimited – and so is its potential for patterning. "This is why", writes Mary Douglas, "though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that is it destructive to existing patterns; also that it has a potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power" (1984 [1966]:95). This is a theme that will reoccur throughout this book, and here, I use Douglas' words to underline that the question of how to write and define the urban wasteland is not merely a matter of curiosity, or a vain interest in words, but a question of power. To name a place, to define it, is to decide on behaviour, on people, activities, and architecture, which are to be proper for that very place. To define is, in other words, a way of taking control (Sand 2008:88).

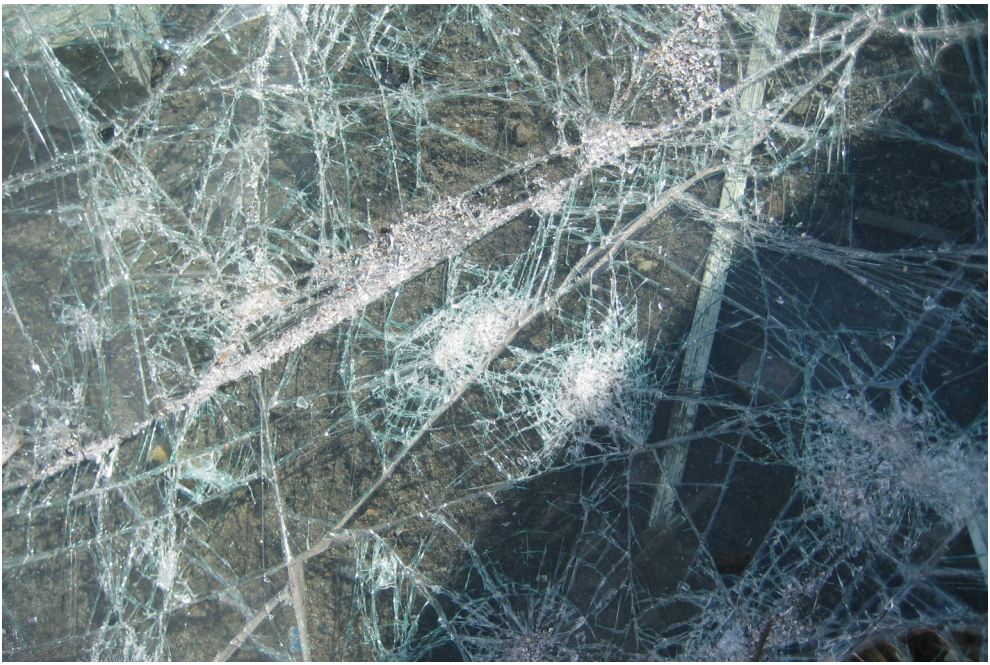
The choice I made to spell out the phenomenon as urban void, was not in any way given, as the "void" in 'urban void' suggests a sort of vast, almost monumental, emptiness which is not (necessarily) there. By way of doing so, it aligns with a perspective on the phenomenon as "empty" and meaningless space in relation to "ordinary" space filled with meaning. I have chosen to do so because there would be nothing to conceive of as an urban void, as something different, vague and indeterminate, if there were not a paradigm where ordered and well-defined space is the norm and what surrounds the urban void and makes it become the *urban void*.

Nevertheless, writing "the urban void" might be problematic not only because it signifies something that is not a void *per se*, but also because the ambition is to shake up the dominant modes of

perceiving the urban void. And those, the dominant modes, are inherently connected with the very use of terms like the urban void. What does it do to the venture if the name (and with that, a hint at a definition) is already present before the start? Any name that one chooses to write invokes a certain kind of space. *What is this place? Is it our 'home'? Is it an 'urban wasteland'?* You want to embrace the inexplicable but find the phenomenon already closed in with a certain meaning. Maybe, it is among the conditions of writing that one cannot write the undefined and the ambiguous, and then what? Does it have to be un-written? In Derrida's view (1988a:5), written communication is representational in character, an imitation of its content. Hence, written language cannot imitate something that is not there and there at the same time. The urban void is an ambiguous phenomenon, it is *this*, and *this*, and (maybe) *that*, yet *either/or*, and it is inevitably the case that few possible terms reveal all those possibilities, while most of them point at only one option of identity. "Sometimes", writes Solnit, "I think these pretenses at authoritative knowledge are failures of language: the language of bold assertion is simpler, less taxing, than the language of nuance and ambiguity and speculation" (2014:88f). If we agree that everything is discourse, then language is what we have to work with (cf. Derrida 2001 [1978]:354).

How then does one write the urban void, this ambiguous kind of space? This chapter problematises the capturing of the void in words, which is an essential perspective and key to understanding the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of space and its political significance, and thus contributes to the overarching aim of the thesis. The 'void', for example, is a *word* chosen to describe the phenomenon, and hence contributes to the production of it as emptiness, nothingness. That in turn, gives prominence to certain experiences and knowledge of the City, at the same time as it neglects others. Just like the following chapters, this is set

up as a montage, performing and displaying the urban void as seen through different facets. The text ponders what it implies to want to write the ambiguous, as well as zooming in on different ways of writing the urban wasteland found within texts on the phenomenon, written by scholars who in different disciplines and in various ways have engaged with the subject.



Found artefact at Ödetomten in Malmö, Sweden: a broken car window.

Defining the undefined

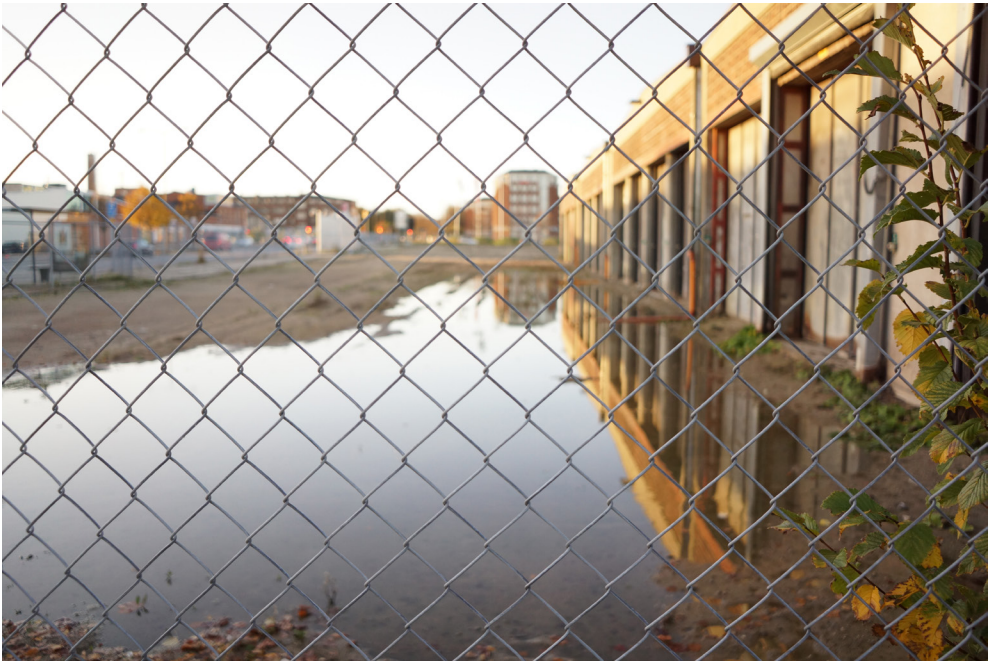
As indicated above, the 'urban void' designates a kind of space that is often recognised by its "undefinedness": it is not designed to fill a certain function (i.e. a function according to plan), and the relationship between use and place thus remains unnamed (Wikström 2007:148; Wilson 2002:260). That is, these places might be either disused or in (temporary) use with an obvious

function, but there is often something at the place that reveals that this is not an authorised use (according to plan). These places often have an air about them of being "forgotten" by the authorities, as they are seldom looked after – grass and brushwood grow freely and litter lies around unattended. If there are any built structures on the site, something about them might signal that they have no building permit: they are temporary in character, or in other ways, not meeting health and/or safety standards, and therefore likely to be unauthorised, e.g. a hut built out of the timber from a pallet, or a DIY[4] skating bowl. Another example is that of ruined buildings that with time and gradual dilapidation have fallen out of use and no longer fulfil the function they once were assigned. Tim Edensor interestingly notes how social order is partly maintained by a predictable distribution of objects in relation to space, things should be 'in place' so to speak (2005b:311f). Ruined industrial sites constitute a break specifically rich in contrast to such order, as factories in their heydays are exemplary spaces in which things are in order: machines are set to work in accordance with the imperatives of production, and tools and other equipment are assigned to particular shelves, lockers, or hooks. Once they become derelict, however, the condition of these objects reveals that without constant maintenance, social, spatial and material order is likely to collapse (Edensor 2005b:313). Whether the urban void houses a ruined factory or a new, illegally built, construction, both are out of order and neither is in authorised use.

It also works the other way around, as property owners or planning authorities may by means of small measures define a vacant place and signal that it is not undefined and open to spontaneous use and appropriation. In a neighbourhood in Malmö, Sweden, where I once lived, a tumbledown house was eventually demolished, and afterwards there remained an empty lot in the corner of a block. Not empty for long, though, as a bright red parking meter

4. Do it yourself (DIY), the method of building, modifying, or repairing something without the aid of experts or professionals.





"Property owners or planning authorities may by means of small measures define a vacant place and signal that it is not undefined and open to spontaneous use and appropriation." Norra Sorgenfri, Malmö, Sweden.

was soon installed there, clearly visible to anyone passing, from whatever direction. It said: *This is a parking lot*. The same effect of discouraging appropriation is achieved by the convention of fencing vacant demolition sites, as the fence both concretely and discursively closes the meaning of the plot.

Apparently, the *undefined* space lacks a name linking use and place – hence there is no way to determine if the people and/or activities taking place at the site are *in* or *out* of place. This is why the undefined space might seem threatening (to one person) but full of potential (to someone else). The definition of normal or rational behaviour at a certain place is made by those with the ability, the power, to create the terms that connect a function with a specific site (Németh 2006:298). As regards the concrete space, this power lies with landowners and/or planners. As regards research on this phenomenon, the power lies in the hands that tap the keybord. The yearning to replace uncertainty with certainty is a force that contributes to the production of the urban void – as an urban space *as well as* a written and thought phenomenon. And even if the focus of this chapter is on the latter, both perspectives need each other, not only as it is a way of making the abstract argument more concrete, and the concrete based in a theoretical perspective and thereby visible as *something* rather than *anything*, but also because they are inherently connected.

The practice of defining the urban 'void' as such, in a concrete sense, is not necessarily something that occurs as an answer to an urban wasteland that has emerged as an unintentional residual of urban development somewhere in the city. In an article on how people make everyday strategies for living together after mass atrocities in a postconflict context, Johanna Mannergren Selimovic writes from a town in eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina: "Here and there in the townscape yawning holes opened up, places where several mosques

used to stand. At the time of fieldwork, only one had been rebuilt. Similarly, there were many houses still in ruins. These sites were 'inverted' commemorations, which served as constant reminders of the ethnic cleansing – physical voids that spoke like negatives, always reminding the inhabitants of what it was they were trying to forget" (2015:238). The urban void can, as in this Bosnian town, be violently inscribed in the urban fabric as a cut – as an act of war. This elimination of buildings or other structures may be understood as a distinct form of political violence with the concept 'urbicide' (Coward 2006:422).

Whether the concept is used in contexts of armed conflicts (see e.g. Graham 2002; Gregory 2003; Coward 2006; Fregonese 2009; Ramadan 2009; Fedman & Karacas 2012) or in terms of other urban conflicts (see e.g. Berman 1987; Watson 2013), it permits the erasure of urban fabric to be conceived not as having been conventional, in terms of collateral damage or as the means used to achieve other ends, but as an act of intentional destruction (Coward 2006:422). Martin Coward defines 'urbicide' as "the destruction of the built environment as the 'substrate' in and through which a specific form of existence is constituted. Urbicide, then, is a term for a form of political violence aimed not at the character of the population, but rather at its material environment: the buildings that constitute the spaces in which any population lives its lives" (Coward 2006:426). The same phenomenon has earlier (before the term 'urbicide' had any wider recognition) been referred to as 'place annihilation' (Hewitt 1983), which brings out even more clearly the connection with a notion of the urban void as a cut, and a scar, in the urban fabric.

Connecting back to the above discussion on the defining of the undefined – here, the example of urban voids in a Bosnian town, the result of urbicide, would then represent the erasure of a past definition without its replacement by a new. It is the inscription of

a void as a scar. Gilles Deleuze writes: "A scar is the sign not of a past wound but of 'the present fact of having been wounded'" (1994:77). It highlights how the force that defines the urban void is a force both of space *and* time, as in the case of urbicide it re-arranges the present by performing a constant (physical) presence of a violent past (a present absence). In Mannergren's words, "'inverted' commemorations" (Mannergren Selimovic 2015:238). The "past and future are precisely only dimensions of the present itself" (Deleuze 1994:77).

A void, devoid of what?

The mere act of defining the urban wasteland in terms of a deviation, as emptiness, or for that matter as a 'void' is, as discussed above, a way of dealing with disorder, or rather, it is the ambition to produce a certain kind of urban order, in time and space. The 'void' becomes as a signifier of places that have no obvious link between use and designated function, and as such it becomes undefined in relation to what is thought of as well-defined urban space. A connection between on the one hand the production of this kind of space as something indeterminate and ambiguous, and on the other hand the common way of (in different ways) denoting it in terms of emptiness, is however yet to be made. The following therefore returns to the notion of the 'void' (as a deserted place) and juxtaposes it with a variety of ways, found in texts on the urban void, in which it is certainly *not* empty, and asks what constitutes the inconsistency.

When used to describe a place, "void" means a) "destitute of occupants or inhabitants; not occupied or frequented by living creatures; deserted, empty", b) "not occupied by buildings or other useful structures; unutilized, vacant" (OEDa). These spaces are however very seldom devoid of human or non-human living creatures, or material structures (what is deemed useful is a subjective question). It is also true that when this phenomenon and kind of space is

studied and written about it, these are not studies of emptiness, but instead of what happens there, what is there, what moves there. A few examples of what is studied follow here: Mats Lieberg (1992) observes that children and teenagers find places of their own, away from the supervision of adults; Mattias Qviström and Katarina Saltzman report "heaps of dirt, broken glass and pieces of bricks are found here and there, as well as concrete fundaments covered by high grass" (2006:29) from a wasteland, an abandoned garden industry, on the fringe of Malmö, Sweden, where also "cypresses, forsythia, mahonia and narcissi – none of them native in southern Sweden – flourish […] as living evidence of the history of the area" (ibid.). There the vegetal inhabitants of urban voids, as e.g. in Darren Patrick's (2014) study of the Ailanthus altissima (Tree of Heaven) as a "pioneering plant colonizer" (ibid:921) of New York City's High Line, calling attention to "the ways in which plants [are] enrolled in the political, economic, and social discourses and practices of redevelopment" (ibid:931). From the Paris equivalent, La Petite Ceinture, there are reports of a variety as well as a great number of animals: "Bech marten, winter wren, blackcap, common chiffchaff, and red admiral are well-established inhabitants […] domestic and stray cats, hedgehogs, two species of tit, robins, redstart, all species of pigeon, ravens, crows, kestrels and various other birds of prey […] 1200 rare and protected insectivorous bats […], and a population of protected wall lizards" (Foster 2014:128).

A wasteland might also provide connections between one place and another, shortcuts, visible through paths trodden diagonally over meadows (Wikström 2005:48,50). Or it offers space for "tent cities", semi-permanent encampments that shelter homeless people in many cities (Mitchell 2013). It can also function as a place for a kind of consumption, e.g. flea markets and other second hand commerce, which can flourish at locations that other, more established, sellers have rejected (Peterson McIntyre 2009:95). Olshammar (2002)



The traces of stolen copper at an urban void
in Stockholm, Sweden.

illustrates a never completed, and now degenerated, industrial zone as a case of a 'permanent-provisional state', in a study of visible results of an everyday practice out of step with development and planning trends. In Andreas Huyssen's (1997) article on the voids of Berlin, the seventeen acre vast wasteland that extends between the Brandenburg Gate, Potsdamer platz and Leipziger platz as a result of the fall of the Wall, a former no-man's land, is "a wide stretch of dirt, grass, and remnants of pavement under a big sky that seemed even bigger given the absence of a high-rise skyline that is so characteristic of this city" (1997:65). As a place that Berliners affectionately called their "prairie of history", in an urban context marked as much by its "absences and visible presence of its past" (ibid:60), it is a monumental void that is filled/marked by testimonials of the past. Or conversely, as Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen argue, the voids are not places of *grand recits*, but where little things like "cigarette ends, broken toys, rubbish or paper tissues" (2002:95) charge these spaces with meaning. And there are voids with art, e.g. an excavation-installation unearthing remnants of earlier urban inhabitants at an "empty" lot in Berlin (Till 2011).

The "void" in 'urban void' does not fit well with the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, as the concept ('urban void') refers to a phenomenon *de facto* seldom empty. My own fieldwork, conducted in Athens (Greece), Berlin (Germany), Brasília (Brazil), Malmö and Stockholm (Sweden), confirms the above accounts of urban voids as places where, contrary to what the word "void" suggests, there is often a lot going on. To recall a few examples: At many messy in-between sites in Athens I met cats, looking for something edible or dozing in the shade of the adjacent house (Field notes May 30th 2013). In Berlin, I once found myself as if was I in a rural idyll when, promenading through the high grass of a flowery meadow, sun shining, I met a few dog walkers and passed someone resting in the grass, head on his backpack. Turning

to the map, I realised this urban void was a former strip of no-man's land that formed part of the Wall. The pastoral experience of the place suddenly felt uncanny (Field notes July 11th 2013). At Ödetomten in Malmö, I have not always met other people, but the lot has never been empty. One of my earliest field notes records my seeing: "a mouse [for a computer], a ragged rucksack, a variety of furniture in pieces, many different bits of a wrecked red car. I observe that it is still possible to see, in the ground, contours of the buildings that once stood here." (Field notes May 15th 2011). A couple of years later, I note that across the street (Industrigatan) from Ödetomten, at another piece of derelict land, there are "two trailers and laundry out to dry on on a clothes line. There are a few cars and people around the trailers, maybe doing their morning routine. It is obvious that people live here. I do not take any pictures, feeling that it would be to intrude, trespass, not respecting the people living there" (Field notes October 24th 2013).

Returning to the academic articles on the urban void, Gil M. Doron notes that few of the authors writing on the subject seem to reflect on this friction/inconsistency between what the negative term connotes and the phenomenon that the concept defines (2000:248). I have made the same reflection, observed the same absence, in my reading (which also includes texts written later than Doron's now 16 years old article). The urban void is not devoid in the sense suggested by the OED as destitute, deserted, unutilised. It is instead devoid of something else (other than the presence of living creatures and/or built structures). My suggestion is that the 'void' – in terms of emptiness – does not represent the concrete *place* in question, but instead the relation of the phenomenon to the planned/ordered city. In the words of others who have written on the subject: The urban voids "lack programming" (Cupers & Miessen 2002:132) and the activities at them rise up "in the absence of planning" (Nemeth & Langhorst 2014:143). "[F]or those for whom space must have



an evident function as productive […] ruined space is understood as somewhere in which nothing happens and there is nothing" (Edensor 2005a:8). As such, "wastelands […] challenge unified conceptions of the cultural landscape and other ideological motifs that pervade contemporary urban thought" (Gandy 2013:1312). It is, as these citations illustrate, noted in some of the texts that this kind of urban space is characterised by an absence of planning, although it is not a matter that is discussed as an absence in preference to any other possible absences at the place. But what is more important for the argument here is, that neither of the texts put the noted absence of programming in relation to the terms used in the texts to describe the phenomenon, terms that connote emptiness and lack. These texts thus constitute a paradoxical representation of the urban void: they are, on the one hand, a (sometimes implicit) critique of the conception of the urban wasteland as voids, stressing as they do the presence of activity and living beings at these places and, on the other

Found artefact at Ödetomten in Malmö, Sweden: a computer mouse.

hand, a confirmation/reproduction of that very perspective by an unreflected use of terms, connoting nothingness, to name them.

An absence present since the birth of urban research

The texts studied and referred to in the above have predominantly been written during the last two decades, and it is therefore not out of place here to note that neither is the fascination for the obscure, forgotten and hidden parts of cities new; they had romantic charm already for the flâneurs of the nineteenth century (Wilson 2002:258). And in the discourse on the modern metropolis, the obscure came to gain a prominent position (Forsell 2013:275). Nor are the actual gaps and niches in the urban fabric, filled with temporary activities and used for the time being as storage, scrap yards or charity shops, new, nor are the voids that were laid out simply for the negative reason that they are not to be filled in (Bishop & Williams 2012:17; Choay 1969:18).[5] Nor is the idea of blank spaces *per se* new (Lindner 2013:36f).

The urban void constitutes a break, a gap, in the urban fabric, and understood as such it also brings to the fore the question of how we can understand the city as something where a 'gap' or a 'space between' could possibly appear. It was in the 1800's that the city first was considered as a whole (Olshammar 2002:55). When the city became an entity it became possible to conceive of holes in the whole, of spaces between. This first happened with Haussman's plan for Paris, which made it a great city instead of a conglomeration of adjacent arrondissements (ibid.). Green spaces were planned in order to be empty "simply for the negative reason that they are not to be filled in" (Choay 1969:18). The point of the green spaces as such, or one by one, was to be pointless, meaningless. As a part of a bigger whole, though, they filled the purpose of contributing to a healthier city, and were thereby meaningful. These spaces,

5. The first example, of "filled" gaps, mentioned in (Bishop & Williams 2012:17), does not come with a more specific date in time than "there have always been gaps and niches in the urban landscape" (ibid.). The other example, of "unfilled" voids, refers to Baron Haussmann's work on/plan for Paris in 1853-1870 (Choay 1969:18). The latter will reappear in the discussion in chapter 3.

writes Olshammar, can all in all be described as "hard to define, un-ordered, fragmented, developed without intentions, or at least by the lack of interaction between intentions" ([my translation] 2002:58). Tracing the urban void back in time thus contributes to the argument that the urban void performs the constitutive outside of the City. When the City became as a whole, as noted above, there also became holes – urban voids. They are, as such, inherent to the idea of the modern city.

The related idea of urban *terra incognita* marked the birth of urban sociological research in the 1800's (Lindner 2013:36f). The urban ethnographers and sociologists went out to explore it: they found the "dark continent" in close proximity to the well known – "at a comfortable walking-distance from the General Post Office" (Sims 1889:3). Just as today, the unknown was just around the corner from the known. A contemporary reader might find it curious that the areas described as blank, white spots, in the 1800's in fact did have housing, streets, garbage dumps and inhabitants – it was just that the latter where working class, about which the bourgeois explorers had no knowledge. Statistical societies were formed in order, on behalf of the local middle class, to collect, analyse and distribute information about the inhabitants of the urban terra incognita (Lindner 2013:36f). As regards the naming of this phenomenon or kind of place, there seems nevertheless to be little difference with today's urban experts (whether practitioners or theorists), in the naming of places as gaps, blanks, and voids, however inaccurate such a description of the place is. Examples of titles of books reporting from social expeditions into the unknown, written around 1900, are *Glimpses into the abyss* (Higgs 1906), and *The people of the abyss* (London 1903) (cf. Lindner 2013:44). In the past as well as today the 'blank' and the 'void' refer to the lack of knowledge about the place, rather than describing the concrete place.

To summarize, what have we? Clues that make it possible to trace the urban void back to the nineteenth century, when the city first became a whole. It is a trace that indicates that this phenomenon, which forms a negative in the City that is otherwise constituted by places defined in the positive, is intrinsic to the notion of the modern city. Furthermore, we have a variety of texts that testify to the fact that the urban voids (or whatever they are termed) might be inhabited, or occupied, or brimful, or occasionally visited, by something or someone or other, yet use a variety of terms that describe the opposite. The present text is guilty of the same, as it is a text on the urban void that stresses that it is not a void. However, this text will not fail to comment on the contradiction.



Guerilla gardening at Tempelhof, the former airport, in Berlin, Germany.

Captured in other words

There are, however, attempts to write the urban wasteland in ways that does not use terms denoting a lack. Conceptualisations of the phenomenon as 'space between', 'transgressive space', 'interstitial space' and 'terrain vague' will be discussed below as efforts to shift the focus from *absence* to *presence* as a kind of in-between.

Conceptualised as an in-between

It is not uncommon for the urban void to be treated as a space between, either in passing or as a conceptualisation of this phenomenon (see e.g. Doron 2000; Olshammar 2002; Wikström 2005; Sand 2008; Saltzman 2009a; Brighenti et al. 2013). The model of an in-betweenness, of an indeterminacy or undecidability, furthermore pervades the writings of contemporary philosophers (such as Irigaray, Minh-ha, Deleuze, Derrida, and Serres), and has become a celebrated metaphor for many feminist and postmodern discourses (cf. Grosz 2001:93). The in-between challenges the binaries that dominate Western knowledge, the oppositional structure that defines phallocentrism, as well as ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism. As such, it becomes a site for contestation of those dualisms (ibid.). This trait makes it a productive concept in relation to the urban void.

The urban void performs, in several senses, a space between in the urban structure. Just as water connects land, "[r]esidual areas, buffer zones, vacant land do separate one zone of building from the other, but they also connect the enclaves and afford opportunities of a range of actions" writes Tomas Wikström (2005:48). It is the messy gap in-between the otherwise (more or less) well-defined urban space that appears as undefined. But the void might also be thought of as a time between, temporally unregulated, "as spaces that are typically perceived to be between distinct and legitimate planned forms and cycles" (Foster 2014:126). It is

the in-between time, the gap, in which a certain space can be recharged, when no definition of the place is dominating: it is a moment of uncertainty.

Conceptualising the phenomenon as an in-between opens the way to a discourse on urban wastelands that does not deny that there are potential qualities inherent in the threats it poses. The space between is strange (Grosz 2001:91) and to take that as a point of departure to reach an understanding of the urban void is to consent to the idea of it as a complex phenomenon. It is not fixed/stable but floating/movable/flexible (Sand 2008:97). As a concept, the 'space between' is by no means an easy way out – on the contrary it poses a challenge (Sand 2008:100f). This should however be understood as an advantage; the in-between is a concept that embraces the indeterminate potential of the urban void.

If, however, the ambition is to determine the existence of the space between, failure is inevitable, since that is a space that is in constant flux (Sand 2008:102). Instead, Sand promotes a method of identifying the space between through practice – to activate it by using and shaping it. In this she was inspired by Deleuze who argues that a dynamic space must be defined from a point of view in that space, not from an external position (1994:29). Any active interference with such a space contributes to its becoming, to the shaping of its identity. As such, it highlights the role of the one who observes the space between, since the relationship between body, space and concept forms the observer's interpretation of the space between and what it is (Sand 2008:103). There is thus no possibility to perform a neutral study or conceptualisation of the urban void, if it is read as a space between.

As stated at the outset, the urban void becomes in relation to dominant notions of the City. It is articulated as undefined and

empty from the point of view where the norm is that space is well-defined, and what is not is undefined. It is a discourse on the City that structures our understanding of it with binaries such as this one: well-defined/undefined. The urban void as a space between makes it possible, with Deleuze and Félix Guattari, to escape the dualisms that shape our conceptions of the urban environment (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:305). In fact, they argue (ibid.) that the in-between is the only way to escape the dualisms, to pass between. The dualisms are however constantly present: The space between has no inherent characteristic of its own, but borrows it from its surroundings. Or rather, it would not exist at all, had it not been perceived as something not quite like its surroundings. The space between has no boundaries of its own, and it receives its form from the identity of others, whose relations are dualisms, which thereby define the space that constitutes the in-between (Grosz 2001:91). And with Derrida, there is no moving beyond the structure of dualisms (1987:12). The moment of undecidability is not to be traversed, or overcome; instead, it offers a means of studying the determination that the binaries and the undecidables perform (cf. Mouffe 2005b:10). It is that determination, which aims to fix a meaning in an essentially unstable context and which always implies the exclusion of other possible meanings, that is at work at the urban void (as anywhere), tying it down as an urban *void* (cf. Mouffe 2005b:9f). Irrespective of the differences, only briefly hinted at here, between a Derridean undecidable and a Deleuzian in-between, both provide a way of conceiving the urban void in a perspective different from that in which it is projected as a void, or an emptiness.

'Transgressive space', 'interstitial space', and 'terrain vague'

The conceptualisation of the urban wasteland as a space between implies a cross-cutting between spatial categories, social norms and/or physical boundaries. In order to distinguish between those

features of the in-betweenness, there are different terms that may be used. This section discusses three such possibilities.

A space between could be denoted as a 'transgressive space' (Doron 2000; Wikström 2005). To transgress means to "go beyond the limits set by (a moral principle, standard, law, etc.)" but may also refer to the crossing of spatial boundaries (Wikström 2005:52). Entering an urban wasteland often implies transgression in both the above senses. To leave a public space and to enter a surrounding residual space means not only crossing a spatial boundary, but also leaving the formal and informal control of public space (Wikström 2005:54). Furthermore, the urban wastelands that are found on the city fringe, which is where they quite often lie, perform a kind of transgression in itself as they disturb the border between the urban and the rural (Doron 2000:256; cf. Saltzman 2009b). Since they connect the urban and the rural, and inhabit both, these spaces are apparently an ambiguous or confused territory that defies any clear-cut definition (Wikström 2005:54; Doron 2000:256). Formulated in terms of transgression then, it is a way of writing the phenomenon of the urban void with a focus on the ways in which this kind of space crosses a variety of different boundaries: spatial, legal, social.

Another alternative is 'interstitial space' (Borret 1999, Wilson 2002, Jorgensen & Tylecote 2007, Brighenti et al. 2013). 'Interstitial' derives from the (Latin) word "interstitium", literally "space between", from "inter" = "between" and stet/ster = "to stand". Hence it implies holding a position in/at the left-over space. It makes it possible to refer to the phenomenon on its own terms – not as a deviant but seeing it from within, standing in between. It also carries both a spatial and temporal meaning: "An intervening space (usually, empty)" and "[a]n intervening space of time; an interval between actions" (OEDb). Luc Levesque, however, notes that depending on one's point of view, the interstice can very well be understood in



A fence cut open in a small wedge of wood between a motorway, a bus depot and a sports field. Stockholm, Sweden.

terms of separation, as a gap or rupture, but it can also be thought of as connecting tissue, as links and relations (Levesque 2013:23). Furthermore, (and like the above 'transgressive space') the notion of the interstitial space does not only concern morphological aspects, and is not simply a physical space, but also accentuates a position between different programs, e.g. it is what remains as a left-over space after a planning process, or what appears in-between two discontinuous plans (Brighenti 2013:xviii). It is about spatial production through territorial transformation, as is maintained by Mattias Kärrholm, who further stresses that the interstice is not restricted to appear as urban wastelands, but can be found or produced anywhere (Kärrholm 2013:139f). An interstitial practice is the possibility of charging a place with atypical performances, which then in effect transform the territory (Kärrholm 2013:137).

Kärrholm uses the book collector Thomas Phillips to illustrate this argument: Phillips was an English baronet famous for his utterance "I want a copy of every book in the world", who bought books at a pace that left him without time to unpack them. His house was gradually filled with books and unopened delivery boxes, and as a result of this excess he "managed to undermine and break all the meticulously constructed territorial rules of the Victorian home" (Kärrholm 2013:138). The spatial division into maid's chambers, dining rooms, parlours, etc. was deterritorialised. In a letter to a friend in 1856, he wrote "We have no room to dine in except the Housekeeper's room! … Our Drawing Room & Sitting Room is Lady Phillipp's Boudoir!!" (Munby cited in Kärrholm 2013:138). On the basis of an argument from the previous section, the interstice might also be thought of as being about transgression. And this perspective, the urban void understood as 'interstitial' – which connects as well as separates, but also charges a place with atypical performances – brings out the ambiguity in the phenomenon. This is because the urban void in itself performs the *strange* in a context

(the City) where the norm is well-defined space – since it does not respond to any *one* name, and has no designated function.

In the same manner as the interstitial defies classification (cf. Kärrholm 2013:140), so does the 'terrain vague', the concept to which we now turn. 'Terrain vague' is one example of the attempts to conceptualise the urban wasteland in a way that conveys the overall indeterminacy of the phenomenon. The French word 'terrain' carries an urban connotation, and hence cannot be translated either as the English 'land' (which does not connote urbanity), or as the English 'terrain' (which has acquired a more agricultural or geological meaning). The French word, furthermore, refers to greater and less precisely defined territories (de Solà-Morales 1995:119). As for 'vague', it has both Latin and Germanic origins. The Germanic 'Woge' refers to a sea swell, and encompasses movement, fluctuation, and instability. The Latin history of the word reveals two roots since it derives from 'vacuus', which in English gives us both 'vacant' and 'vacuum'. 'Terrain vague' is thus a term that captures a sense of ambiguity, by denoting the emptiness (vacuum) as well as a notion of freedom and availability (vacant). The Latin 'vagus' is also relevant to an understanding of the French 'vague', which also gives us the English 'vague' in the sense of "*in*determinate, *im*precise, blurred, *un*certain" (de Solà-Morales 1995:120). Here, de Solà-Morales notes the paradox that the synonyms given are negative (indeterminate, imprecise, uncertain), whereas it is precisely the absence of limit that embodies the expectations of mobility, vagrant roving, liberty (ibid.). He claims that this paradox is fundamental to an understanding of the potential of the city's 'terrain vagues': void and absence, yet also "promise, the space of the possible, of expectation" (ibid.). de Solà-Morales' term has been picked up by others, e.g. by Borret (1999), Boeri (1998, cited in Borret 1999), Foster (2014), and in the contributions to the anthology *Terrain Vague. Interstites at the edge of the pale* (Barron & Mariani et al. 2014), in which the chapter by de Solà-Morales is also re-published.

Maybe it is indicative of the difficulty of writing the ambiguous that de Solà-Morales' text on the terrain vague, a concept that problematises the urban wasteland, is an analysis of photographs of this kind of strange space. The author does not state this as a deliberate move, as a method, turning to art, to photographs as another medium, that might (or might not) contribute to formulating the urban voids with the help of a language that is not written, but the text could be read as such. However, de Solà-Morales writes that "[a]rt's reaction, as before with 'nature' (which is also the presence of the other for the urban citizen) is to preserve these alternative, strange spaces" ([emphasis added] de Solà-Morales 1995:122). But can these temporary spaces possibly be preserves at all? Certainly, a still photo preserves an image of a space, but then, what is it that a *still* captures of or from a space in *flux*, a '*vague*'? These questions remain unanswered in the text, but it closes with a request to the architectural profession to react to the terrain vague, paying attention to the continuity "of the flows, the energies, the rhythms established by the passing of time and the loss of limits" (de Solà-Morales 1995:123). It is a request that might equally well be addressed to other professions engaged in attempts either, in the concrete or in the abstract, to define the urban void.

'Space between', 'transgressive space', 'interstitial space', 'terrain vague' all have the advantage that they convey an in-betweenness of the urban void. They do not, however immediately signal the relation of the phenomenon to its context, the City. As the first three, at least, are applicable in contexts other than concrete urban space, it is furthermore less obvious that they denote an urban space, since the terms speak more to the abstract aspect of the idea. Even if these terms, in comparison with the 'urban void' have the advantage that they do not pursue attempts to void or empty the phenomenon of meaning, they fall short in tying together the abstract and the concrete that I value in the term 'urban void'. What is more, use of

the term 'urban void' stresses the fact that it can never, as a category of space, be overcome as such. It exists because it is produced as a constitutive outside, as empty in relation to what is perceived as full, and as a hole in the whole. Use of the term 'urban void' does not, however, exclude the possibility of using the above in-between-related concepts in the process of investigating the becoming of the urban void as an*other* kind of space.

The violence of writing

Standing at a point, viewing the urban void from where it becomes a negative nothingness, yet at the same time consider it a positive something – how do you describe what you see from there? Such a viewpoint is located within a paradigm that explains the City as an entity that can and should be planned. It is not a problematic point of view *per se*: on the contrary, it is where one must be, as the urban void becomes through being *other* to the City. However, to stand there without noticing one's own postition is problematic as it reproduces the urban void as something empty or shapeless, and at the same time exotic, in the otherwise normal/ordinary urban structure.

I sought a term that did not assume a position within the planning discourse, standing inside looking out at the urban void. I did so because I found that position problematic since it could imply a point of view from where not all aspects of the urban void could be seen or revealed. I was afraid that it would obstruct the search for a way of understanding the urban void in its own right, to conceive of it in other terms than negative (e.g. 'unplanned', 'unordered', 'undefined', etc.).

I searched for a place to write from that made it possible to oscillate between an outside and an inside perspective: a space between. Eventually, however, it became apparent that it was not possible

to flee from a position within the planning paradigm, or for that matter the idea of the modern city, nor was it desirable to give up: outside the planning paradigm, without the view of the City as a whole and an entity that can be planned in its entirety, there would be no wastelands, no gaps; no such phenomenon as the urban void. And then, at that time, a song was sung to me: *You've followed each and every road, always been hunting for home, you weren't looking for a way out, you were on the inside looking in* (A Heavy Feather 2011). So, I was not looking for a way out. The urban void becomes an*other* space. To see it, one must have access to that hegemonic view on the City. To read it critically though, demands something else. *To take a step back? If so, where is 'back'?*

'Arche-writing', 'arche-violence'

Solnit writes on what she finds as an aggression, in academic scholarship, against ambiguities in art: there is "a desire to make certain what is unknowable, to turn the flight across the sky into the roast upon the plate, to classify and contain. What escapes categorization can escape detection altogether" (2014:100). As noted, the undefinedness of the urban void accounts not only for the messy un-ordered wasteland of urban space, but also for the phenomenon in an abstract sense. It lacks a name, and it does not yet have a common language (Wilson 2002:260). The very ambition to know or write anything about the indeterminate, about the void, contributes to the ordering and categorising of it. Language, or with Derrida's 'arche-writing' (the language that precedes speaking and writing and is there before we use it) brings about the system of terms, of differences, through which orders are possible (Grosz 2005:60). "To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying" (Derrida 1997:112). The arche-writing is also conceived of as 'arche-violence', and writing as the possibility of

violence (ibid.). The argument here is that as our society is characterised by irreducible chaos and instability, any inscription of it, any binding up of the real in writing or marking is violence (Derrida 2005:86; Mouffe 2005a:9; Grosz 2005:60). "This violence" (arch-writing, arche-violence), writes Grosz in her exploration of the violence of writing, of thought, and of knowing using resources provided by Derrida, "is the containment and ordering of the thing, the world" (2005:60). The wordling of the world is thus a violent force, as any word must cut, must categorise and classify, that is – to order disorder.

Any attempt to write the indeterminate is to engage with/in the violence. "To turn the flight across the sky into the roast upon the plate" (Solnit 2014:100). To write the urban void, to read a phenomenon as an undefined in contrast to that which is defined, to single out the *other* from the norm in order to analyse it, is to admit to the cut of categorisation, and to a world built with dualisms. However, to aim in a deconstructive manner, to find the urban void as an *either/or*, to write until it shows as an undecidable, is to present these cuts as unstable, to destabilise classifications taken for granted. Undecidability is the possibility of endless quotation and recontextualisation in contexts yet unknown (Grosz 2005:65). It is the possibility for things to be otherwise.

The term as a lie

There is something the matter with the way that the majority of the texts on the urban void phenomenon (including the one you are reading at this moment) give it names like derelict areas, no-man's land, disused space, no-places and at the same time aim to show how they are anything but voids. What is the matter? "There is no language without the performative dimension of the promise, the minute I open my mouth I am in the promise. Even if I say that 'I don't believe in truth' or whatever, the minute I open my mouth

there is a 'believe me' at work. Even when I lie, and perhaps especially when I lie, there is a 'believe me' in play" (Derrida 2005:84). The names given to these spaces often turn out to be lies, however, there is a 'believe me' in play here. We who put these no-/un-/dis- prefixes to use in naming the phenomenon bto be believed, at the same time as we assure the reader that what is also true about these spaces is that they are not spaces/phenomenon characterised by a negative prefix. *Do you believe me?* "The *terrain vague*", writes Borret, "continues to resist all straightforward definition, because its semantic emptiness turns out to have less to do with an absence of codes than with a multiple presence of codes that are superimposed, that clash, or even destroy each other" (1999:240). Maybe this is true (or should I write "true"?), that the urban void, the terrain vague or whatever we want to call it, has multiple meanings, that clash or even destroy each other. It is a phenomenon characterised by an absence, a void. It is a phenomenon characterised by a presence. Both these statements are true. Yet, the first falsifies the other, and vice versa. They cannot both be true at the same time. Still, to claim that both statements are true opens up the phenomenon, undefines it and reveals, for a moment, an indeterminacy. It could be read as a moment that destabilises the consensus of urban space as something that is either ordered or un-ordered. The urban void is either/or that we try to frame as such or such (depending on where we stand in relation to this kind of space, from what perspective we conceive of it), as this or that, but such attempts are futile, since the moment of indeterminacy, the urban void, refuses to be defined. It is defined by being undefined (cf. Derrida 2005:86).

As Borret notes, to consider the urban void as an either/or, as a concept characterised by a multiple presence of codes, is to adhere to a conviction that "urban life must rest on a model of conflict, in which the necessity of total determination, cohesion, and harmony does not take precedence" (1999:241). It is to acknowledge that

our world/society is of a fundamental and irreducible instability, against which we struggle with laws, conventions, and politics (Derrida 2005:86). This is how the politics of urban space, which could be understood as planning, or for that matter, other conventions/regimes that make sense of the urban structure as a stable and well-ordered set-up of urban space, is understood here. In such a context, one could read the urban void (if closely read, not in the version of it where it *is* a void, nor in the version where it is but a vivid splash of colour in the well ordered urban structure, but as an either/or) as a moment and a place (and a concept) that unmasks the stabilisations as provisional. An unmasking that "permits us to think the political and think the democratic by granting us the space necessary in order not to be enclosed in the latter" (Derrida 2005:88). In other words, deconstruction is hyper-politicising as it follows paths and codes that are not traditional (Derrida 2005:87).

Then, deconstructing the urban void might provide a glimpse of the chaos, "which is at once a risk and a chance, and [...] [where] the possible and the impossible cross each other" (Derrida 2005:86). To follow a path into the void, or rather, to write a path into it, demands a language that can handle the chaos existing at the point where the urban void becomes a phenomenon that is defined by being undefined: where it is constantly produced as ambivalent.

To great dreamers of corners and holes

Here we return to the question of the ambivalent and how to put it in words, taking help from Gaston Bachelard who writes about the corner as a "refuge for ambivalence" (1994 [1958]:140). Bachelard finds in corners a quiet space where one might withdraw into oneself, "a symbol of solitude for the imagination" (1994:136). He searches for corners in poetry and finds, among others, a corner "reserved for gloomy waiting" (1994:140), and as I find him finding this,

I also find the urban void – a space in wait (and gloomy, why not?) The urban void emerges when and where an authorised definition of urban space is invalid, and is from a perspective of the City seen as ordered, in wait of being defined. However, back to Bachelard, who when having found this corner exclaims: "What a refuge for ambivalence!" (1994:140). "Here is a dreamer who is happy to be sad, content to be alone, waiting" (ibid.). The urban void is too, a refuge for ambivalence, being an either/or, at the same time neither this, nor that, it is an ambivalent space.

In/at the corner, the daydreamer is one who lets the imagination wander (through the crypts of memory), and Bachelard writes: "to great dreamers of corners and holes, nothing is ever empty, the dialectics of full and empty only correspond to two geometrical non-realities" (1994:140). I do think that one needs to let the imagination wander off, to grasp the ambivalence of the either/or, of the urban void, maybe one also needs to be a dreamer to appreciate it fully. However, to think it is quite something other than to write it, and to put it in words. It is "a poetic fact that a dreamer can write of a curve that it is *warm*" (Bachelard (1994:146). The author of a thesis however might not be able to write of a curve that it is warm. Bachelard states that "[l]anguage dreams" (ibid.), nevertheless, it is a practical and pragmatic fact that different things are expected of poetic language on the one hand and of academic language on the other. They are made to do different things. Yet, "[t]he intellectualist philosopher who wants to hold words to their precise meaning, and uses them as the countless little tools of clear thinking, is bound to be surprised by the poet's daring" (ibid.). The present text aims to be to the point in formulating the urban void and its becoming an*other* kind of space, and there is no ambition for poetry. Nevertheless, the editing of the montage, which is set up to perform and display the urban void as seen through different facets, both urges and admits me to make use of a variety of mate-

rial in shaking up the dominant ways of conceptualising the urban void, properly. Therefore, in what follows I add the language of a daring poet, as a space between here and the next section.

> "A city with no name seems to be on fire, full of black holes surrounded by neon signs, traffic lights, street lamps in the squares. At dawn the black holes turn into white holes. And the sunlight wipes out every name because the shadows are now the common sign. Somehow the names too are signs, they become real the moment they are born, and within them there will not cease to be a word of destiny or a future hidden in each letter, between each syllable, in every death sentence implied in the gap between its writing and how it sounds. Every name is a sign, a history and a coming-into-existence, but part of this unpredictable zodiac of language and blood running through its letters" (Montecinos 2009).[6]

The pharmakon

"Let us get ahead of ourselves. Already: writing, the *pharmakon*, the going or leading astray" (Derrida 1981:71). This section concludes the chapter in which I have asked what it is to write the ambiguous. It has condemned a yearning for the certain yet admitted that writing is not possible without the inscription of a cut, and that it classifies *per se* (cf. Derrida 1997:112). It has criticised other texts for depicting the urban wasteland in terms of a lack combined with presenting facts showing that it is not lacking, at the same time as it does the same: writing the "urban void" but claiming it is not a void. The chapter has as such been the search for a way of capturing the urban wasteland in words that do not do away with the ambiguity of the phenomenon. The search ends here, by establishing the impossibility of writing the ambiguous, and it does so with the help of a derriedean undecidable – the pharmakon – which also is a chance of the very same: the ambiguous.

6. Translation from Spanish to English by Petronella Zetterlund

By beginning with a request to get ahead of ourselves, as has already been done, by the introduction of the *pharmakon* in the very first sentence of the section. In the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus*, writing is referred to as *pharmakon*, which translates *both* as remedy *and* as poison. By underlining the ambivalence of pharmakon, presenting it as the medium in which opposites are opposed and where they cross over each other, Derrida shows how Plato's message of existence is structured in terms of binaries (separate substances or forms) and that those are hierarchical – but is undermined by his own rhetoric. Pharmakon is an either/or and this charm, writes Derrida, is spellbinding with a power of fascination, and can be – interchangeably or at the same time – beneficient or maleficient (1981:70). However, any attempt to translate pharmakon into any language that is an heir of the Western metaphysics cannot reproduce the ambivalence of it, but will only reduce it to one of its simple elements by interpreting it as a 'remedy' *or* a 'poison' (*or* as a 'remedy or poison') (cf. Derrida 1981:99). "Such an interpretative translation is thus as violent as it is impotent: it destroys the pharmakon but at the same time forbids itself access to it, leaving it untouched in its reserve" (ibid.).

A painful pleasure, with/through the pharmakon one might get a glimpse of the ambivalent, but one cannot hope to write it, stuck as we are with a language built on binaries. (And I do not attempt or desire a writing style like that of Derrida, which functions according to a type of another, non-binary, logic, and as it does so, it is, writes Barbara Johnson in the "Translators introduction" of (1981) "not surprising that it does not entirely conform to traditional binary notions of 'clarity'" (1981:xviii)). Writing, as pharmakon, is linked as much to the malady as to its treatment (Derrida 1981:99). The ambivalence of the urban void, being an either/or, is elusive, as I only can explain it by stating

that it is both full and empty, that it is netiher full, nor empty. That is, as soon as I try to explain, to write, what constitutes this ambivalence, I must take to the binaries that lock it up as either this or that. Yet, it is this very existence of binaries that has produced the urban void in the first place. With nothing to understand as a present entity, the City, there would be no thing to conceive of as an absence. Setting out to capture the void is the going or leading astray.

3 The space between

> …[T]hose forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them – in short, of differences.
> (Lefebvre 1991:285)

"There has never been a paper bag for drugs," states Major "Bunny" Colvin of the Baltimore police department, in a speech to his subordinates in the HBO-produced TV-series *The Wire*.[7] "Until now", he continues (*The Wire*, "All due respect", S03E27). The speech is his presentation of the scheme he is cooking to contain the city of Baltimore's drug trafficking. It is a policy that, so to speak, "paper bags" drug dealing and using by moving it into an area of (presumed) vacant houses. In other words, Colvin is about to create a free zone for drugs, so that the drug-related crime can move away from where "decent" people live to a derelict place in the city where, in effect, drugs are legalised. When the policy is implemented, the police spread the word to the drug-dealing

7. The HBO produced TV-series *The Wire*, is an American crime drama television series, or an epic narration about the city of Baltimore, written by David Simon, a former journalist on the *Baltimore Sun*, and Ed Burns, a former police officer with the Baltimore Police Department who also worked as a teacher in Baltimore's public school system (Bryant & Pollock 2010:709). The third season of the series tells a collective story of the drug trade and the political scene of the city.

corner boys that they must move their business to the free zone, but they protest. "If you move yourself down to the free zone, down to the vacants over at Vincent street, then you can do whatever the fuck you want", explains officer Carver. If they stay at their corners, they are going to get arrested and rearrested until they get the picture. Another cop tries to make it even clearer: "Vincent Street is like Switzerland or Amsterdam." One of the boys asks: "What the fuck is that?" "It's one of those countries where drugs are legal. Vincent Street is your Amsterdam in Baltimore" the cop Herc explains. Carver: "You go down there, we don't give a fuck, you stay here, you go to jail." Corner boy: "I ain't going to no Hamsterdam" (*The Wire* "Amsterdam" S03E29).

* * *

Major "Bunny" Colvin has found (what he thinks is) an urban wasteland – a place that his policy demands as a 'void'. It is made a black hole into which can be put (what is considered) city waste for destruction, or dissapearence. In other words, an urban space where the idea of the paper bag can be scaled up. About the paper bag, Colvin says in his speech that "there was a small moment of goddamn genius by some nameless smoke hound who comes out the Cut Rate one day and on his way to the corner, he slips that just-bought pint of elderberry into a paper bag. A great moment of civic compromise. That small wrinkled-ass paper bag allowed the corner boys to have their drink in peace, and it gave us permission to go and do police work" (S03E27). What Colvin is set out to do is to repeat that great moment of civic compromise, with the urban void as the mise-en-scène.

The paper bag is thus yet another metaphor by which the urban void can be described and understood, and that can be added to the terms and metaphors used in the previous chapter. Now, however,

the focus will shift. Without losing sight of the importance of language, we will in this chapter turn to the concrete production of the urban void – in spatial terms.

So, this is when what earlier have only been briefly hinted at – notions of the City as an entity that can be fully planned and the City as a growth machine – are thoroughly elaborated as the norms with which the becoming of the urban void as a void can be contextualised. These are, I will argue, dominating norms to which the urban void forms a constitutive outside, and thus, the former is not independent from the latter (cf. Derrida 2005:89). This means that any notion of an*other* kind of space always forms part of how the norm is conceived (and not only the other way around, but both ways). The City is not a stable entity on which the 'urban void' is projected as a curious object.

In the interaction between multiple trajectories in space – norms of rational planning, norms of economic growth, actors with the upper hand in producing urban space that accords with these norms, and citizens that come to use the urban wasteland – the urban void unfolds in the present chapter. It tells a story of those forces, to speak with Lefebvre as quoted in the epigraph of this chapter, that "make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them – in short, of differences" (1991:285). It is a violent force that – in metaphorical as well as concrete terms – erases any traces of meaning that inhabits the urban wasteland in order, with different strategies, to turn it into a void. Yet it is just as much a story of the appropriations that define the urban voids as something rather than nothing, and that undermine any attempts close it down. They are all contributing to the spatial production of the urban void. Before investigating its concrete manifestations in the City, however, I discuss how such a production, in a more abstract sense, is understood in the present context.

The production of space and the urban void

"One of the most powerful ways in which social space can be conceptualised is as constituted out of social relations, social interactions, and for that reason always and everywhere an expression and medium of power" (Massey 1995:284). A relational understanding of space is not only, though, a powerful way in which space can be conceptualised. Rather, it is a perspective that mobilises a set of tools to bring analytical clarity to diverse political situations, such as in this thesis, to the making of the urban void as an*other* kind of space (Mouffe 2013:2). Since space, time and politics are co-constituted, paying close attention to the production of space is also a way of getting at political problems in a forceful way (Massey 1992:84). This thesis is written in this post-structuralist tradition of thought, and the following section is a way a gathering of the team; it is to show what thoughts have been important in the process of understanding the construction of the urban void, and whom I have been thinking with. I have not, however, chosen *a* theory or a theoretical framework on space/spatiality to work with and that will be presented here. Rather the section should be read as the context to which this work seeks to be related.

This context, a post-structuralist ontology of space/spatiality, has been crucial to the thesis' arguments on the urban void. The writings of Doreen Massey have here been a primary source of inspiration (1992, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2005, 2008). Her work to construct a new concept of space draws on a diversity of philosophical sources, but of particular interest here is the way in which she uses a deconstructionist reformulation of progressive politics in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, which connects with the notion of the political to which this thesis adheres (Saldana 2013:48, Laclau & Mouffe1985 [2001], Mouffe 2005a). Laclau and Mouffe's notion of a radical democratic politics, corresponds well with Massey's privileging of relationality above essential identity, and

radical openness above the maintenance of wholeness and origins (Rustin 2013:60, Saldana 2013:49). Furthermore, this notion of space coupled with a Mouffian conception of an anti-essentialist politics is also inspired by Derrida's post-structuralist philosophy in unpacking traditional analogies that Western thought have made between binaries such as time/space, male/female, urban/rural etc. (cf. Saldana 2013:49).[8]

With such a conception of space, cities are then, as earlier noted, intense and heterogeneous constellations that demand for complex negotiations, constituted of places that are all formed through a myriad of practices of quotidian interventions (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005:154f). Consequently, any urban space is a product of the prevailing social order *and* a producer of this order, and should be understood as the place and medium of political struggle (Lefebvre 1991). This is, according to Massey in the quotation opening this section, one of the most powerful ways in which space and spatiality can be conceptualised. There is however no claim that such a view is more correct than any other (Massey 1995:4). But the perspective has helped me formulate the problem of the thesis, and it has hence also been vital to me in engaging with the problem – and what has been crucial here is the notion of space as inherently political. The object of interest, to speak in Lefebvre's terms and as mentioned above, is not space *per se* but the actual political production of space (Lefebvre 1991:37). In other words, the focus is on how the urban void is *made* a 'void'.

Hence, the ambition of this thesis is not neutral in any way, as it questions the dominant ways of constructing the urban void (as a void). It acknowledges, with Lefebvre, that space has the capacity to structure, stabilise and reproduce social relations of society. Space is a product as well as a producer of a hegemonic order. This is a perspective on space that makes possible an analysis of

8. Further consideration of a notion of spatial politics, as understood through reading Derrida together with Massey and Mouffe, was recorded in the opening chapter of the book.

how space has been made a means of domination – an exercise of power (Lefebvre 1991). Yet, the thesis is written with belief in the possibility of another urban reality, whereby the city is a timespace that is not only the product of the elite's domination, but where the participation of citizens in the development of the city can contribute to a reformulation of the urban void (Lefebvre 1991, cf. Olsson 2008:56). It is a conviction that I have acquired through this work, taking into consideration also the spatial, which can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are formulated (Massey 2005:9). In an abstract as well as concrete sense, space and place form the question of our living together.

To articulate it as a product of interrelations is one way of linking the production of space to an anti-essentialist notion of politics. Identities are the result of processes of identification, that always imply the establishment of a difference (Mouffe 2005a:15,18). So, to state that space is relational is to acknowledge that the ordering of urban space, like any order, is political and based on some form of exclusion (Mouffe 2005a:18). There are always other possibilities that have been supressed and that may be reactivated (ibid.). Any stabilisation of meaning, in terms of identity, place, or context, which is then the establishment of a difference, is temporary (Dixon & Jones 2005:243). To attempt to show how processes of making (and remaking) urban space, the urban void in this case, are made then, is to pay the sharpest possible attention to the forces aimed at establishing those differences (cf. Derrida 1988b:136). And this, the fixing of a meaning, is always political (ibid.). "Once this generality and this a priori structure have been recognized, the question can be raised, not whether a politics is implied (it always is), but which politics is implied in such a practice of contextualization" (ibid.). Thinking spatially, the way that is implied here, is thus never an innocent, politically neutral activity (Featherstone & Painter 2013:3).

The urban void, however, is a phenomenon of both space *and* time: it is understood as performing a void in the urban fabric as well as a gap in time that appears when one definition of a place becomes invalid before another one is imposed. The urban void is as such a timespace. With an argument on space as constituted out of social relations, which are dynamic, it follows that space is not static but constantly changing; that spatiality is implicated in the production of history, and that – in other words – space must be conceptualised integrally with time (Massey 1995:254). Of course, spatiality and temporality differ from one another, but neither can be conceptualised as the absence of the other (Massey 1992:80).

That space cannot be thought without time is an argument that permeates the understanding of the urban void in this thesis: it is a notion of timespace as a context that has to be produced as well as it is productive (Thrift 1996:43). However, at occasions when this needs to be made explicit, I use the term 'timespace'[9] (instead of space-time as used in physics), so as to underline the need for time and space to be thought together (May & Thrift 2001). 'Timespace' here further alludes to Theodore Schatzki's conception of it as "the dimensionality of human activity" (Schatzki 2010:ix). An all too broad definition if left just like that, but what it does is to refute the idea of activity as something that comes to have temporal or spatial properties by virtue of "occupying" or occurring "in" time or space (ibid.). Hence, it is a conception of space-read-together-with-time that goes well with a notion of space as relational and inherently political: Timespace is not merely a vessel, it produces as well as it plays a part in the ongoing activities and situations of everyday life (Kärrholm 2014:7).

So, the outline of this book, where arguments on the *spatial* politics of the urban void are gathered in this chapter while arguments on the *temporal* politics of the urban void are put forward in the next

9. For a notion of 'timespace' as "a total collapse", or in other words, a critique of 'timespace', see (Merriman 2011).

chapter, is therefore counterintuitive. Structuring the text otherwise might have implied a stronger emphasis, and meta-argument, on the need for these two dimensions to be thought together. However, after having carefully considered the disadvantages of the present outline, I believe that the story is more forcefully told like this – where this chapter can focus on the spatial representations of the urban void and the next on the temporal. It is only a matter of temporary analytical focus, though, as the temporal and the spatial will always spill over into one another.

The planned city

As noted in the very beginning, the urban void becomes (a *void*) with and through a dominating conception of a (Western) City as a coherent whole that it is possible and necessary to plan. What follows here is a montage that represents such a construction – the City as possible and necessary to plan – by viewing the City through a lens of 'urban planning'. 'Urban planning' is given a prominent position here, not because urban planning *as such* is vital for the argument to be made, but because, both in theory and practice, it has and always has had great influence on how the City as an entity is understood. In order to construct such a lens, then, I will turn to the genesis of Western urban planning, not in general but with regards to how it addresses the city as something that ought to be ordered for ordering's sake. Before that, however, two reservations need to be spelled out: that attempts to order the city were of course made long before modern urban planning was born, and that 'urban planning' is not a coherent phenomenon.

There had of course been efforts to order the city fabric, before the rise of modern planning, e.g. in the Middle Ages: In the Middle Age town and city, the layout often had the appearance of (what from the outside would seem) disorder. "The aerial view of a town

built during the Middle Ages or the oldest quarters (medina) of a Middle Eastern city that has not been greatly tampered with has a particular look. It is the look of disorder. Or, to put it more precisely, the town conforms to no overall abstract form" (Scott 1998:53). The local inhabitant of such a city knew his/her way around, while a stranger and/or a trader visiting the city for the first time would probably find it hard to orientate him/herself – because the structure of the city lacked a known logic (ibid.). With a linguistic comparison that James C. Scott makes, "it functioned spatially in much the same way a difficult of unintelligible dialect would function linguistically. As a semipermeable membrane, it facilitated communication within the city while remaining stubbornly unfamiliar to those who had not grown up speaking this special geographic dialect" (1998:54). Historically, this relative unintelligibility was an important measure of political safety from outside elites. As such, the "un-ordered" urban structure became a vital element to alter for the outside elite seeking to dominate the town. Other things equal, a city laid out according to a simple repetitive logic will be the easiest to administer and control.

But also, cities laid out according to plans existed long before the Middle Ages. One of the earliest examples is the grid plan that governed the reconstruction of Miletus on the coast of Asia Minor in the 5th Century BC, but grid plan cities existed in Egypt, Babylonia and Palestine as early as the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC (Badersten 2002:182f). Another example of early urban planning cities would be the strict spatial ordering of the baroque era. As Mumford notes, it was "one of the great triumphs of the baroque mind to organize space, make it continuous, reduce it to measure and order" (1961:364).

"Urban planning as a *social activity* (the collective management of urban development) has existed ever since cities appeared on

the surface of the earth, several thousands of years ago", writes Raphaël Fischler ([emphasis added] 2012:108). Before modern urban planning, however, there had been no specific profession involved in the ordering of the urban fabric, no city planning by specialists (Sennett 1970:87). "Urban planning as a *professional activity* (the supply of expert advice on the management of urban development) originated in the industrial era. It was in gestation during the nineteenth century, was born toward the end of that century in Europe and in the beginning of the twentieth century in North America, and grew to maturity over the following decades" ([emphasis added] Fischler 2012:108). This distinguishes urban planning as a professional activity carried out by experts in the field, from a pre-modern ordering of the urban fabric.

'Urban planning', however, is not one coherent phenomenon; neither is it a universal concept that holds for all times and places (Healey 2012:200f). In addition, it does indeed carry a normative orientation and a tradition of debate. In its widest sense, planning can be defined as the realisation of the idea of a better world (Mukhtar-Landgren 2012:38). In the field of planning theory, which in turn is not *a* theory but an eclectic collection of theories, the definitions of planning are many and different (cf. Allmendinger 2002:79). Furthermore, there are different terms that are closely related, which, though, do not signify exactly the same thing, e.g. "city and regional planning," "town and country planning," "community planning," "territorial planning," and "spatial planning" (Fischler 2012:107f). If it still needs to be underlined: planning is a heterogeneous concept and phenomenon. It could be argued as being not only a practice filled with empty signifiers such as "sustainability", "urbanity", "risk", ready to be filled with whatever content suits the hegemonic discourse, but also one in itself – an empty signifier (Gunder & Hillier 2008). Michael Gunder and

Jean Hillier suggest that planning as such is a contested and contestable term, and will remain so (ibid.). Any conceptualisation of 'urban planning' is hence a construction, and the one put forward here is no exception.

A genesis

Still, however floating and widely defined as a practice and as an idea, planning, like many other fields of knowledge, have its own storyline of birth, a genesis, which also serves as its justification. It answers the why-question of planning as a practice, and works to legitimise it – today (cf. Mukhtar-Landgren 2012:46). What is more, and this needs to be underlined, this is the hegemonic narration of planning history and as such it lays claim to being *the* history of planning, whereas it is merely *a* history (Hooper 1992). Thus, the genesis provides a way of tracing the dominant discourse on the City as an entity that ought to be planned.

According to the dominant story in a Western context, planning is the response to the problems that are said to have arisen in the cities as a consequence of industrialisation and the following urbanisation (Hooper 1992:53). The un-controlled and spontaneous growth causing unsanitary cities needed to be controlled – modern spatial planning was invented. In her reading of some of the early "Great Men in Planning Theory", e.g. Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier, Dalia Mukhtar-Landgren shows how the problem to be solved was not only the urban misery, but the unplanned city per se: The city was to be planned and ordered (Mukhtar-Landgren 2012:46).

One example of a city where a yearning to control potential chaos led to a great restructuring in terms of urban planning, was Paris in the 1860's. It was a rapidly growing city, and a mosaic of industrial and pre-industrial orders. On the outskirts, new factories were established, and the inner city, characterised by

crooked streets and decaying buildings, was becoming even more densely populated due to the influx of factory workers. In Françoise Choay's words the city was merely "a collection of juxtaposed parts" that did not form a coherent entity (Choay 1969:16). The growing population was increasingly unknown to the administrative and social service authorities of the city. The combination of these factors was frightening to the political authorities: an inaccessible geography and an unknown populace. Furthermore, there was no way of controlling the workers in the event of an uprising – the twisted streets were very suitable for setting up impromptu barricades (Sennet 1970:89).

It was in that setting, and as an answer to those problems, that Baron Haussmann drew up a plan for Paris where long straight avenues cut through the untidy neighbourhoods, and he wanted to make the erection of barricades impossible for all time (Benjamin, *AP* Exposé of 1935). Haussmann's plan was intended to give the fragmented city an appearance of coherence, to give unity to and to transform into an operative whole (Choay 1969:16). He promoted the idea that the altering, in effect ordering, of physical space could change the social patterns of the metropolis (Sennet 1970:90f). Such a faith in planning's ability also dominated the profession from the early days of modern planning until the 1960's (when the idea of planning as working 'in the public interest' was challenged) (Yiftachel 1989:33). "Planning was 'good for everyone', rescuing ailing industrial cities from chaos and decay" (ibid.). The new avenues as drawn by Haussmann would provide not only for greater amount of traffic in the city, but for the possibility for troops easily to gain access to riotous neighbourhoods (Sennet 1970:89). Haussmann viewed his work as a calling, something that he stresses in his memoirs, and he called himself a "demolition artist", *artiste démolisateur* (Benjamin, *AP* Exposé of 1935). He appears from the texts as a Great Man, and he carries a great role

in the story of Western urban planning as a man who managed to put comfort to a growing city's authorities increasing anxiety over the unknown and uncontrollable population: with a city plan.

The problem of un-order as such reappears in the early writings of modern planning. Another one of the Great Men in planning theory, Ebenezer Howard, wrote in 1902 about "ill-ventilated, unplanned, unwieldy and unhealthy cities – ulcers on the very face of our beautiful island" (Howard 1902:133). The issue was, as the quote illustrates, not only the misery, but also the fact that the city was unplanned (Mukhtar-Landgren 2012:46). These un-planned cities, according to Howard "stand as barriers to the introduction of towns in which modern scientific methods and social reformers may have the fullest scope to express themselves" (Howard 1902:133). That is, the work of planners, if they are given full permission to act, was conceived as the solution to the urban problem. Consequently, and in line with the positivist epistemology that characterises modern urban planning, any failure to control the risks associated with an un-planned city is often blamed on planning institutions, on the grounds of their lack of knowledge and/or competence (Jasanoff 1999:137). It is a conception of what we can know about the world (the positivist) with which risk becomes something that can be mapped and measured by knowledgeable experts and, within limits, controlled (ibid.). So, a tenet of planning is the constant quest for an impossible absoluteness of knowledge to give the illusion of certainty; of a safe tomorrow (Gunder 2008:188). It accords planning a central role in managing the risk that unknowability implies (Gunder 2008).

The very rationale for modern planning is that knowledge can be used through planning to achieve positive change, as Yvonne Rydin (2007:53) expresses it, which is similar to what Michael Gunder has also argued, that a quest for comprehensive knowledge underlies

planning's central ontology of purpose (2008:188). A distinction between these arguments is however that Rydin stresses the belief in knowledge as a singular and something that a planner can achieve to reveal *the truth* as something belonging to the modernist era (in contrast to a contemporary), while Gunder maintains that irrespective of whether planning is carried out with a positivist or constructivist conception of knowledge (contemporary) planning seeks to control the unknowable, the uncertain (Rydin 2007:53f; Gunder 2008:187). Here, in the present context, where planning is relevant as contributing to a notion of the City as an entity that can be fully planned, what I take from these arguments is what unites them, i.e. the central role of knowledge in planning. And to elaborate more precisely *what* that role is, I will for a moment make the argument more general, with Karen Christensen, who writes: "Planners hate uncertainty as much as most other people do, and they spend their working lives trying to reduce it" (1985:63). And to most of us it is with knowledge, or the impression of it, that we pursue this aim of trying to reduce uncertainty. We are here reaching the key argument of this section: the major justification for planning is to provide the illusion of certainty in a risky, uncertain, and un-planned world (Gunder 2008:189).

What have we, then? Well, a notion of planning, of which a common feature is the will to order that which is perceived as un-ordered: To turn the unknowns into knowns by structuring the urban fabric according to a logic of measurability and predictability. Unknowability becomes, as noted above, a threat. Yet, the unknowability, or undecidability, is ever present, and one might with a lacanian perspective note that, as Gunder and Hillier write, "[t]here is always a void, an incompleteness, which we as subjects strive to complete and make whole, but which we always fail to achieve" (2007:469). Hence, there will always be a yearning to overcome this undecidability. Furthermore, their formulation

inevitably brings the urban void to mind. As the space in the city with no designated function, i.e. no definition according to plan, it becomes something unknown – if considered from viewpoint of the plan. And from the perspective of any actors that use the urban plan as their guide to the city, a mere failure to comprehend the urban wasteland, and I mean this in a very pragmatic sense – the inability among these actors to recognise what is going on there – turns it into an urban void. In other words, if the urban wasteland appears as an unknown from the point of view of the authorities that have legitimacy to define urban space, it becomes a blind spot – a void. Ödetomten, an urban wasteland in Malmö, Sweden, illustrates the relation between the urban void and a notion of the City where the ideal is that nothing should be out of control (cf. Sennet 1970:94).

"It's like this area is a bit dead"

"It's like this area is a bit […] dead […] it's a bit of a vacuum" said ([my translation] Urban planner/civil servant 2011[10]), the (then) responsible planner for the development of the Norra Sorgenfri area, in an interview about Ödetomten. S/he searched for words to describe the place and those that occurred to her were "dead" and "vacuum", which is significant: the quotation illustrates the blind spot that the urban void constitutes in the (planned) City. Before moving on, however, please be introduced to Ödetomten:

Ödetomten is a wasteland, a vacant demolition site, where all that is left in terms of buildings is a fire-ravaged shack, abandoned years ago. It is found in Norra Sorgenfri, which is an area in transition in central Malmö, Sweden's third biggest city located on the southern tip of the country just across the bridge from Copenhagen, Denmark. During the last century Norra Sorgenfri has been an area of small industries and workshops, and since around the turn of the millennium it also hosts some galleries, artist studios, and

10. Architect and urban planner at Malmö City Planning Office (Stadsbyggnadskontoret), Malmö, Sweden. Interview conducted on May 17th, 2011.







Opposite above: Ödetomten, Malmö, Sweden.
Opposite below: A stove by the artist Juan Carlos Peirone, built at Ödetomten in 2009.
Above: A DIY cast skateboard bowl at Ödetomten.

a school. During the coming decade it will, according to plans, be transformed into an area of mixed-use, i.e. a combination of housing, offices, and shopping. As an exception from other old industrial areas of Malmö, Norra Sorgenfri has a relatively central position in the city (geographically). Due to its location, quite a lot of people pass through the area daily, many of them along Nobelvägen. Where Industrigatan crosses Nobelvägen there is a lot local which people call 'Ödetomten'.

Standing at the edge of this site, it appears to be a quite typical urban wasteland, if such a thing exists. Sharply marked off from the surrounding lots, who are built with small workshops, a gallery etc., this rough place hosts a fire ravaged ramshackle workshop; an art project past its prime; a DIY skate bowl; and sometimes it houses people in tents. The character of the place has rendered it fame and a name; it is well established as an urban void, and by the name "Ödetomten". It is Swedish for the deserted, or vacant, lot, in the definite form, as if it were the only one in town. In a blog on Norra Sorgenfri, it is also well documented by the name "Stäppen",[11] and the posts cover the proceedings at the city planning office as well as regular updates on what happens at Stäppen/Ödetomten (Norra Sorgenfri Nu). Ödetomten is not a forgotten or hidden place, from the point of view of many people in Malmö in their everyday life. And, for a few of them, this place is where they wake up in the morning.

Ödetomten has housed homeless people in tents and/or trailers from time to time during recent decades. In May 2002 there was a report in Sydsvenskan (the local newspaper) about the eviction of homeless people from the place, in an article that further states that it had long been a "refuge for the homeless, drug-addicts and criminals" (Sydsvenskan May 23rd 2002). In October 2004 and July 2007, yet more evictions from Ödetomten

11. Swedish for "the Steppe".

are reported (Sydsvenskan October 9th 2004; Sydsvenskan July 28th 2007). So, during 2014 and 2015, when Ödetomten came to serve as a temporary place for home for a group of people living in tents, trailers and cars there, it was nothing new. This time however, the number of people living at Ödetomten was greater, and local media more frequently reported the threat of and execution of evictions of people from the lot, as well as complaints about the use of the place, and actions taken by Malmö City regarding the issue (see e.g. Sydsvenskan October 21rd 2014; October 23st 2014; December 15th 2014; March 12th 2015; April 2 2015; April 26th 2015; April 27th 2015; August 13th 2015; August 16th 2015). The conflict that arose over the evictions certainly put Ödetomten on the map. For the sake of clarity, though, it should be noted that the interview conducted with the planner, to which we now return, was conducted before this larger settlement came about.

There is a certain dynamic to Norra Sorgenfri, said the planner, and maintained that one of the reasons for it was the tension between today's activities in the area and those to come tomorrow (Urban planner/civil servant 2011). Examples of current activities were given, stressing the interesting nature of the mix, as "artists and all sorts of different activities, from schools to offices, a dance school, driving test facilities, and the Migration Board office, and a variety of other things, and more manufacturing businesses and just the fact that the area is in use is important [for the development], but [Ödetomten] falls out of that [picture], since [it is] not being used" ([my translation] Urban planner/civil servant 2011). The activities and businesses that the planner discusses, from the planner's point of view at the City Planning Office, are all established, legal and with the paper work in order. With such a perspective, where the activities that count as 'activities' are approved ones, other events or goings-on fall out of sight.

At the time of the interview, however, Ödetomten was neither dead, nor a vacuum. It has during the last decade or so housed many people engaged in a range of different activities: doing art, living in tents, skating, burning copper. These are however carried on informally without permission or paper work, and maybe that is why they seem to pass unseen.

This disconcordance between the formal and an informal conception of the place is found also if one turns to the valid detailed plan for Ödetomten. From the, legally binding, detailed plan of the lot, issued in 1991, it is possible to read where the buildings were (or were to be) built and how many storeys the buildings were restricted to (Malmö stad 1991).[12] The contrast with what actually exists at the site is quite striking, as it is only the ramshackle that the detailed plan and the concrete place have in common. It is obvious that the detailed plan does not correspond with the present conditions. Even if it is still in force, it speaks of the past – not the present.

The plans produced by the city planning office during the last decade instead speak, as visionary plans do, of the future (Malmö stad 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). They outline Norra Sorgenfri's tomorrow. And even if the current activities at Ödetomten are briefly mentioned in some of these documents, the valid detailed plan and the visionary plans together form a silence in-between what was and what is to come: in this context, the *now* is void. It has been argued that planning is a utopic enterprise, and here it is a relevant argument as it points to how present places may be ignored in favour of the future places to come (Olwig 2002:23; Qviström 2009:190; cf. Strömgren 2007). This needs further clarification: "Utopia" is an imagined place where everything is perfect, however it is a place that does not yet exist but hopefully will in the future (OEDc). Hence, in the present it is as such a no-place

12. At the time of writing, the detailed plan from 1991 is still in force, however, a new detailed plan for the site is in the process of being finalised.

and that is also how it translates from ancient Greek, (u-topia) means "no-place". The concept of a utopia helps to express how the now can become a void. Or, a vacuum, in the above-mentioned planner's wording.

Another way of understanding this formulation of the void is to note how the notion of Ödetomten as regards the formal perspective lacks an up-dated conception of the place because it is *informal* – and therefore out of view. The lack of knowledge about these activites, or, the inability of the authorities to acknowledge what is un-authorised, is then what turns Ödetomten into a void. It is a void in the local plans and from a formal viewpoint; it is not void of things, people or vegetation. Nevertheless, the representations of this place as a blind spot, however little it has to do with what actually happens at the place or what is in place there, contribute to the production of Ödetomten as an*other* kind of space – as something not quite ordinary. But how is it that a space in the city can appear as a vacuum at all? For there to be a hole, there must be a whole, is the simple answer. But what does that mean? The next section elaborates that.

The rational and a hole in the whole

The development of urban planning rested on an understanding of the city as a whole, as an entity that could be efficiently planned (Sennett 1970:92f). In other words, urban space was conceived of as a delineated unit, not as a relational phenomenon (Massey 2005). Such a notion prevails contemporary planning practice, which "more generally have steadfastly retained their Euclidian or absolute conceptions of space, often tied to traditional institutional frameworks such as political and jurisdictional boundaries", as Michael Buser maintains (2012:280). Here, objections might be made, because yes, a lot of contemporary planning theory is characterised by a relational interpretation of space, and argue in

case for alternatives like e.g. a post-structuralist planning practice in which the plans produced are rather considered "fixities in the chaos of practical unknowing" (Balducci et al. 2011:492; see e.g. Healey 2007; 2008; Hillier 2011). Yet, there is a disconnect between theory and practice (Hillier 2007:33; Buser 2012:280). And even if – as my friend the planning theorist kindly and rightly remind me when my arguments get too simplistic – "There are planners who have read and who appreciates Massey just like you, you know", it is a policy field whose origins are technocrat. Despite the extensive critique made against this instrumental rationaliy, it "keeps creeping back into policy rhethoric" as Simin Davoudi writes (2015:317). Planning practice is grounded in deepseated institutional structures of legislation and land use control, and relational, non-essentialist theories and practices have been slow to be adopted (Hillier 2007:33). The legacy of Euclid, reinforced by a Newtonian view of spatiality, remains influential to planning ideas and practice (Davoudi & Strange 2009:13).

The idea of planning as a process of decisions taken on, and grounded in, rationality still dominates planning practice (Friedman 1998:246; Strömgren 2007; Davoudi 2009:214; Mukhtar-Landgren 2012:41; cf. Dear 2000:121f), and that is the core of the argument in this section. That idea (and what is important here) is that it thus influences the way in which the development of the urban fabric is understood. With such a perspective, the spatial politics that then comes to dominate the ordering of the City demands for urban space to be measurable and with well-defined boundaries it can then, as a *whole*, be ordered. With rationality further follows a concept of power characterised by causality that influences planning so that the object (the city/the city plan) is transformed in consequence of the subject's (the planner) actions (Mukthar-Landgren 2012:50). The idea of planning thus presupposes a distinction between subject and object, as it is

impossible to imagine planning without a subject that plans and an object subjected to this activity (Gullberg 1984:27, also cited in Mukhtar-Landgren 2012:50). The production of a city, then, becomes the process of designing social and material parts from a predetermined urban whole (Sennett 1970:93).

In a city understood as being laid out rationally according to plan, places are created as an effect of a planning process that has made definitions of them. This is the mere idea of a rational planning process – planning ascribes a certain function to a demarcated space and thereby a place with the designated function comes into being as such. In the process, delimited spaces have been defined, for example as a street, park, parking lot or office spot. These spaces are determined (as) parts of the whole, and together they form an entity: the city. This is not, of course, valid for urban voids. Urban voids are not generated as a positive by planning processes but in a negative way. In other words, they are the residual of planning processes; they are S.L.O.A.P.s (Spaces Left Over After Planning) that are defined only by their undefinedness. "Although sometimes included in plans, they often constitute the indirect result of planned building and exist in the outmost periphery of architects' and planners' intentions" (Wikström 2005:50). The urban void is perceived to be between distinct and legitimate planned forms and cycles, and they are as such not in the plan (cf. Foster 2014:126).

Urban voids are thus not defined by plan, except in a negative sense – by being what is *not according to plan*. From the point of view of a planning paradigm then, they might appear as gaps or blind spots. Or, as silences of unknowability, as illustrated in the example of Ödetomten in the previous section. Furthermore, the trait of the urban void of, so to say, being undefined according to plan (i.e. they are negatively defined by plan) leaves them open from a street level perspective, to be defined. That is, as they appear

undefined and open to passers-by, they invite appropriation. These spaces are then defined by appropriation. As such, they might carry many different names simultaneously, and reveal a schizophrenic character. In contrast to the rationally ordered space that surrounds it, this becomes the *irrational* – that does not respond well to any attempts to apply to it any *one* definition. To return to Sennett's representation of rational planning, he likens it to industrial production, where the product to be made is conceived beforehand (1970:92). "By envisioning the fruit of the labor in advance of labor itself it is therefore possible to plan the production process so that the 'parts are determined by the whole', since the parts of production are thought to have no life of their own, no role other than to work harmoniously toward the creation of a pre-planned entity" (ibid.). The urban void then, which cannot be known in advance, becomes a rupture in the process (cf. Brighenti 2013:xviii). It emerges as *a hole in the whole*. And so, the reading of the urban void has arrived once again at the undecidable limit.

How so? As a hole in the whole, the urban void negates the idea that the City can be fully/totally planned; it is the crack in the wall that reveals *the irrational in the rational* City. By being defined by appropriation it may take on new guises at any time, and when it does it no longer remains that undefined residual as which it first appeared. It becomes the haunting figure that escapes the dominating order of everything-ought-to-be-ordered.

On the other hand and at the same time – and this is important – the urban void is the *rational consequence* of planning: there needs to be gaps/holes/voids in the city, there needs to be undefined spots in order for new definitions to come in place. The development of a city demands "unused" land in order to grow. With the rational notion of development as progress that characterises (and legitimises) planning, vacant land is essential as it provides the moment

in *time* for growth to take *place*. The urban void is that moment and place, when and where urban space might be recharged.
The urban void thus appears here as carrying a double, contradictory value, and/or undecidable value (cf. Derrida 1981:221). It is what brings the irrational into the rational, at the same time as it is the rational consequence of the rationally ordered City. Thus, it destabilises the opposition of rational/irrational, which, as indicated above, is a constitutive feature of the modern City. As Derrida maintains, there are in every text 'blank spaces' that take on importance, and in the City, I argue, the urban void is such a space (1987:3). The urban void as an undecidable marks what can never be mastered (Derrida 1981:221).

Planned and unplanned in Brasília

To illustrate furher how the unplanned always sneaks into the planned, even in the most rationally ordered cities, Brasília provides a useful example. Brasília is the capital of Brazil and one of the most complete examples ever constructed of the architectural and planning tenets put forward in the CIAM (Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne) manifestoes, initiated by president Juscelino Kubitschek as part of his plan for rapid modernisation of the country, and inaugurated in 1960 (Williams 2009; Holston 1989). The CIAM formalised and spread the modernist ideals for architectural design and urban planning, which were implemented in the plan for Brasília by urban planner Lúcio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer, both whom were admirers of Le Corbusier's work (Williams 2005:123). Brasília materialises modernist ideas on urban development in the largest single project of architectural modernism, which UNESCO finds notable as a world heritage partly because of the "grandiosity" of the project (Williams 2005:124; UNESCO).

The literature on Brasília is, and was always, preoccupied with the Plano Piloto, the part of the city that was built in the form (if seen





Four images depicting Brasília, Brazil, as the “modernist dream” of a city that it is promoted as.





from above) of a bird or an airplane, and that hosts not only the governmental buildings and national cultural venues, but also housing and commercial zones (Williams 2009). It is designed according to modernist principles on functional zoning, which divides the city into different sectors with separate characteristics and end uses. This, the Plano Piloto, was also the form that, according to the myth, was all that was to be found in the scrappy sketches that Costa submitted to the design competition for the new capital of Brazil, Brasília (Williams 2005:125). That sketch eventually became the winning entry, and Costa, forming a team with Niemeyer, won the competition. Costa's plan for Brasília was that the city should be comprised by the Plano Piloto, and, only when that was completely occupied, by a number of satellite cities (de Holanda et al. 2001:1).

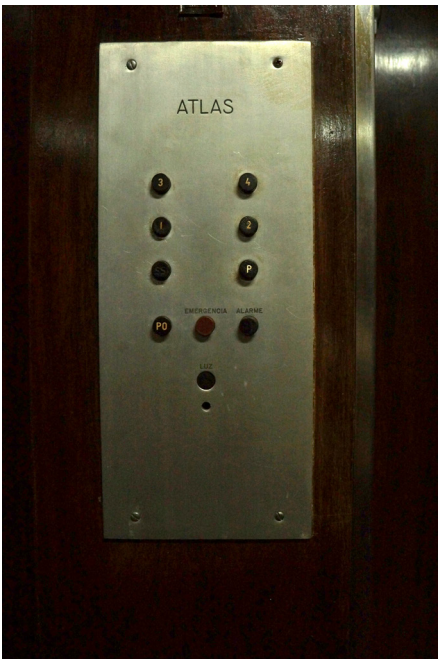
The machine metaphor aptly applies to this particular representation of Brasília. First, beginning with the shape of the Plano Piloto when seen from above (from, e.g., an airplane), it looks like a machine – a jet plane. The jet plane form was intended to symbolise the modernisation of Brazil – the country's trip fast forward into the future (Brandão Jönsson 2010:93). Kubitschek had promised that a modernisation process that in other countries took fifty years would in Brazil instead be completed within five years, and the new capital played a central role in this and in honouring the motto of the country, which is inscribed on the Brazilian flag: "Ordem e Progresso" (Eng. "Order and Progress") (Brandão Jönsson 2010:93,97). Second, the Plano Piloto was formed as a delimited entity built out of predetermined parts that would function of and by itself, as in Sennett's machine-analogy above. The plan was further constructed on the basis of a geometric pattern, with straight lines, the latter of which prompted Le Corbusier to write that "[w]hen man begins to draw straight lines he bears witness that he has gained control of himself and that he has reached a condition of order" (Le Corbusier 1987:37 [1929]). He conceived of the machine and machine-architecture as

incarnated geometry, and, according to him, there is "nothing in nature that approaches the pure perfection of the humblest machine" (Le Corbusier cited in Hooper 2002:59). Brasília was built with these ideals, of the straight line and the machine. Third and lastly, the priority accorded to the car needs to be mentioned, since it tells us that Brasília was built not only *like* a machine, but also *for* a machine: the car. By designing the plan for Brasília with a special status for the car, two birds could be killed with one stone: A) to honor the modernist ideal to reduce traffic congestion by reducing the number of streets and, as part of a Le Corbusian solution, building "great arterial roads for fast one way traffic" running through the city forming its two great axes east-west and north-south (Le Corbusier 1987:171). B) Making the capital a car-dependent city was a key factor in Kubitschek's plan for progress, which depended heavily on the creation of a domestic car industry (Wolfe 2010:113).



"Brasília was built not only like a machine, but also for a machine: the car". Here, the Monumental Axis running though the Plano Piloto (the aisle of the airplane, if the plan of the Brasília is considered as such).

A note on the dominance of the car in Brasília: Having just arrived in Brasília and left my bags in the apartment (with the address SQS 308 Bloco D – there are no street names in Brasília) where I was going to stay, I headed for the elevator to get out and see the neighbourhood. Staring at the letters marking the buttons in the elevator, my ignorance of the Portuguese language made me hesitate, as I did not know which abbreviation meant "ground floor". Feeling street-smart I pressed the most often used button, (easily recognisable by its worn looks), because, in the contexts I am familiar with, the ground floor button is always the one most often used in the elevator of a house. However, here the elevator took me to the basement garage. Eventually, I managed to find the ground floor and I had in the process learned the lesson that in this part of Brasília I was quite unique in leaving the house on foot rather than by car (Field notes February 18th 2014).



"Feeling street-smart I pressed the most often used button, (easily recognisable by its worn looks), because, in the contexts I am familiar with, the ground floor button is always the one most often used in the elevator of a house", Brasília, Brazil.

High time to get to the point now. Brasília was built as a celebration of modernist and rational planning ideals. However, here too, the rational is haunted by the irrational. In the plan for Brasília, there was no plan for where to house all the workers that migrated from other parts of Brazil to build the new capital. Hence, they built their housing themselves, and the informal settlement Cidade Livre (Eng. "Free City") was developed in the outskirts of what was to be the Plano Piloto (Williams 2005:129). This was not in line with Costa's plan, which designed the Plano Piloto as a unit that should not be "contaminated" by suburbs or other urban elements that did not belong. Instead, suburbs were to be built, as mentioned above, only when the Plano Piltoto was fully occupied, and then located as satellite cities far away from there (de Holanda et al. 2001:4f). Thus, the actual construction deviated from the plan even before the start, yet the favela and the people that built it were then, in fact, a prerequisite for the existence of Brasília. Even before it was in place, Brasília was thus a mixture of planned and unplanned. So, what in the plan was thought of as something external that would "contaminate" the Plano Piloto, the suburb, was essential to its creation and therefore not external but internal (cf. de Holanda et al. 2001:4f).

This representation of Brasília adds a nuance to the argument above on the urban void as the undecidable limit where the rational/irrational dichotomy destabilises. From the point of view of modern planning the favela of Cidade Livre, an informal settlement, does not conform to any rational ideals of urban development. However, constructed as a response to human needs as well as the construction process of building Brasília, it is not irrational. It is the rational consequence of the (ir)rational plan to build Brasília. The irrational and the rational here once again collapse into each other. The example of Brasília as such nuances the argument above on the urban void as the undecidable limit

between rational and irrational, as it shows that, even if this limit is highlighted or accentuated by the urban void, it is not unique to it. The urban void is not the only timespace capable of such destabilisation. The urban void, just like any space, is not easily tamed (again with reference to Massey (2005:152)). The assumption predicating the modern order that Le Corbusier and his colleagues designed – that time and space are unresisting materials, manipulable at will – is questioned by the example of Brasília, their own grandiose creation (Hooper 2002:58).

"An illicit settlement"

In the previous section, we saw how the urban void appears as an absence in plans and as such is merely defined in the negative, as a residual. Instead they rather defined by appropriation, by the passers-by who use it. Below, we will follow the eviction of people who had appropriated an urban wasteland in Stockholm, as an example of how a conflict over the definition of a place contributes to the making of urban *voids*, as an*other* kind of space. First, however, some brief remarks on appropriation as such.

The appropriation of space is a vast issue and the mere term 'appropriation' might suggest associations to Marx or Hegel (cf. Sandin 2003:66f). And, to Lefebvre, who (in connection to the two men just mentioned) makes a distinction between 'dominated' spaces and 'appropriated' spaces, where the former is the realisation of a "master's project" and the latter "a natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group" that have appropriated that space (1991:165). Even if my use of 'appropriation' here has a ring of Lefebvre, in the sense that I do so in order to distinguish between a definition made according to plan (which could be thought of in terms of a "master's project") and definitions that arise out of the use of a certain place

by anyone (which could be thought of in terms of having been altered to serve the needs of a certain group), I have no intention to further apply his dialectical binaries. On the contrary, there is a need to underline that there is no aim here to imply that space is defined either as an effect of a plan made *or* caused by a certain use. Any space is produced, and thereby defined, by a myriad of practices of negotiation and contestation and therefore it is in the interaction between different actors concerning a place that it becomes defined (cf. Massey 2005:154). This is the reason that it is, as I wrote in the beginning of the section, the *conflict* over a definition that is of interest here. Stating that the urban wasteland is open to appropriation, then, refers to concrete fact rather than alluding to a theoretical notion. Now, let us turn to the illustration.

"The hovels and tents that have been erected constitute an illicit settlement at a City property. The City has in no way given permission for any settlement or the like at the place. Thus the defendants have unlawfully disturbed the City's possession of the property and taken other illicit measures concerning the property. The settlement is a cause of great inconvenience for the City and for people that live or spend time in the area" ([my translation] Stockholms stad 2014).

The place that this relates to lies next to a bus depot and a main arterial road, on the fringe of a little wedge of wood between four suburbs south of Stockholm, where a small group of people have found a site for a provisional home. In other words, an urban wasteland. However, this description of the place is irrelevant as regards the City of Stockholm Development Administration[13] (CSDA), as the latter use the same formulations in all their applications to the enforcement service[14] to execute evictions of the people living at property owned by the

13. Swedish: Exploateringskontoret, Stockholms stad.
14. Swedish: Kronofogdemyndigheten.

CSDA (Land manager/civil servant 2014[15]). The quotation at the beginning of the section is from one of their applications, which we will keep by us in this illustration.

The CSDA are responsible for the land owned by the City for which there is no valid detailed plan. During the first ten months of 2014 approximately 20 evictions were requested by CSDA and carried out at their properties. In their applications, the CSDA always call for an interim decision, which can be granted if the case can be shown to be urgent (Land manager/civil servant 2014). It furthermore implies that the defendant (the person facing eviction) does not need to be informed before the decision is taken.

This particular place had been appropriated by seven men and women aged between 25 and 45, as can be seen from the application. This part is not copy+pasted, as the identities of the people to be evicted must be verified by names and birth dates in the application. These seven have made the place their temporary home. Photos attached to the application show two tents and two small slanting huts made of wood and tarpaulin, both with chimney-like pipes protruding through the roof, next to the huts are a table and a few chairs, a clothes-line where clothes are hung out to dry, a spade leans against one of the hut walls, and two black garbage bags lie behind a blue tent. The photos are taken in September and the trees are still green (Stockholms stad 2014).

This temporary home is "an illicit settlement" and a great inconvenience for the City and the people that live and/or spend time in the area, according to the City (ibid.). Even if there is no valid detailed plan in force, which would legally regulate the function of the area, there are other ways of defining this place. This place is not undefined, but rather, defined in different, conflicting ways.

15. Land manager at City of Stockholm Development Administration (Exploateringskontoret), Stockholm, Sweden. Email and phone conversation November 20th and 21st 2014.

First, there are laws that apply, providing a (negative) definition by stating what you cannot do here, e.g. no camping, no littering. The CSDA, who own the property but have no legal right to define it beyond the laws that apply, can thus rely on laws and regulations when stating a definition of the place. However, they also invoke additional arguments. In their application, the CSDA refer to previous appropriations made even before the matter of a temporary home/an illicit settlement arose.

According to the CSDA's argument, in consequence of *earlier use* the place is defined as a recreation area, even though it is not expressed in those terms. It states that the people living nearby, "who normally use this green open space as their recreation area, are now hindered from using it as before" ([my translation] Stockholms stad 2014). Occupation of the site as a dwelling-place is understood to be an impediment to its use as a recreation area. "This is of course also a consequence of the private sphere created by the settlement", the City states ([my translation] ibid.). The latter use has as such re-defined the place, which the City opposes. This line of argumentation is interesting since the CSDA have no capacity to assign a certain function to the place beyond the laws that apply. Here however, an earlier appropriation, such as the customs followed by people living nearby, is invoked as an argument as to why it should not be defined by appropriation in another, new, way. This presents a line of conflict between old and new habits, and between locals and strangers.

Eventually, the CSDA application to the enforcement service to execute evictions was approved and executed. The eviction in effect restored the un-order that characterised the place before the seven people built huts and put up tents at the place. I write un-order, which of course can be argued against: the use of the place as a recreational area was certainly one order. But it was a

definition made by appropriation and in that respect it does not differ from the later definition made. Neither "A recreation area" nor "A temporary home" are definitions according to plan, and in that sense, they are both, in a (however very strict) sense, variations of disorder. With the eviction, the appropriation by which seven people found shelter and somewhere to sleep was deemed illegal, in order to re-establish the earlier definition made in the same way – by appropriation.

Indeed, urban space is defined not only by plan, nor only by applicable laws, but also by norms and habits. The above illustration of an eviction shows how this plays out in a particular way at the urban wasteland, where the absence of a designated function, i.e. a definition according to plan, leaves greater scope for conventions to be manifested. In this case, the use of the place as a home not only broke the law, but also the norms ruling that place. Because the urban wasteland lacks a definition according to plan, the authorities have no definition on which to rely and can therefore choose to favour one particular use rather than another, on the basis of arguments of e.g. proximity and history (the people living nearby normally using the space as a recreation area).

This example is also an illustration of a very concrete way of turning a place into a void: to carry out evictions. It is a literal emptying of a place in order to restore order – but what order is it that is restored? Paradoxically, it restores an order that is of out of plan and defined by appropriation.

The map and the canvas and the tabula rasa

The map, and the way in which it makes the city visible, has had an important role in how the formulation and content of

spatial public policies have developed over the years. To enable an orderly development of the perceived un-controlled growth of the city, the land to be ordered needed to be known to planners and other civil servants involved in that project – and here, the map proved an indispensable tool. The following examines the map and how it orders the city as lines in a plane. It is a reading of the map as a canvas onto which modern day planners can project their ideas of an ideal city, which eventually juxtaposes the modernist notion of a *tabula rasa* with the urban void. The ideas of the map, the canvas and the tabula rasa then prove to give insights into the contemporary production of the urban void, as illustrated by the fictional case of Hamsterdam, an urban wasteland in the HBO TV-series *The Wire*. It is a montage that, in line with the previous section, further questions that the urban void becomes as a *residual* of attempts at ordering the city with plans (cf. Wikström 2005:50). The Hamsterdam illustration suggests that the urban void may very well be made, intentionally, a void by authorities for purposes of order and control. But we start with the map in our hands.

In the mid-1800's, new techniques permitted cities to be visualised in new ways – more detailed. From then on, the very existence of the city became inseparable from different initiatives that sought to produce true knowledge concerning the social fabric of the city (Osborne & Rose 1999:739). This "true knowledge" was about mundane techniques of gathering, organising, classifying and spreading information on the city (ibid.). The map could be understood as one of the ways in which truths about the city were produced. The facts that were included in this "truth" were such as could be visualised in a map: buildings, streets, and squares that could be represented as lines on a page (cf. Joyce 2003:54f). The map simultaneously made other things in the city invisible, such as e.g. social relations. In other words, the

map directs the planner's attention to the physical features of space rather than the social (Murdoch 2006:134).

What did this do to planning and the City? Modern planning thought matured in a positivist tradition and modern planning practice was a technocrat endeavour. Planning came to adopt an image of the city that derived its traits from the map, and the city became what could be visualised in the map: lines and well-defined areas of buildings and streets. From a rational perspective, the beauty perceived in the straight lines of a map also provided a blueprint for action: making the space of the city legible and thereby governable involved untwisting the winding alleys, and the smoothing out of any irregularities (Joyce 2003:55). Here, one might for instance recall Le Corbusier's love of the regulating line, which he found a guarantee against arbitrariness. "It brings satisfaction to the mind", he wrote (Le Corbusier 2007:32 [1928]). The straight line as such could thus provide comfort and quell a planner's fear of the irrational in the city (cf. Joyce 2003:55).

Furthermore, the model of vision enabled by these maps was the omniscient view of the surveyor, and the view of the city became characterised by a detached gaze, always looking upon its object – the city (Joyce 2003:35,52). And once the planners "held the map, they held the city; and once they held the city, they felt that they could mould it in line with dominant governmentalities of spatial organization", writes Jonathan Murdoch (2006:136). Understood as in this quote, the map did not only allow the planners to see the city, to know it – it also made them artists. Seen as a reflection of the confidence of the profession, the planner was presented as an artist who employed the city as his (because it was a he) canvas. The town planners, in service of their community, were to be given "freedom to become artists of their own cities,

portraying on a gigantic canvas" the expression of the life of the community (Unwin 1910:9).

For the modernist artist-planners, with great-men-representatives like Le Corbusier and Lúcio Costa, the ideal was the production of a pure, clean and rational space. It needed to break with, and improve upon, the city and civilisation of the past (cf. Hooper 2002:55). The blank canvas was thus the preferred starting point, or: the *tabula rasa*. As such, they can be understood as joining the forces, which in Lefebvre's words "make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them – in short, differences" (Lefebvre 1991:285). What did not fit into a geometrical grid was to be done away with and Le Courbusier promoted the idea that the blank canvas should be filled by one that rationally ordered the elements that were its subject matter. A geometric order was imposed upon an object (e.g. a building, a city, a body) perceived as passive (Hooper 2002:59). In other words, it was the planner who moulded the city into shape.

These ideas were put into practice. One example from Le Corbusier's work is the proposed plan for Stockholm, Sweden, which he submitted for a competition in 1933, where the point of departure is the tearing down of everything in the central city and starting from scratch to build a more 'people friendly' city. Lúcio Costa's winning entry for the competition in 1957 to create the plan for Brasília in Brazil was indeed something closer to a work of art rather than the way in which most people imagine an urban plan: as earlier mentioned, it consisted of no more than a few sketches of a cross, interpreted as a flying bird or an airplane, and nothing else – at least according to the myth (Williams 2005:125). Brasília is today on the World Heritage List, and the UNESCO website describes the city as "created *ex nihilo*" (UNESCO). *Ex nihilo* is latin for "out of nothing", and it is inscribed in the story

of Brasília, a modernist city dream. It is said to be built in the middle of nowhere, where there was nothing before Brasíla. But the *ex nihilo*-statement of Brasília is a lie: There were indeed people living in the area before the arrival of the bulldozers and construction workers (Brandão Jönsson 2010).

The map did three things of importance for the argument here: First, it made the city assumedly visible, it is the materialisation of the illusion that the City can be made perceptible through the lines and dots that make up a map. Second, it gave planners the impression that the city was a blank canvas, it made them artists, so that they could draw the city on that blank canvas, to create it from anew. These two points are what makes possible the intentional creation of the urban void in the illustration below. However, the map also did a third thing: At the same time as it puts some things in view, makes them visible, others are hidden.

In this third respect, the urban void appears (or disappears) as a *tabula rasa* within the city. It becomes a blank spot on the map: the traits of the urban void are seldom visible on a map or city plan, since in official plans it is characterised as being an unknown. The unknown void appears in the map as mere blank spots, as a space left blank. It is not marked in the plan as "unknown" or the like, since we make plans out of what we know, not out of what we don't know. And since what we don't know is omitted from the plan, the urban wasteland becomes a "nothing" in the plan – a void. As a void it makes up a small fragment of a *tabula rasa* in between the known parts of the plan/map: A blank canvas upon which the ideas and ideals of planners and other experts can be drawn/painted/applied. The view of the urban wasteland as a blank canvas is, however, predicated on unawareness, or ignorance, of the things and/or people already there. Hence, the urban wasteland perceived as a *tabula rasa*, or a void, is often a lie.

Major "Bunny" Colvin and the lie

Here, we return to Major "Bunny" Colvin and Hamsterdam, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. At a meeting with citizens of an area where drug-dealing is ever present and affecting their everyday life, police representatives have discussed the problem with them. The atmosphere is tense and the police present seem to have no answers that comfort the audience. At the end of the meeting, Colvin takes to the rostrum and one man in the audience asks: "So, what's the answer?" Colvin responds: "I'm not sure. But whatever it is it can't be a lie" (S03E29).

Later, standing before the cops in his command, Colvin reveals the plan he's been hatching, a plan to take back the streets from the drug dealers. The idea is to warn the street level dealers that they can continue to sell drugs, but they must limit their activities to one of three designated areas. Seemingly abandoned zones with vacant houses. As long as they confine their dealing to these areas, the cops will let them be. But if they don't accept the policy, they will be arrested and rearrested until they get the picture. The cops are outraged by the proposal, which in effect sanctions the illegal activity. Colvin, who is portrayed as a man with courage, vision and values and might, according to Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock, be regarded as exceptional "amidst the self-serving, the overtly corrupt, the ambitious, self-regarding and even the sadistic and self-destructive world of the police department" as it is presented in the series (2010:718), is not disturbed by their indignation, nor intimidated by the negative reactions from his superiors. As he is getting quite near retirement, and has already been exploring the possibilities of a job within the security sector, he could not care less. But (maybe) most of all, he is dissatisfied with what his life's work has achieved. Considering the condition of Baltimore, Colvin reflects on his long career: "The city is worse than when I came

on. So what does that say about me? About my life?" (S03E29). It says something about his level of ambitions. And the idea that will become Hamsterdam is Bunny Colvin's last deed: this is how he will leave a mark in the history of Baltimore. His idea is presented in a speech[16] of quite grand sentiment; it has the air of a Great Plan, which I write here as a reference to Le Corbusier or Lúcio Costa, or Baron Haussmann for that matter.

"Nothing but tumbleweeds", states lieutenant Mello (S03E029), when he and Colvin go out to explore the area Colvin aims to turn into a free zone. By that statement, the place is declared derelict, and the two partners have found what they need for the implementation of Colvin's policy: a vacant area to turn into a free zone. Or, in other words – a *tabula rasa* for the realisation of the Great Plan. The derelict place becomes the blank canvas on which Colvin can draw up his master plan for drug-free corners.

With the Hamsterdam policy, Bunny Colvin makes political use of invisibility. The basic idea of "brown-bagging" drug-dealing is to make it invisible. The inspiration was drawn from the habit of putting a bottle of alcohol in a paper bag, in order to be able to drink it in public irrespective of the United States "open container"

16. "Somewheres, back in the dawn of time, this district had itself a civic dilemma of epic proportion. The city council had just passed a law that forbid alcoholic consumption in public places, on the streets and on the corners. But the corner is, and it was, and it always will be the poor man's lounge. It's where a man wants to be on a hot summer's night. It's cheaper than a bar, catch a nice breeze, you watch the girls go by. But the law is the law. And the Western cops, rolling by, what were they going to do? If they arrested every dude out there tipping back a High Life, there'd be no other time for any other kind of police work. And if they looked the other way, they'd open themselves to all kinds of flaunting, all kinds of disrespect. Now, this is before my time when it happened, but somewhere back in the '50's or '60's, there was a small moment of goddamn genius by some nameless smoke hound who comes out the Cut Rate one day and on his way to the corner, he slips that just-bought pint of elderberry into a paper bag. A great moment of civic compromise. That small wrinkled-ass paper bag allowed the corner boys to have their drink in peace, and it gave us permission to go and do police work. The kind of police work that's worth the effort, that's worth actually taking a bullet for. Dozerman, he got shot last night trying to buy three vials. Three! There's never been a paper bag for drugs. Until now" (S03E27).

laws, which regulate or prohibit the existence of open containers of alcohol in certain areas/public space. If the police could not see the bottles, they could ignore the problem of public drinking and dedicate themselves to other, more highly prioritised, kinds of police work. With the Hamsterdam policy, the idea is the same, to hide away the drug trade and the dealers and addicts related to it in a place where it is out of sight for other citizens and where the police can look the other way.

What Bunny Colvin wanted to achieve with Hamsterdam, Baron Haussmann did in Paris in the 1860's: The latter's plan not only made the city more readily accessible for the authorities, it also put the social problems of poverty and deprivation out of sight behind the grand boulevards so that they ceased to be a visible problem (cf. Sennett 1970:90). Colvin creates an urban void in order make certain things invisible, to disappear, much like a black hole.

It does not go quite according to plan, though. Colvin's friend the deacon accuses him of having created a "great village of pain" with Hamsterdam ("Moral midgetry" S03E33). And when a free zone has been created, dubbed Hamsterdam and eventually turned into an inferno – Colvin sees an old lady stepping out at the front steps of one of the "vacant" houses, and realises that he has problems to face. He (and lieutenant Mello) had failed to see that there were more than tumbleweeds, that the area was not completely derelict. What he thought was a blank, was not. Thus, the answer he came to give, Hamsterdam, was a lie.

The idea of Hamsterdam required that the area in question was vacant. Major Bunny Colvin needed the place as a *tabula rasa*, or a blank canvas onto which his idea could be projected. However, the mere idea of a place as a *tabula rasa* is often, as in this case,

predicated on an ignorance of the people living there. As his Great Plan demanded that it should be empty, though, it was stated empty. The (intentional) creation of an urban void thus cannot be anything other than a lie.

The city as a 'growth machine'

Here, we leave a conception of the City as dominated by rational ideas of planning, for a notion of the City in which it is organised to accord with capitalism and the goals of economic growth. How may the becoming of the urban void as another kind of urban space be understood in such a context?

Money has a long history of dictating the urban structure. "Urban demolition and replacement became one of the chief marks of the new economy", wrote Mumford in the 1960's about the economy that was "new" in the 1600's (1961:413). Here, however, the perspective is (relatively) more contemporary and frames the city in terms of a 'growth machine', a metaphor first used in 1976 to describe the political economy of the City (Molotch 1976). This notion of the City is the facet through which the urban void will be considered in the below. First, the idea of the City as a 'growth machine' is elaborated, and then an illustration from Berlin is introduced. The illustration shows how a creative, yet the illegal, appropriation of urban voids is made legal in the name of economic growth and place branding, and it argues that this is not so much about allowing the spontaneous into the city as it is a way of controlling it.

Harvey Molotch argued that the very "essence of a locality is its operation as a growth machine" (1976:310), a slightly bold claim to make at a time when state Fordism was still in the ascendant (Parker 2011:79). However, the term refers to a notion of urban

growth not as a function of urban necessity but as the target of political action, which in effect bends the policy priorities of cities towards developmental, rather than redistributive, goals (Logan et al. 1997:605).[17] In other words, it forms a context in which the strategies that dominate the spatial politics of a city aim to maximise its successes on a market where it competes with other cities over investments and affluent citizens (cf. Harvey 1989). And since the publication of Molotch's article in 1976, urban boosterism has become an integral element of the contemporary politics of local economic development (cf. Boyle 1997).

These strategies have been termed 'entrepreneurial', and understood to be representative for the post-industrial city, which is the supposed successor of the industrial, Fordist city (T. Hall & Hubbard 1998; Harvey 1989; Jessop & Sum 2000; Dannestam 2009). Note, though, that the latter has not been replaced by the former in the way in which you change one record for another in your record player, as "the old" and "the new" City co-exist in 'the City'. E.g how contemporary urban spatial power is still influenced by a belief in rationality which supposedly characterises the modern city, as earlier argued. The Fordist model of governing the city was through regulated housing markets and functional zoning principles, suburbanisation and urban renewal with a strong connection between the state and the urban scale (Mayer 2013:6). This, the modern city development, was performed through large-scale planning, which during the 1970's and 1980's has gradually been replaced by 'entrepreneurial' forms of action (Harvey 1989:4). Today, the housing sector is deregulated and private real estate owners heavily influence the planning and building of our cities. The private sector plays a leading role in the spatial governing of cities (Mayer 2013:9). 'Urban government' has become 'urban governance' in a shift where it is recognised that the spheres

17. Even if a notion where growth and welfare are treated as two opposite poles is not unproblematic (T. Hall & Hubbard 1998:13f).

of the state, the economy, and daily life overlap and interact in the construction of politics and policy. There has been a proliferation of public-private partnerships and semi-public bodies in which public actors together with business as well as communities and voluntary groups develop and implement policy initiatives (Healey 2007:18).

The shift is commonly understood to have something to do with the oil crisis and recession of 1973, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods monetary system, and a de-industrialisation. But also, with a neoliberal[18] context, as underpinned by the belief that economic freedom and the system of private property is the prerequisite of other forms of freedom (Hayek 2007 [1944]). Furthermore, as the capacity of the nation state to control global money flows has diminished, investments have increasingly taken the form of negotiations between international finance capital and local powers, where the latter do their best to maximise the attractiveness of the local site (Harvey 1989:5, Brenner & Theodore 2002). Contemporary urban development is driven by the imperative of capitalism in general and by the requirement to attract investment, maximise profit and absorb capital in particular (Stevenson 2013:26).

With policies to attract 'the creative classes', these cities provide space and niches for artists and alternative activists to play important roles in gentrification and the sprucing up of earlier worn

18. The contemporary (Western) urban environment is sometimes described as 'neo-liberal', and/or, the object of planning – the city – is described as the 'neo-liberal city' (cf. Mayer 2013). Such a notion often implies a top-down analysis, where neo-liberal policies are implemented by planners in their shaping of the city, implying a causal relation between planners' action and urban space (cf. Scharenberg & Bader 2009:326). If it instead is acknowledged that there is a variety of actors influencing the production of urban space, and that cities are characterised by frictions and conflicts between and among these groups, it is more accurate to speak of a city dominated or governed by neo-liberal concepts, rather than a 'neo-liberal city' (Scharenberg & Bader 2009:327). The latter, they argue, gives little analytical space to the contestations within the city (ibid.). It enables an analysis more nuanced than one where the line of conflict is drawn between the authorities implementing neo-liberal policies on the one hand and counter movements on the other hand.

down neighbourhoods (Florida 2002; Stevenson 2013:145). This forms the context of the illustration below, which is the examination of such a policy: one that promotes temporary creative use of vacant lots. These policies are not implemented without conflicts, as not everyone benefits from the increased exchange value of the landowners (Jonas & Wilson 1999:6; Parker 2011:80). The marketisation of cities has created uneven geographies, of enclaves of wealth bordered by regions of deprivation and marginalisation, argues Mayer (2013:10). How so?

In the competition for global investors, affluent inhabitants and tourists, cities become their own brand. New policies that centre on the marketisation of cities have emerged: the branding of cities as event cities, culture cities, creative cities etc., all of which includes sanitation of urban environments for the purposes of consumerism (Mayer 2013:9). With the outsourcing of manufacturing to the global south, or relocated to production complexes in industrial zones far away from the thriving urbanised areas, the post-industrial cities of the global north have become "the playgrounds for the upper classes, serviced by armies of downgraded and increasingly precarious workers" (Mayer 2013:9). Now let us turn to one of those playgrounds.

"A considerable boost to future development"

Berlin, if considered as a text, has been written, erased, and rewritten throughout the violent 20th century, and its legibility relies on visible markers of built space as well as on images and memories repressed and ruptured by traumatic events (Huyssen 1997:59f). The urban voids of Berlin, irrespective of whether they are a result of the war, of the fall of the Wall or of de-industrialisation, are as present in the physical structure as in the image of the city. Some even claim that the voids are the signature of post-War Berlin (Girot 2004:35). "They are literal erasures of historical spaces," writes Christophe Girot, "since transformed into inaccessible or

undesirable ruins" (2004:35). "Inaccessible" and "undesirable" are however not a unanimous way of describing these spaces of Berlin, as they are quite often used.

At around the turn of the 2000's local politicians, planners, economic development officials, and city marketers started to recognise the temporary use of these spaces as a potential for the city (Colomb 2012:138). The Berlin Senate and other local agencies then started to formulate policies to support the temporary uses of vacant lots (ibid.). One such is the publication *Urban Pioneers. Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin* by Senatsverwaltung für Stadtenwicklung Berlin (SSB) (2007), which is both a policy document and a promotion material for the City of Berlin. It is policy material on administrative techniques to deal with subcultural appropriation of urban wastelands in Berlin as well as a publication promoting the city in line with the political will to strengthen Berlin as a "city for all creative people" (Lanz 2013:1305). It spreads the word to other cities on how to make use of urban wastelands at the same time as it portrays Berlin as a culturally vibrant city. This section considers the phenomenon of urban voids as presented in *Urban Pioneers. Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin* and reads it in the context of the City as a 'growth machine'. First, however, some words on the campaign of which the publication is a part.

The municipal government of Berlin introduced the brand campaign "Be Berlin" in 2008, and mayor Klaus Wowereit gave a speech at the launch, in which he not only stated that Berlin is poor but sexy ("arm aber sexy") but also declared the political will to strengthen Berlin as a "city for all creative people" (Lanz 2013:1305). It was however already in 1999 that Partner für Berlin GmbH (the city's official public-private partner in charge of marketing the city) began to market the city as the culture capital of

the twenty first century. At that point, the subcultures of Berlin had reached economic critical mass according to the marketing company, and some of the countercultural movements in the city began to be considered an engine not only of creativity but also for commerce in Berlin (Vogt 2005:50). These policies were an answer to Berlin's economic decline in the 1990's, when two thirds of the industrial jobs disappeared and the city was de facto broke (Lanz 2013:1312). Cities that are successful in the global competition race generate more demand for urban land (for housing, offices, infrastructure etc.) and increased exchange value for the landowners (Parker 2011:80). The city of Berlin had acknowledged the power of gentrification. It is within this context that the publication *Urban Pioneers. Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin* (2007) needs to be read.

The introductory part of the book are several pages of four colour photos displaying families and couples enjoying picnics in the sun set alongside the Berlin Wall, a woman training a horse on a hot summer's day at an empty lot, a man fishing from the Spree riverside, a dad and daughter playing pool at a wasteland like lot surrounded by brushwood. The sun is shining brightly in all the photos which show quite idyllic scenes from various urban wastelands of Berlin.

"Vacant sites and discussed premises are not a constraint but a prerequisite of restructuring. They are the spaces of the future: a training ground and experimental zone for the future city. They are a part of this city's wealth. This manual is intended as a practical contribution to realising their potential." (SSB 2007:18). In the preface of *Urban Pioneers*…, the Senator for Urban Development states that the vacant spaces of Berlin are a part of the city's wealth, and a potential to be realised. There is a positive, "always look at the bright side…"-perspective on the voids shown in the book and

it is an invitation to "[p]erceive the issue of 'temporary use' not as 'disturbance' but as a catalyst of urban and location development" (SSB 2007:23). Site-owners are said increasingly to recognise the benefits of the temporary users. The authors maintain that the use of urban voids hinders vandalism and decay, and that the projects at the sites create a new identity for the place (SSB 2007:40). The users are understood not only to produce value for the city as a whole, but also for the property owner. The "new identity" produced is understood in positive terms. "Many temporary use projects […] give a considerable boost to future developments" (2007:47). The urban voids – in this context – provide space for the city's possible successes in the race to attract investments and affluent citizens. Let's ponder this for a bit.



Guerilla gardening, a "creative" use of an urban void, at Tempelhof, the former airport, in Berlin, Germany.

I would like to dwell for a while on the above cited formulation that the use of vacant land should be perceived not as a "'disturbance' but as a catalyst of urban and location development" (SSB 2007:23). The word 'disturbance', in inverted commas, suggests two things: One is that there is somehow a connection between 'disturbance' and (the use of) the 'urban void', otherwise it would be (literally) nonsense to refer to *disturbance* in the same sentence as the urban void. If there had never been a perception of the urban void as a *disturbance*, at a time and place and among people that mattered, there would have been no point in bringing that characterisation to the table. Turning to the definition of 'disturbance' in the Oxford English Dictionary: "The interruption and breaking up of tranquillity, peace, rest, or settled condition; agitation (physical, social, or political)" (OEDd). It is a description that, as we have seen above, is often used for the urban void and/or the use of it; it interrupts a settled condition. The use of inverted commas signals that the authors need to distance the text from a conception that the urban void *is* a *disturbance*, in such a distinct way that writing *not* as a *disturbance* is not enough, but the inverted commas are needed so as to reinforce the negation.

Instead, of being a disturbance, it is put forward as a *catalyst* of urban and location development. I turn to the Oxford English Dictionary again: "A substance which when present in small amounts increases the rate of a chemical reaction or process but which is chemically unchanged by the reaction; a catalytic agent" (OEDe). It will bolster the urban and location development; yet remain unchanged by the process. It is an instrumental view on the urban void, which in this sense becomes nothing more than its contribution to the City's race in the competition among the economically most successful cities. As a *catalyst*, instead of a *disturbance*, the urban void is deprived of being something, anything, in its own right, besides catalysing the change of whatever surrounds it, while the urban void remains unchanged. As a *catalyst*, it will only reinforce the process already

set in motion, it will not disturb, that is, disrupt the process. This way of formulating the urban void hence disables its potential as something that could alter the set-up of urban development. I would argue that this is just another way of voiding the void; this way, it becomes a blank, a void. As (urban) space is continuously changing processes of becoming, then something (in this case the urban void) that is held constant, that cannot change, must be a no-space, a blank, a void. This however brings out the urban void as a disruption nevertheless (!), as a break in the otherwise always changing continuum of urban space.

This means that even when the city authorities regard the urban voids and the use thereof as something positive, there is still (as the discussion above reveals) a need to control it. In the following, we will see how this need marks the policy as a whole.

"Surplus space is a specific factor in Berlin that facilitates creative development" (SSB 2007:142). The surplus space offers free or cheap space for creative people to do projects, something that is understood to contribute to the branding of Berlin as a creative city. "The broad range of temporary use projects in Berlin has become a PR and economic factor for the city. Whether as a motor for creating jobs, a catalyst for the relocation of international companies or as an attraction for tourists, the financial stimulus generated by temporary users is increasingly important for Berlin as a creative metropolis" (SSB 2007:41). The temporary use of the urban voids is of stated importance to the City's development, and with *Urban pioneers*… it is made municipal policy. The publication presents administrative techniques to deal with subcultural appropriation of urban wastelands. In effect, it translates the voids and their use into the bureaucratic language of city planning. It is a way of giving them legal status, and at the same time placing them under bureaucratic supervision and control (Lanz 2013:1314).

Paradoxically, it encourages the spontaneous use by way of channelling it into and through a bureaucratic process, presumably leaving little remaining of the spontaneity in 'spontaneous use'.

The creative work carried out by 'creative people' in the urban voids of Berlin of course contributes to the creative aura of the city, no matter the legal status of the use. However, the municipal government and/or landowners cannot acknowledge the work if it does not adopt lawful means. By adopting policies for temporary use and creating administrative techniques to make legal what has been illegal, the City can recognise it as well as turning the work into PR in their branding campaign. This also means that the work that the subcultural, often countercultural, groups of people appropriating the urban voids do, is hijacked by the City (cf. Mayer 2013:12). Re-connecting here to David Harvey, frequently cited above on the issue of entrepreneurial cities, he wrote (even before the fall of the Wall) that "[i]f, for example, urban entrepreneurialism (in the broadest sense) is embedded in a framework of zero-sum inter-urban competition for resources, jobs, and capital, then even the most resolute and avant-garde municipal socialists will find themselves, in the end, playing the capitalist game and performing as agents of discipline for the very processes they are trying to resist" (Harvey 1989:5). The policy of *Urban Pioneers*…, might seem radical in the way in which it brings legal out of illegal and money out of waste, but it is rather ordinary in how it rids the urban void of its possible disruptive potential and disarms the 'countercultural' burglar (of urban land) into a money making artist in service of the City.

The urban void – a spatial paradox

"It is the mood of the beholder which gives [sic] the city of Zemrude its form. If you go by whistling, your nose a-tilt behind the whistle,

you will know it from below: window sills, flapping curtains, fountains. If you walk along hanging your head, your nails dug into the palms of your hands, your gaze will be held on the ground, in the gutters, the manhole covers, the fish scales, wastepaper. You cannot say that one aspect of the city is truer than the other, but you hear of the upper Zemrude chiefly from those who remember it, as they sink into the lower Zemrude, following every day the same stretches of street and finding again each morning the ill-humor of the day before, encrusted at the foot of the walls. For everyone, sooner or later, the day comes when we bring our gaze down along the drainpipes and we can no longer detach it from the cobblestones. The reverse is not impossible, but it is more rare: and so we continue walking through Zemrude's streets with eyes now digging into the cellars, the foundations, the wells" (Calvino 1974:66).

Just as the form of Zemrude is given by the mood of the beholder, in Italo Calvino's *Invisible cities* (1974), the urban void and its spatial representation changes with the perspective. One cannot argue that one aspect of the city of Zemrude is truer than another. And the urban void? Sure, the urban void is many different things. Consider, for example, an urban void such as Ödetomten. In the gaze of someone who lacks knowledge about what goes on at the site, it remains/becomes merely a *void* – produced as a space of unknowability. Such a space could furthermore appear as a *tabula rasa* to someone, like e.g. Major "Bunny" Colvin – and as such a blank canvas onto which any fantasies may be projected. A fantasy like Hamsterdam, an intentionally created urban void, makes serious problems disappear. Just as if it were a black hole. And what may be a black hole in one perspective is a place for home in another. That very place for home may in turn be deemed an "illicit settlement" and cause for an eviction to be carried out. If the person using the urban void is not a "defendant", as in the applications to the enforcement service to execute evictions, but

a creative "space pioneer", as in the policy that promotes the use of vacant land, the urban void could instead be considered "a considerable boost to future development".[19] What does it imply that the urban void depends on the mood of the beholder?

The lack of a designated function that characterises the urban void opens the way, as earlier noted, for passers-by to appropriate it and thereby to define it. But that is not all, as the very same absence of an authorised definition also provides greater (legal) space for authorities to decide what is appropriate use of a certain urban void. Put another way, the City could be thought of as a normative space of "proper"[20] places, that is, a context in which people behave and act according to expectations that are spatially distributed and determined – e.g. you drive your car in the street but do not gather there for a family picnic, you water the plants on your balcony but not in the park, etc. (Cresswell 1996:48). But at the places in the city where the "proper" is not clearly marked, the urban voids, the possibility for authorities to navigate between different norms and regulations is greater. It is in the power of the dominating discourse to decide whether a use is an "illicit settlement" or a "considerable boost to future development"; if the people using the urban void are "defendants" or "creative" "pioneers". The relative transparency in considering what is in or out of place that prevails in the well-ordered urban space is obscured in the un-ordered urban space.

There will, I hope, remain no doubt that this investigation of the urban void and the production of it as different, is not merely about words. The words that determine the urban void do not exclude the world, reality, history, but are what makes it (cf. Derrida 1988b:137). The othering of the urban void voids it of transparent rules and regulations, and makes the judgement of who gains access to these places arbitrary.

19. "Creative" is of course a quality judged in the eye, or mood, of the beholder. Is a person that constructs a place to live out of whatever is to be found in the woods and/or in the street *not* creative?

20. Here, somewhere, one might reflect on the close relationship between the words "appropriate", "proper" and "property".

At the same time, and on the other hand, the urban void is open to anyone passing by to appropriate it, for a while. The urban void thus remains a paradox. As has been shown in this chapter, it puts the irrational into the rational, yet it is the rational consequence of rational planning; It is a lie in an honest man's speech; It makes authorities praise the spontaneous by ridding it of any spontaneity, and pulling legal out of what is illegal. As such, the urban void destabilises any order that attempts to close it down. In a conceptualisation of space, Marcus Doel writes: "[S]pace is continuously being made, unmade, and remade by the incessant shuffling of heterogeneous relations, its potential can never be contained and its exuberance can never be quelled. What becomes of space always and necessarily eludes the grasp of every will to order" ([emphasis removed] 2007:809). Considered with Doel then, the way the urban void avoids any attempt at controlling it, does not make it different, but just like any space. However, the prevalence of paradoxes it produces in response to any strategies of making it an*other*, are to be found at few other places. Thereby, the urban void forms the undecidable limit of the City, and as such, not only escapes the urban order – but destabilises it by confirming it *and* contradicting it at one and the same moment.

4 A moment of indeterminacy

> Why you got to go and fuck with the program?
>
> (Fruit, *The Wire*, S03E29)

During Penelope's wait for her husband Odysseus to return home, a long line of suitors have queued up outside her place (Homer). To keep them at bay, she has stated that she will not consider their offers until she has finished weaving a burial shroud for her father in law, Laërtes. After seventeen years of waiting, she develops a strategy to prolong her waiting: at night, she interrupts the rhythm of weaving by unravelling the work she has done during the day. The product of Penelope's work changes from being cloth to becoming time.

The weaving of the shroud is the public account of her waiting, her official reason for not (yet) considering the suitors' offers. The weaving is active and productive; it is a deal with her suitors to work for the weave to be finished, so that she can give them her attention. Penelope's daytime weaving is waiting *for something*, directed to the future to come (Schweizer 2008:56f). Her nightly unravelling, on the other hand, is another kind of waiting; it is merely waiting for time to pass (ibid.). This is her private account

of waiting, and it is invisible to her suitors who cannot see her nocturnal unravelling. Seemingly unproductive, the unravelling is on the contrary very fruitful – it creates time. This is time unaccounted for, and represents Penelope's resistance to the patriarchal narrative (Schweizer 2008:57).

Weaving with Penelope

Consider how differently the value of Penelope's work might be interpreted. In the official account that she provides, the purpose of her work is a burial shroud. The product, or the result of the work, is both a thing (a weave) and a moment in time when she will conform to the role of the unmarried woman and consider the suitors' offers. By day, her work is done according to society's norms/expectations of her. In her private version of the work, the result is not a thing but time. A time over which Penelope has some amount of control, a time which is in effect an act of resistance. Both night-time and daytime work are productive, depending on the perspective by which the work is judged. A similar alternation of perspective, between an official and an unofficial account of time, provides insights to the timespace and politics of the urban void.

In the official time of the city, where the evolution and change in the urban fabric is according to plan, the urban void constitutes an important timespace: It functions as the in-between time, the gap, in which a certain space can be recharged. Perhaps something like a 'hesitation' (cf. Brunsdon 2010:91). To make a change possible, there needs to be a space in which the transformation can materialise, can take place. The urban void provides that time, that space, and is for that reason indispensable for the orderly development of the city. The urban void is a timespace-between that emerges when and where the authorised definition of a space in the city becomes invalid, when the definition is contested and/or void. According

to the planning paradigm it is hence a timespace waiting to be defined (by planners and/or other experts). Understood as such it is a moment of indeterminacy.

By her work at the loom, however, Penelope brings to the fore not only waiting but also rhythm. Her involuntary situation makes her (voluntarily) get out of step (Sand 2008:13). It is by the change in the rhythm of her work that she manages to create for herself a new timespace. With the idea of rhythm, i.e. sequential repetition, the differences between the waiting that Penelope does by day and that which she does by night can be discerned, and reveal how changing a rhythm creates an alternative timespace (Cavarero 1995; Sand 2008; Schweizer 2008). During the day, her waiting is conducted in the rhythmical and repetitive movements of her hand across the loom (Schweizer 2008:53). The day side of her waiting is purposeful in terms of the norms of society, and the time that elapses is measurable by the thumping rhythm of the loom: "[s]o one waits in the light of public expectation" (ibid.). The nightly unravelling, on the other hand, is a rejection of those norms. What during the day is a neatly ordered weave is during the night undone into a tangle of threads, and the rhythm is altered into something immeasurable.

Like Penelope's nightly unravelling, the time of the urban void is unknown – it runs according to a beat other than the official time of the planned city. This time is when the formal definition of a place becomes invalid. How does that happen? Imagine, e.g., the following: a site, which houses an office building. This particular office building was built sometime in the 1970's, a reddish-brown brick façade and small narrow windows behind which every employee has his or her own office. Four decades later, this office is hopelessly out of date, according to management consultants explaining the economic and organisational gains of running the

business in an open office space, with almost no interior walls (and those that are, however, needed should be designed according to the keyword "translucence"). The company decides to move to another, more modern office building. To get closer to the point here, the decision is made to tear down the old office building. This is done, and once the demolition is completed and the demolition workers and their machines have moved on, the site is no longer a lot that houses an office (although it still says so in the local plan), nor is it a demolition site since the fencing is down and with it the warning signs. And since the global economy declined at about this time, the company that was supposed to build the new open office was no longer interested in taking on the risk of doing so. Hence, dandelions started to grow last month and this, this is the time of the urban void. It is at this moment that the urban void might be appropriated, and thereby defined, by actors other than experts. It is an indeterminate moment, that is, without a known end point, and as such the urban void might be thought of as providing a time and a place outside the urban plan. Yet, at the same time, the urban void is also a moment that is required for a possible further development of the city – needed by developers and planners – and is in that respect taken for granted as a part of the planning system. It is a time of either/or, an arrhythmical break in the linear rhythm of urban development as progress. As such, interrupting, but also the very moment that permits the City to develop, and thus enabling.

Considered as a whole Penelope's work also creates a rhythm, in its oscillation between doing and undoing; between adaptation/acceptance and resistance (Sand 2008:13). Sand notes the timespace-between of this rhythm, between the weaving and unweaving, in which a definite decision is taken: a decision to unravel, which in turn questions the grounds for weaving at all, the weave here representing the patriarchal norms of society (ibid.).

I read the weave in the myth of Penelope as related to the urban structure, which is sometimes thought of as a fabric (see e.g. Kostof 1991, Osborne & Rose 1999, Crang & Travlou 2001). Woven together over time, it is determined by the warp and made whole by the threads. As a metaphor the urban fabric has temporal as well as spatial traits and here it provides a connection, a thread that runs from Penelope to the urban void. In this chapter, themes of waiting and rhythm form ways of making the arguments of the time of the urban void less abstract. The themes of waiting and rhythm are furthermore connected, certainly so in the city where waiting raises questions of temporal rhythm in architectural and urban design (Bishop 2013:136). The physical structuring of the City is as much a temporal one, as it seeks to direct and regulate timespace and its associated rhythms (ibid:138). Think, for example, of the argument for mixed-use planning (as opposed to modernist planning principles of functional zoning) creating a combination office spaces, housing and commercial space, to avoid exclusive office areas that become dead zones after working hours and vice versa, neighbourhoods that are emptied of people when the inhabitants go to school or work.

When I was working at the Malmö City Planning Office I sometimes guided groups of professionals from abroad visiting Malmö on a study trip, in the housing area of Västra hamnen, then only a few years old.[21] The guided tours where made by day, that is, during office hours, in an area where a majority of the buildings are housing (there are a number of commercial spaces in the outskirts of the area, but at that time, this was not a factor that seemed to contribute to the presence of people, and it did not, so to speak, raise the pulse of the area). During the tours, we seldom met any people. After a while spent walking in the neighbourhood, there was often someone in the group who asked: "Where are all the Swedes?"

21. Eng. The Western Harbour

The montage of this chapter is mounted around mainly three themes: the idea of waiting, of rhythm and the City, and the phrase "time is money", all providing different ways of reading the timespace of the urban void. The montage is an engagement with the time and temporality of the urban void. With further insights into the coming and going of the urban void, it aims to show how the urban void is inherent in the constant becoming of the City. As such, it is nothing more than an ordinary urban structure. Yet, as it appears and disappears according to an unknown rhythm, it is not fully comprehensible on the basis of a conception of urban development as progress (linear time).

Waiting and the void

Waiting can be conceived both as a link and a gap between the present and the future – as an interstitial timespace (Gasparini 1995). As such, waiting connects different times, but it may also be used as a figure of thought to highlight and concretise the idea that time and space must be thought together (cf. Massey 2005:18). Waiting is just as spatial as it is temporal. A kind of interstitial timespace is what bombsites in post-war London constitute in an exploration of empty spaces in British London-set feature films, in which Charlotte Brunsdon notes that they express the relation between past and future (2010:97). The bombsites are the result of war and the inscription of destruction and death, yet in the films they rather represent the future, as 'spaces of possibility'. Brunsdon illustrates this by the example of the attitude expressed by the doctor in the film *Waterloo Road* (1945): "The film is framed by the doctor's visit to the house of the Coulter family in a partially wrecked terrace, standing in empty ground by Waterloo Station, and he acts as a voice of authority and narrator. After advising the baby's mother not to indulge him if he is to be a good citizen, the doctor gazes at the surrounding devastation, concluding, on a note of optimism: 'Well, Jimmy my boy, you've



One of the two companies that each owns a part of Ödetomten, Malmö, Sweden, has put up signs on the fence surrounding (parts of) the lot. The sign to the left: "Activity in progress! We plan for new housing. The sign to the right: "N.B! Brownfield – entering is at one's own risk".

got the future, it's all yours'" (2010:96). As if the erasure and absence of what was, the built structures, provide space in which to imagine what is to come: the possibilities of something else.

The in-betweenness of waiting does not, however, need to imply a connection between different times in a horizontal linear movement, but might also refer to "an entrance into imaginative and experiential depth" (Bishop 2013:140). As such, waiting becomes not merely a disruption in a linear movement, but something that could be thought of as an entrance to an existential vertical dimension, as Peter Bishop states, with reference to the *axis mundi*, the connection between heaven and hell and a fundamental idea in the organisation of sacred space and architecture (ibid.). An existential verticality of waiting is also what characterises Bachelard's waiting space the corner, discussed in chapter 2, where "the past rises to the level of the present" (1994:141). In the following, the urban void is read as a moment in which different times intermingle.

The present of the future

Even though waiting is a verb, and most often used to describe something that a living being does, waiting as a figure of thought is here used to investigate the moment that the urban void forms in the urban fabric. A moment in time and space that is somehow alien to the ordered urban structure, yet somehow very ordinary. On the one hand it is a timespace waiting to be defined. On the other hand, that very moment of indeterminacy – that is, indeterminate from perspective of authorities unable to perceive of it in other terms than such – is what makes it accessible and open to appropriation and thereby possibly defined in many different ways simultaneously.

We experience time only when it does not coincide with what we want – when it is in conflict with how we thought time

would run, maintains Harold Schweizer (2008:16). With the urban void the time of the City materialises, and we can perceive the time according to which the surrounding ordered city changes – because at the urban void the (ordered) development is put on hold. During a limited period of time, the void is the constant against which one might measure the pace of the processes of change in the urban structure. From a perspective on urban change as a linear and smooth process of progress, the urban void is a halt or the jarring sound in the machinery, what disturbs the coherence. Yet, of course, the "empty" timespace constitutes a predicament necessary to enable the city to develop: for something new to be built, there needs to be timespace available for that building, and that is the moment of the urban void. Standing at an urban void, however, a sense of halt or pause is not always what comes to mind as there are often things going on. And sometimes, irrespective of one's perspective and expectations on the urban void as a dead space or the opposite, time still does not run as one thought it would: because it represents multiple times, and therefore, multiple definitions apply to the space. Ödetomten in Malmö exemplifies this:

If the formal (legally binding) local plan is considered, the function of Ödetomten is to house office buildings, small-scale industry and crafts (Malmö City 1991). A plan, issued by the local authority, is valid until another plan is made. In this case the plan in force was issued by Malmö City in 1991. Visiting Ödetomten it is however obvious that what you see and feel standing on the site, has little to do with the function assigned to the property in the local plan. The current physical version of Ödetomten is not synced with the representation of Ödetomten in the old – yet still valid – plan. The fire-ravaged ramshackle building remaining on the site, as well as the broken concrete,



marked by old rails for freight trains and overgrown by grass, is a reminder of how the site is defined in the plan – a place for workshops. At the same time, though, it is in its current state of decay an account of the inaccuracy of such a definition today.

It seems as if at least two definitions of Ödetomten are available: one according to the plan; and one that you make for yourself standing at the site. These two have no correspondence with one another and this, considered from within the planning paradigm, is a moment of uncertainty. This uncertainty, has (at least) two dimensions: one arises out of the discordance between the formal definition (the local plan) and the *de facto* definitions (perceivable standing at the site), and the other one is that the end point of this moment is unknown. As of now, there is no certainty as to when this discrepancy between definitions will cease to characterise this place.

"The fire-ravaged ramshackle building", at Ödetomten, Malmö, Sweden.

At the urban void Ödetomten the old lingers – very visibly so in the shape of ruins, parts of railroad tracks, a fire ravaged shack. Ödetomten is clearly left from another time, and the contrast with the neighbouring lots is stark. Yet, there are also people and things on the site today, in the present, from which one can read current definitions of the place. By taking urban voids into account, by seeing the city from standing at a space between, it is obvious that the old and the new exist simultaneously in the city. St Augustine defined waiting as "the present of the future" (St Augustine cited in Gasparini 1995:30). The urban void makes room for another time, which is a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" in the words of Massey (2005:130), but by being in wait – also inhabits the future, the stories-to-come.

'Blank' or 'black?

Waiting as a phenomenon, however, connects not only different times (as was argued in the previous section), but additionally also makes certain places akin. As in the description of the waiting room of a 1969 Brooklyn emergency ward, in Paula Fox's novel *Desperate Characters*: "It was like a bus station, an abandoned lot, […] subway platforms, police stations. It combined the transient quality, the disheveled [sic] atmosphere of a public terminal with the immediately apprehended terror of a way station to disaster" (Fox 1970:131). It could also be other places that are physically and temporally outside the dominant and privileged flows, like refugee camps or places next to closed borders where asylum seekers are hostages (cf. Conlon 2011; Mountz 2011). Waiting places, or places in wait for that matter, share the dishevelled atmosphere that grows off the beaten track. However, waiting for the dentist is hardly comparable to being detained as an asylum seeker. "For asylum-seekers, these sites are often associated with waiting, limbo, disruption of life before and after and legal and jurisdictional ambiguity that inhibits access to rights and protections encoded in domestic and international law" (Mountz 2011:381). So, even if waiting places

share certain features in being zones of exception, the experience of being at these places of course varies. The following though, elaborates the urban void as a zone of exception with the aid of other kinds of waiting places, and interprets it as a 'blank figure'.

"Typical for an unsettled in-between time is the experience that anything or nothing can happen", writes Kärrholm and Gunnar Sandin (2011:1) in their article on waiting places, in which they point to waiting places as carrying a transformative potential by providing a timespace for thoughts and activities that might not otherwise be given time in a busy everyday schedule. These timespaces could hence, with reference to Latour, be thought of as having agency in themselves. for example, at train or bus stations, designed as a clearly demarcated area of their own in their own right as a waiting place, are however becoming less and less prevalent in contemporary cities. Instead, what used to be waiting places, free from pre-programmed time (as, e.g. in Fox's novel), have since the 1990's been increasingly integrated with a consumer environment (Kärrholm & Sandin 2011:3). Now, there are shops and often a variety of places where to buy food, and far fewer places to sit. What was earlier a 'gap', where "anything or nothing could happen", is now filled with non-waiting consumer-related activities. Planning and urban design intentionally seeks, not only to provide aesthetic and functional spaces, but also to regulate timespace and its rhythms (Bishop 2013:138).

Waiting is not allowed to work as, in the words of Serres (2015 [1991]) and Hetherington (1998), a 'blank figure', that is, a person or thing that could be inscribed in a social context with almost any kind of agency or signification, like a stranger, a scapegoat or the joker in a deck of cards (Kärrholm & Sandin 2011:8). This kind of agency, blankness, seems to be a threatened ecology of waiting places. There is a disarming of blank spaces, a pre-programming

of a lot of different kinds of urban spaces (not just waiting places) but also of "blank moments", filled by temporal architectonics (ibid.). The urban void is a 'blank figure' in the sense that "the text has yet to be written in this space", in Kevin Hetherington's words (1998:126). That is, there is either no function according to plan assigned to it, or no authorised definition of the place that does not seem out of place. In both instances, the definition of the place is uncertain. This is only the case, however, if the urban wasteland is considered from within the planning paradigm that it may appear as a space where the text has yet to be written. In such a perspective, the only text/definition that counts is that which is given to it by the one with authority to define urban space legally. The urban wasteland is thus *made* a blank figure by being set to wait for a definition, and by being formulated as a 'blank space', a 'no space' or an 'urban void'.

To spell this out more clearly: In terms of the urban void, the only blankness of it is the closing down of it as a 'dead zone', or a 'no space', caused by an inability to see it as anything other than *nothing* – as it is not legally defined as *something*. The effect of this blankness however, is its opposite. It is that very blankness that opens the urban void up to appropriation, and to its being defined outside any regulations. It is what makes the void instead a 'black figure', i.e. abundantly filled with different meanings. As such, it destabilises a conception of the City in which the urban wasteland is nothing, as well as questioning the idea that it has to *wait* for a definition (to be made by institutions with the authority, by planning laws and/or money to do so).

To illustrate the argument above, one might recall the example of evictions from an urban void in Stockholm, Sweden, which was discussed in the previous chapter. At a space next to a bus depot and a main arterial road, at the fringe of a rather small wedge of

wood between four suburbs south of Stockholm, seven people had found a temporary home and put up tents and small huts. It is a place that is not regulated by a detailed zoning plan and, as such, it is not legally defined as anything. A place owned by the City of Stockholm that most likely, as Stockholm is a growing city with a will to expand, will be developed at some point in the future. That point is however unknown, and at the moment immediately before the party of seven decide to take shelter here, it is a space in wait. When the City of Stockholm Development Administration (CSDA) is notified about the settlement, they take action. An eviction (carried out by the enforcement service commissioned by the CSDA) erases traces of the spontaneous appropriation, and what it in effect does is is to reinstate the urban void as a 'blank figure' – as a space where the text has yet to be written (Hetherington 1998:126).

The only result of the eviction, however, and as noted above about the effect of the blank figure, is to leave the urban void open to (new) appropriations. The enforced blankness that the eviction then constitutes, may therefore be understood to inhabit its own impossibility. Beyond the theoretical implications that this section thus concludes with, showing yet another way in which the urban void may be understood as an undecidable, it highlights the recurrent evictions of people from their temporary homes in vacant lots as a paradox, or an activity biting its own tail.

Rhythm and the City

Cities are sometimes described in terms of speed, as if they are "fast" or "slow". Some places within cities are thought of as "fast", because they are sites of intense activity, while other are perceived as slow, where activities and movements are performed in a leisurely manner, and therefore experienced as "breathing spaces" of the

city (Wunderlich 2013:383). The city further inhabits a variety of different temporalities – calendrical, diurnal and lunar, life-cycle, somatic and mechanical – whose rhythms are an important factor in our experience of social time and its organisation (Edensor 2010:69). Taking rhythm as a point of departure to understand the temporal dimension in the production of urban timespace is helpful, since (just like waiting) it connects time and space. "Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm", writes Lefebvre (2004:15), whose writings on rhythmanalysis have inspired studies of rhythm in the urban environment. Much of the literature on urban rhythm that take Lefebvre's rhythmanalytical texts as their point of reference, considers it from a street level perspective, e.g. the movements of the traffic, the speed of people walking, the pounding sounds from a construction site, etc. (see e.g. Allen 1999; Bank 2007; Edensor 2010; Mareggi 2013). As will be argued in this part of the chapter, however, rhythm is helpful in the analysis of the becoming of the urban void also according to other urban scales, like a 'macro' level (see further the section "Urban life cycles"). But for now, the text stays for a while with Lefebvre and the street level.

Rhythmanalysis

To Lefebvre, rhythm is inseparable from the notion of time and repetition (Lefebvre 2004:16). In his posthumously published book *Rhythmanalysis. Space, Time and Everyday Life* Lefebvre expanded on rhythms and the method of rhythmanalysis – the ambition was no other than "to found a science, a new field of knowledge […] with practical consequences" (Lefebvre 2004:13). Rhythm as a concept has been used for investigations in many different fields of research, however Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis is still far from being a well-developed research method, it is even frustratingly vague (Elden 2004:196; Koch & Sand 2010:63).

"The rhythmanalyst strolling about perceives more the ambience of a city, rather than the image flattering the eye; more the atmosphere than the spectacle" (Meyer 2008:156). The ambience of the city is indeed a sensory perception; you not only hear or see a certain rhythm – you feel it. To engage with the rhythm of the city is to direct your attention to the unwritten aspects of the city. Writing to explore the temporality of the urban void, becoming attentive to human movement through the city helps one to grasp the city beyond the formal plans (cf. Degen 2010:23). The beat of the urban void is to be found somewhere where the official rhythm meets an unofficial rhythm; there is the time of the urban void.

Let us again recall the example of Ödetomten, which earlier in this chapter illustrated how one might get a sense of the different times that run alongside each other there. These different times could not have been grasped merely by armchair research. One needs to be present in order to perceive the past, to see the remains of what was. To grasp the rhythm of the urban void, however, the observations need to be contextualised by other knowledge, i.e. such fetched from the study of plans or through interviews. Why? Because a rhythm is always relative to other rhythms (Lefebvre & Régulier 2004 [1986]:96). In order to grasp such a fleeting phenomenon as a rhythm, it is "necessary to situate oneself inside and outside" (Lefebvre 2004:37). Lefebvre, very specifically, proposes that one should place oneself on a balcony watching the people coming and going, the traffic lights changing (2004:37). One is then simultaneously both inside and outside in relation to the street below. In terms of the urban void, there is no clarity as to what constitutes its outside, or its inside, as it is a kind of space between. However, I instead read it as an injunction to oscillate between different positions vis á vis the object of study, e.g. by approaching the city through different kinds of material and, not least, to read it at different scales. One of them is the scale of the body.

Rhythmanalysis implies thinking with and through the body (see e.g. Degen 2010:24, S. Johansson 2013:208). "The whole of the (social) space proceeds from the body" writes Lefebvre, and continues: "The genesis of a far-away order can be accounted for only on the basis of the order that is nearest to us – namely, the order of the body" (Lefebvre 1991:405). Any rhythmanalytical project thus turns attention to the body in the city. In the practical part of such a project, the analyst might assume the role of flâneur, walking through the city, observant of the ways in which the body perceives the city (cf. S. Johansson 2013, Wunderlich 2008); or, sitting on the balcony as proposed by Lefebvre (2004:37). Solnit suggests that "[w]alking the streets is what links up reading the map with living one's life, the personal microcosm with the public macrocosm; it makes sense of the maze all around" (2000:176). In other words, walking the city in a study of urban voids is one way of discerning the connections, or disconnections, between the everyday experience of an urban wasteland and the official account of the place found in plans or other documents.

The body is the key: the rhythm of the body is one against which you can measure/feel other rhythms. The importance of the body to the rhythmanalytical project is also that it enables us to understand how space connects to time in the analysis of the urban void. Our body is our immediate experience of space, as it is the way we exist in the world – it immediately contributes to the production of a certain space. The rhythms of everyday life – eating, sleeping, moving etc. – are the way our bodies communicate with the rhythms of the outside world, e.g. when night turns into day and day turns into night. Acknowledging the rhythm of those movements makes it possible to comprehend the abstract phenomenon of time.

As it has been I, the "I" who is writing this text, who has been making observations for this study, my body has been present on those occasions too. It seems an obvious fact, and almost ridiculous



even to state, right? Well, I had not reflected much on what that implies until one day, when I had made one of my first observations at Ödetomten in Malmö. This was at a time when there were no people living at Ödetomten, and the place was a vast, unkempt field with a lot of junk. During that occasion I was approached by a man who asked me if I wanted to have sex (Field notes May 17th 2011). I, who in the moments before, had thought of myself as a 'researcher' out doing research just as any 'researcher' might, was suddenly perceived as a 'woman potentially selling sex'. The contrast was stark. The moment was however rewarding in insights, as it was suddenly obvious that I would not pass unnoticed when conducting research at urban voids – my own body would always be present. This is a significant observation, since (as I have realised from making more observations) the person active at the urban void is almost always a man. Hence, as I identify as woman with a female body, my presence will be odd at these places. In her iconic essay "Trowing Like a Girl" Iris Marion Young writes: "We [as women] feel as though

Statue of a semi-nude woman by the skatebowl at Ödetomten, Malmö, Sweden.

we must have our attention directed upon our bodies to make sure they are doing what we whish them to do, rather than paying attention to what we want to do through our bodies" (2005:34). In being a PhD student, aiming to talk the talk and walk the walk of 'a researcher' I have, in Young's expression, tried to make sure that my body was doing nothing: a 'researcher' is brains, not body. Thus, even if I had already understood that bodies matter for the study, I was quite reluctant to realise that my own body likewise matters. But of course it does, as my body, like all bodies, is categorically marked and hierarchically ordered, which contributes to constituting both how I become a bodied subject in a particular place, and also how that very place comes into being (Hooper 2001:704).

Urban life cycles

Here is where I leave the street level for a while, to consider urban rhythm at other scales. Seen in light of the City as a planned entity, the urban voids are the moments in-between the temporally defined, i.e. planned, urban space. If planning is successful and – it is necessary here also to take an economic dimension into consideration – the building sector is currently making money, the urban voids are often short, very short moments in time. They might not even arise. If planning is less successful and/or the economy is weak, urban voids come into existence. One cannot, however, know in advance how long they are going to last. The urban voids only exist in-between, and have no intrinsic essence but their in-betweenness. Their becoming might come sneaking, with a slow decay of a construction at a certain place, but it might also come abruptly, as a result of complete demolition. The urban void then exists as a space lacking an authorised definition, for some time, before it is developed and/or defined. This is *another* rhythm of the city, a rhythm that is unknown until it sounds.

To know the rhythm that the appearing and disappearing of the urban voids produce in the urban fabric, one might imagine the

following: You are sitting on a cloud above the city. From here you see the whole city, from east to west, from north to south: fringe-to-fringe. You see the housing complexes and offices, parks and streets. And as you sit there for a century, you see the buildings and parks and (probably more seldom) the streets change, and as a part of this process you will see urban voids come and go. Such a macro perspective will give you a possibility to perceive the rhythm at which the urban voids perforates the city, and to get an overview of how a city gradually transforms. The urban voids appear as breaks in the life cycles of urban properties. A life cycle that in each case, at each property, is the construction of a building → the building standing there → starting to decay → the tearing down of the building. The urban void is the moment when and where there is a pause before the above described life cycle starts all over again, when there is maybe a longer break than usual between tearing down and constructing anew. The urban void could also come into appearance from being a rural field in the outskirts of town → its surroundings (other fields) comes to be built and incorporated in the urban structure → the field becomes a gap in the urban fabric. The urban voids come and go, according to an unknown, yet highly manifest (if you have ever turned your eyes towards those parts of a city) rhythm.

Turning to read the City strictly through a modern planning paradigm however, the time of the city is framed differently – Western urban planning is based on ideas of development as progress, and thus on an idea of linear temporality (Sztompka 1993; Rydin 2007:53; Healey 2012:191; Mukthar-Landgren 2012:79ff). The notion of progress is inherent in modern planning as knowledge is understood to accumulate over time, by which societal improvement follows from the use of more and better knowledge through planning (Rydin 2007:53). The discourse on progress is one that is based on the idea of the improvement of place and

of that improved place as moving forward in a linear social time (Hetherington 2001:53). Urban development, understood as such, is irreversible and determined to follow a certain, linear and horizontal, path. The old society is no more – it has been replaced by a new.

The linear repetition, writes Lefebvre, comes from institutions of society, social practice, "the monotony of actions and of movements, imposed structures" (Lefebvre 2004:18). The cyclical repetition on the other hand originates in nature: days, nights, the tides of the sea etc. (ibid.). These two models of time, the linear and the cyclical, have typically been those available when we try to make sense of temporal movement, and as Fanny Söderbäck reminds us, each of these have traditionally been associated with its own mode of subjectivity (2012:301). Women, often relegated to the 'natural' and to embodiment, have become the bearers of cyclical time, while men, suborting nature and body in the name of culture and reason, are the holders of linear time and the progress associated with it (ibid.). The argument is however not limited to the relation between men and women, but the point may be extended beyond that since the same phenomenon occurs in the embodiment of e.g. poverty and race (Deutscher 2002:119). Furthermore, it is an argument that illuminates how the urban void, if represented as a phenomenon of cyclical time in a context of urban development characterised by linear time and progress, becomes as a deviance from the norm in a temporal sense as well. Then, the urban void becomes the *other*, reduced and bound to presence and cyclical repetition with its only purpose being to provide space for the future of the well-ordered city, which in turn is marked by a movement forward, of progress and futurity (Söderbäck 2012:302,307). This dichotomous representation of the temporalities of urban void on the one hand and the neatly ordered urban space on the other hand, however, should not

stand unchallenged for long. The orderly development of the City may just as well be described as cyclical, consider e.g. the example from Berlin below.

What is, perhaps, an overly manifest illustration of the cyclical rhythm of urban change is the place in central Berlin that for many years hosted the Berliner Stadtschloss (Berlin City Palace). Beginning in 1443, the palace was constructed and reconstructed over the centuries and served as a residence for various electors of Brandenburg and subsequently for Kings of Prussia. After the fall of the German Empire in 1918 it was turned into a museum, which in 1945, during WWII, was badly damaged in an air raid by the Allies. In 1950, the authorities of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), decided on its destruction, politically motivated to mark the new Communist state's break with the past. The cleared space was named Marx-Engels-Platz and initially used as a parade ground, until in 1976, the modernist Palast der Republic (Palace of the Republic) was inaugurated and hosted the GDR Public Assembly as well as a concert hall and other public venues. The Palast was later discovered to be contaminated by asbestos and hence it was closed. After German unification the decision was made to demolish the building, which was carried out between 2006 and 2008. In 2008, the City of Berlin grassed over the remaining foundations of the Palast der Republic, "[c]riss-crossed by wooden paths, the grassy area has a nostalgic touch of the countryside about it" as the Stiftung Berliner Schloss states on their website (Stiftung Berliner Schloss). In 2013, however, the first sod was turned in the reconstruction of the Berliner Stadtschloss, now to reappear as a public venue under the name Berliner Schloss-Humboldt Forum. Where I once followed the demolition of the Palast der Republic, I have now seen part of the construction of the Berliner Schloss. Viewed from the outside, I have noticed that these instances share attributes: the presence of workers in neon yellow, scaffolding, and the fence surrounding it

all, complete with warning signs. But where demolition tears apart, construction puts together, and creates places very different from each other, yet it is the same place. Or is it? By following the place of the palace over the centuries, through wars and political change, one gets the sense that things run in circles, and this place as part of the city is at every moment finished, yet unfinished: the city is in a constant mode of becoming.

Having questioned the representation or the time(s) of the City and the urban void as a dichotomous relation of linear and cyclical temporalities and in the illustration above represented planned urban development in cyclical terms, it still remains that the respective rhythms of the urban void and the well-defined urban space to some extent are different beats. And a rhythm is always relative to other rhythms, and the urban void is not perceivable outside the planning paradigm. The rhythm of the urban void needs to be considered next to the rhythm of the well-defined urban space in order to exist at all, an argument that is as valid the other way around: the rhythm of the ordered urban fabric must be perceived next to the rhythm of the urban voids to be comprehensible *as ordered*. As Schweizer argued, we experience time only when it does not coincide with our will – when it is in conflict with how we thought time would run (2008:16). The respective different rhythms of the void and the ordered urban space make up that conflict. The next section continues the elaboration of the temporal relations between the urban void and urban planning.

The control of the beat

There might be tensions as regards whether to define 'urban planning' as being about long-range plan-making or about incremental adjustment, about tensions between a notion of the same as a product of systematic research or of *ad hoc* solutions (Fischler 2012:108). But irrespective of that, planning is still a practice by which a society controls the development of cities, and seeks

to manage the inherent macro-rhythms of city life, such as the influx of new inhabitants creating a need for new housing, or the continual decay. The urban planning office, or the equivalent, of a city must strive to assess the plans in accordance with such rhythms. Plans aim to dictate the rhythm of places, the becoming of places, in a manner that makes them appear as stable, finished, defined. To make them beat in the same rhythm, or if not, at least in rhythms that go well together. The control of a unified rhythm, for that matter, is also connected in a very concrete sense, to the growth of the modern City: A unified time-reckoning was created as a means to control territory and the need for this varied with the growth and decline of state units, but as urbanisation and commercialisation grew, the need for an orderly synchronisation became urgent: to have "a smooth running continuous time-grid as a common frame of reference" (Elias 1992:54). To establish and maintain it was the function of central authorities (ibid.). Sync your clocks, and prepare your plans! This section ponders what plans do to time in the City and the production of the urban void.

Considered over the (more than) hundred years that urban planning has been the institution through which Western societies organise urban space, space has been perceived in a uniform way, within the confines of narrow administrative boundaries (Tewdwr-Jones 2011:25). What was evolved in the project of modernity, and which is still with us today, as Massey notes, is a way of imagining space that refuses to acknowledge the multiplicities and dynamism inherent in space (2005:65). That is, a notion of space that is a-temporal; space as something distinctly different from time. Urban planning has a historic desire for permanence, a yearning for fixedness that involves the planner's wish to legitimise the intervention of planning in the urban structure, which requires space to be *pinned down* (Tewdwr-Jones 2011:25). It is, in other words, a static conception of urban space. The pinning down of space furthermore requires the urban

temporal rhythm, the movement and flows, to be controlled and incorporated in the time-line of the plans that have been drawn up and passed. The City is an ensemble of rhythms that interweave in and across place, it does not beat *thump-thump-thump* according to a pre-programmed linear rhythm (cf. Edensor 2010:69). The multiple rhythms produce a dynamic timespace, or, where place appears to be stable, the multiple rhythms disguise the endless maintenance of them "through the serial reproduction of its consistencies, through the reproduction of the changing same", as Tim Edensor writes (2010:69). Hence, the closing down that planning performs on urban space (discussed in chapter 3) is an argument valid also in temporal terms. The 'politics' that orders urban space, i.e. planning, works not only by dominating space, but also by organising the time of the city. Planning is set up to organise urban timespace so as to make it appear, at every moment, defined. In such a context, the moment the urban void appears reveals a hole in the otherwise neatly ordered fabric of urban timespace, or it makes a discordant sound in an ordered urban rhythm. This hole, or discordant sound, is not, however, external to the urban fabric, but a gap that provides a time when, in a concrete way one, might understand the abstract idea of the City as being at every moment unfinished.

Put in another way, with the urban void read as a kind of borderland, an interstitial zone of deterritorialisation and displacement, one might agree with Gupta's and Ferguson's contention about borderlands that "[r]ather than dismissing them as insignificant, as marginal zones, thin slivers of land between stable places, we want to contend that the notion of borderlands is a more adequate conceptualisation or the 'normal' locale of the postmodern subject" (1992:18). That is, if we let it, the urban void, with its rough and seemingly undefined appearance, can serve as an ever-present reminder of the possibilities that are inherent in the rhythm(s) of the City. The urban void draws attention to the City as not (only) comprised by

a linear *thump-thump-thump* directed from somewhere *where we are not*. That *thump-thump-thump*, a rhythm in which space appears to be stable, is only, to return to Edensor's formulation, there to disguise its "endless maintenance through the serial reproduction of its consistencies, through the reproduction of the changing same" (2010:69). The point, in a very concrete sense, is this: Imagine that you have nowhere to sleep, that you have for some reason lost your home. Imagine that. Then entertain the thought that you find a lonely spot, still in the city, a bit of brushwood beneath a bridge, where there is no one but you. An urban void, and a place to put your tent. For a while, this place can be where you sleep. The urban void, by being seemingly undefined, provides that moment when it is possible to think that there is nothing here that says that this space needs to stay a forgotten place, instead I could, for a while, find shelter here. Now instead imagine that you have a home, but you find something, anything, in the way that we build our cities as unjust or undemocratic. And then recall the moment of open possibilities that the urban void invoked when you were looking for shelter. Those possibilities exist also in the way in which we organise our cities – there is nothing here that says that this space needs to stay as it is, just because it is: the City is not finished. On the contrary, it is constantly unfinished.

It has been argued, in the above, that the urban void beats to an unknown rhythm. The following section returns to Hamsterdam (discussed in the previous chapter) to question whether this is always the case.

"Why you got to go and fuck with the program?"

The HBO TV-series *The Wire*[22] focuses in on a variety of temporal trajectories of Baltimore's life worlds, which makes it both poly-diegetic and polycentric (Shapiro 2014:12). With its cinematic montage style, that is, cutting between these different sectors and

22. Illustration previously discussed in chapter 3.

subcultures of the city, between the different trajectories of time, it directs attention to the rhythm of the city. Throughout the episodes and the seasons of the series *The Wire*, the audience becomes familiar with the corner boy's everyday rhythm: meeting the needs of the stream of buyers coming by, selling, and then every once in a while, running to escape from expected police raids. When the Hamsterdam policy is introduced it is not only implemented through a forced re-localisation of the corner boys and their buyers, but also by altering the rhythm of their everyday hustle. Instead of driving up to the corners and making unannounced yet expected raids, the police in Hamsterdam now casually, yet constantly, guard the borders of the area. The pace of the work has been altered, and another rhythm is imposed upon them. One of the dealers, Marlo's man Fruit, objects to the project: "Look: We grind, and y'all try to stop it. That's how we do. Why you got to go and fuck with the program?" (S03E29). In Hamsterdam, they have gained a kind of "freedom" to run their business, however the temporal rhythm is not their habitual but produced in a, according to Fruit, disturbing manner. This imposed rhythm breaks the cyclical everyday rhythm of the corner boys, with an ever-present police guarding the boundaries of their "free town".

Hamsterdam here illustrates how the urban void is not only a theoretical construct being *othered* in relation to hegemonic notions of the City. Instead, Hamsterdam shows how the urban void could be a concretely (however fictional) organised urban timespace with a certain purpose. Here, the purpose is to create a kind of leprosarium for the people in 'the game' (of drug dealing). This is done not only by displacing these people, but interrupting their habitual rhythm, and replacing it with another. The dominating/dominated rhythm of Hamsterdam produces a space that runs according to the beat of the law. As such, it provides a way of illustrating how the urban void is a phenomenon that destabilises

the inside/outside dichotomy: It is created as an outside to the law, by illegally legalising drugs, nevertheless, constantly surveyed, encircled by police force, Hamsterdam is of course not an outside. It needs, however, to perform a sense of being an outside, to fulfil the function of being a paper bag for drugs, and a leprosarium for drug-dealers. In the end, though, it gets out of hand and turns into an inferno – and this, if you will, is when Hamsterdam has turned itself inside-out to become just another Baltimore corner.

Time is money

Waiting can carry different meanings depending which historical and/or cultural context it is embedded in. The spatial and temporal compression of modern Western societies, argues Bishop, affects the meanings, performances, and expectations of waiting (Bishop 2013:137). "It has a unique inflection in the contemporary capitalist milieu in which waiting is generally considered to be a hindrance to development, to an efficient, well-regulated matrix of time – space rhythms" (ibid.). The urban void, which is characterised by being in wait, could in this perspective be understood as an obstacle to the growth oriented development of the Western city.

The contemporary (hegemonic) discourse on cities spells out cities as 'growth machines' or 'entrepreneurial cities', which in short, stresses their role in generating economic growth. This is also associated with the employment of a set of strategies, such as place branding and cultural planning. In the race towards economic success, cities compete with each other to attract affluent citizens and investments (cf. Harvey 1989; Dannestam 2009). With the understanding of the city as a 'growth machine', urban wasteland is valuable in the sense that it provides a timespace for further growth, an opportunity for development of the lot. "Empty" space, hence, is valuable not in its own right of being "empty". The urban void in other words, is not

considered having a value by being in wait, but by providing space for further development. What the lot is worth is measured in its potential – for what could become there. Not for what currently exists there, a moment of uncertainty, a timespace in wait.

"Time is money": a way in which time materialises (and becomes a little less abstract) is in money. Consider the urban voids as urban space carrying a potential for future development. Then there is a question to pose: why is it in wait? It is left a) because it costs less for the property-owner to let the lot lie fallow than to develop it, the property-owner in this case is probably waiting for its price to rise; b) the property owner/developer is waiting for the authorities (planning office or the like) to give permission for construction to start. Whatever the answer, the duration of the moment of wait/uncertainty, i.e. the moment of the urban void, is measured primarily in money, not in days or months. It could be added here, that there are an increasing number of landowners and developers who see no reason to waste the time that the land lies fallow: instead they engage in promoting temporary use of urban voids, to gain at least some value from their property (Bishop & Williams 2012:43).

Not unexpectedly, time was a factor in the very birth of money (as in coins). By the introduction of a standardised coin, a token that carried equal size and weight and thereby equal value, one of the most time-consuming steps in commerce was eliminated, namely the need to weigh the gold each time a transaction was made (Wheaterford 1997:31). Money soon came to express the value of more things than objects that could be bought or sold, and its use expanded to value work. Human labour became a product, the value of which could be decided on and fixed in money, and so time became a commodity (Sennett 1994:205). "[A]s money became the standard value for work, it was also becoming the

standard of value for time itself", writes Wheaterford (1997:36). Another innovation related to that of coins was the retail market. It structured business in such a way that people no longer had to look for the maker and seller of a certain product in the seller's home, but set up a system in which everyone who wanted to sell something gathered at a certain place: the market – which made commerce less time-consuming than before (Weatherford 1997:31).

Thus, money was a standardisation that opened the way for business to be conducted more rapidly. This, the speed of things, is also something that Simmel brings up in contending that the most striking symbol of the dynamic character of the world is money (1990 [1978]:510). "The meaning of money lies in the fact that it will be given away", he writes (ibid.). Understood as such, money is directed to the future, to that which will come (and one might want to once again recall St Augustine's definition of waiting as "the present of the future" (St Augustine cited in Gasparini 1995:30)). The effect of its existence is the anticipation of its further motion. And so, the urban void, a kind of space that promises everything and anything for the future space that will eventually replace it: if it were not to change into something else, and thereby cease to exist, it would not be an urban void. If time is money, then a timespace like the urban void is an asset. The piece of land that an urban void comprises indeed has a value that equals the price of the lot, however there would be no point in letting it remain unused/undeveloped if there were no expectance that it would be more worth in due time. The fluctuation of the state of the market is uncertain, and so is the end-point of the timespace of the urban void. But what on the other hand is certain is this:

The urban void does not last forever; it is a temporary space that will dissolve, probably sooner than later. "Money is nothing but the vehicle for a movement in which everything else that is not in mo-

tion is completely extinguished", writes Georg Simmel (1990:511). The urban void makes the temporality of the City concrete: the temporary character of the urban void is almost tangible, but not only does it manifest the temporariness of its own, but of all urban space. It makes that movement, that constant becoming of space, discernible. And this is also how it poses a threat to an urban order that confirms itself with a conviction of its own permanence: the urban void can be read as the vehicle for a movement in which everything else that is not in motion is completely extinguished. That is, the idea of an urban structure, or a City, as somehow more permanent, and less temporary, is questioned, if not to say, eliminated. (Because that is what is claimed, if the urban void is othered as a temporary space, the norm is not temporary). But what is new here?, you might ask, since the outset of the whole argument is that space (all space) is constantly becoming – no wonder one ends up at such a conclusion if it is already in the premise of the question. New or old, what I find interesting is how the urban void proves to be a break, not only in terms of a disturbance of a smooth timeline of urban progress or in the concrete well-defined urban structure, but also in the way that it breaks open the very predicament of its own exclusion. The urban void is an impediment to the development of the city, as it does not admit to being arranged in order of the plan. Yet, it is the very timespace that enables any change in the city, as without it there would be no time, no space to place the new, the City to be. It is that which puts the City in motion: It is the urban void that makes the City possible.

Of constant becoming

"Rhythms. Rhythms. They reveal and they hide" (Lefebvre 2004:45). The arrhythmic beat according to which the urban voids come and go perform breaks in a linear story of the City where development is understood as progress. The image of the cyclical, however un-

known, rhythm perforating the well-ordered timeline of the City shows how a progressive time, causal time, predictive time, only insufficiently makes urban timespace comprehensible. A rhythm creates a pattern, or rather, *is* a pattern, a way to order and make sense of the beats that make it up. The rhythm of the urban void is unknown.

The unknown (unknown to the outside world, not to her) rhythm that Penelope creates by weaving and unweaving, is a work that transforms cloth to time. Something seemingly unproductive as unravelling is not merely undoing, but *doing*, as it *gives time*. What Penelope creates is a gift, to echo Derrida's notion of the same. "The gift is not a gift, it only gives to the extent that it gives time. The difference between a gift and every other operation of pure and simple operation is that the gift gives time" ([emphasis in original] Derrida 1992:41). It is a figure of thought that might provide a way of arriving at the end of this chapter, that has articulated the temporal dimension of the urban void in order to give further insights into it as a politically significant urban space. "What it gives, the gift, is time, but this gift of time is also a demand of time. The thing must not be *restituted immediately and right away*. There must be time, it must last, it must be waiting – without forgetting" (ibid.). Considered from within a paradigm where the City can and must be planned, and where it is understood as a 'growth machine', the urban void provides a timespace, a pause, for the city to be rethought, reconfigured, recharged. But what it also does is to undermine the very idea of a City as a machine that beats according to a rhythm pre-programmed by plans. As such, it gives time, a moment where the city might be thought, configured and charged, not as a reprise of something that has been, but of something radically new. "It demands time, the thing, but it demands a delimited time, neither an instant nor an infinite time, but a time determined by a term, in other words,

a rhythm, a cadence. The thing is not *in* time; it is or it has time, or rather it demands to have, to give, or to take time – and time as rhythm, a rhythm that does not befall a homogeneous time but that structures it originally" (ibid.). The urban void performs a gap, with a start as well as with an end, it is determined by a rhythm, it is just that the rhythm of the void is not known until it has ceased to be a void. It gives the City *another* rhythm that is *its rhythm*, that is, it is of the City, not external to it, yet it gives *another* time. It is "*the given* that carries with it a force, an impetus of donation, pure expenditure, of endless possibilities of variation" (Grosz 2005:68). The urban void as a gift, as something that gives time, is an opening up of what has been closed down, a moment of endless possibilities of variation.

Any social order is the product of practices attempting to establish an order in a context of contingency (Mouffe 2005a). This implies that *all* kinds of urban space can transform into something radically different, that they are open to political contestation. This is not where the difference between well-defined urban space and the urban void lies. The City *is* unfinished, there has never been any doubt about that – that is, it is a given in the conceptualisation of space that already appears in the first pages of this book. Nevertheless, I would argue that the urban void, as a concrete space, by being a certain kind of uncertain, unfinished, and often rough sort of place, *highlights* the temporariness of urban space in general. The urban void is different from well-defined kinds of space like the street, the square or the parking lot, by being a 'blank moment', the joker in a deck of cards, i.e. not yet written, and at the same time a 'black moment', i.e. abundantly overwritten with meanings. It is an either/or that more easily than a well-defined space such as a town square or someone's front yard, lends itself, not only to appropriation but also to imagination. The moment of uncertainty provides timespace for a dis- or rearticulation of

the common-sense way of defining urban space (i.e. planning). The urban void, in a very articulated way, spells out the City as unfinished – as constantly becoming.

But what is more important is that the urban void, in this chapter, is spelled out as a kind of urban space that *does something* (be it providing a timespace for property development, or shelter for an otherwise homeless, or altering ones perception of the City), hence it is *not nothing*, not a no-space. This chapter has shown how the urban void both accommodates existing needs in the terms of urban development, and, at the same time, introduces new possibilities not yet available. It gives time.

In Derrida's notion of the gift, it cannot be given with the expectation to yield anything in return, and as Grosz expresses it, "[t]he moment an impulse to reciprocity or exchange is set up (one gift for another), the gift ceases to be a gift and becomes an object in a system of barter and exchange. To function as a gift, it must be given without return, without obligation, without expectation, given 'freely'; moreover, it must be taken, received without debt, or the (implicit) structure or return" (Grosz 2005:67). The following will violate this particular conception of the gift, as it will inquire into the possible obligation that the urban void as a gift carries with it. It is quite simple, and it asks this question: if the urban void gives time, an opening up of that which has been closed down, what do we (as in the people that inhabit the cities) choose do with this time?

5 Endings

> An adequate acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of futurity would ensure that we abandon the fantasy of controlling the future while not abdicating the responsibility of preparing for a better future than the present.
>
> (Grosz 2001:149)

"One knew of places in ancient Greece where the way led down into the underworld. Our waking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld – a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise", writes Walter Benjamin (*AP* C1a,2) in the introductory sentences of a section about the underground of Paris, invoking a mythic context for the tunnels. A context in which another language rules: "But another system of galleries runs underground through Paris: the Metro, where at dusk glowing red lights point the way into the underworld of names. Combat, Elysée, Georges V, Etienne Marcel, Solferino, Invalides, Vaugirard – they have all thrown off the humiliating fetters of street or square, and here in the lightning-scored, whistle-resounding darkness are transformed into misshapen sewer gods,

catacomb fairies […] Here, underground, nothing more of the collision, the intersection, of names – that which aboveground forms the linguistic network of the city"(ibid.).

* * *

With this chapter, this study of the becoming of the urban void as another kind of space has arrived at a moment where it eventually ends. It concludes the book in terms of being an unavoidable "the end, finish" (OEDf). However, it delivers no conclusions in terms of "final result, outcome" (OEDf), as the text in its entirety should be read as the result of the investigation. The montage that follows is edited to do three things. First, it puts in the forefront the constitution of the urban void as political, and by no means a neutral, innocent construction. The strategy as regards this point is "repeat to emphasise" – it recaps a conceptualisation of space as relational, as the acknowledgement of the existence of a plurality of different meanings, and as in a constant process of becoming (Massey 1999:28). The arguments made in the chapter's different sections take one each of the three statements as their starting point. Together, they condense the arguments made in the preceding chapters, in order to underline how difference is made between the well-ordered space and the urban void.

Second, and in parallel with this, the chapter challenges the arguments made in the earlier parts of the thesis, by way of adding yet other perspectives on the urban void. More specifically, it introduces an example of an urban void that is not an urban void (or is it?) – the Navarinou Park in Athens (Greece) – in order to modify slightly the notion of the urban wasteland and how it is understood, with a notion of relational space. In addition, it questions whether the urban void, as has been argued in the text so far, is always *othered* by actors who have the upper hand

in the production of urban space, in virtue of being property owners or planners, and as an effect of the desire to order the unordered. It does so by discussing the exoticisation of the urban void by people who are down (in the dirt) with the urban void, and by tracing the trajectories of such fascination in the otherness of the urban void in contemporary as well as historical urban exploration narratives.

The idea that there is always yet another story to be told, as put forward in the second point above, leads me to the third and last task of this chapter: it is written with the ambition to refuse, approaching the last pages as we are, to turn down the volume, in order to allow things harmoniously and slowly to fade out and away by delivering answers. Instead, it turns the volume up and ventures on a search for a new question that follows from this study of the urban void – a question to be posed to the future.

There is no core to the urban void

"Homelessness is often coupled with mixed substance abuse and mental illness. It is undesirable from point of view of the city to create meeting places for people with certain problems at public places and certainly not at the central squares of the city" ([my translation] Sveriges Radio May 19th 2014). This quotation is from a statement made by one of the public authorities[23] of Stockholm City (Sweden), declining the application for a prolongation of a permit for a non-profit organisation[24] to continue its work of serving free food to poor and/or homeless people, at Medborgarplatsen in central Stockholm. The way in which the denial was argued caused reactions in social, local and national media in May 2014.[25] When the statement is issued, the civil servant who wrote it is questioned by a journalist about the arguments in it. The civil servant responds by saying: "If you read my statement, you will

23. The traffic and waste management administration (Trafikkontoret), Stockholm City.
24. Soppkök Stockholm
25. cf. e.g. Metro May 19th 2014; Aftonbladet May 19th 2014; Dagens Nyheter May 19th 2014; Sydsvenskan May 19th 2014; ETC May 19th 2014; TV4 May 19th 2014

understand. This risks becoming a freak show, one might not be aware of that. What one is set to do is to make a contribution and provide free food, but the risk is that one turns a place into a zoo" ([my translation] Metro May 19th 2014).

It is undeniable that the identity of Medborgarplatsen, in the above case, was not determined at the very moment it was defined in an official plan as a public square, or the moment when it was inaugurated, but is being continuously renegotiated in the meeting between different people at different positions. Space is, as such, a product of interrelations, and constituted through interactions (Massey 1999:28).

Through the interactions between the non-profit organisation serving poor and/or homeless people free food, the people coming to eat their food, and the municipal authority, Medborgarplatsen becomes as a contested space. Who is this place for? The name of the square, Medborgarplatsen, literally "the citizen's place" in Swedish, suddenly seems out of place, since the statement made by the public administration in this case declares the square to be a public space, open to some, but not to others. The expressions the civil servant uses seem to imply an awareness of a norm that everyone ought to be admitted to a public space, since it excludes not on the basis that "this group of people is welcome, but not this group of people" but by totally omitting the unwanted from an 'everyone' by representing them as animals ("turns a place into a zoo").[26]

The example not only illustrates the relationality of space, but also how power is not something external to the relations that produce a certain space, but is part of the very constitution of those places (cf. Massey 1995:283). Thus, it is an understanding of the social that rejects any idea of essentialism (Mouffe 1995:261). At

26. Later the same day (as the statement and comments by the civil servant were published in various media) a pressrelease from the same public authority of Stockholm stated that the written rejection of the application issued by the same authority, as well as the statements made in the media by the civil servant, were "not acceptable".

Medborgarplatsen in May 2014, the public authority of Stockholm created a boundary between an *us* and a *them*, that is, it marked a line between Medborgarplatsen's wanted citizens and its unwanted ditto – the latter the constitutive outside of 'citizens'. The example underlines how any social issue is ultimately political and the relations that make it up always show traces of its 'constitutive outside' (Laclau & Mouffe (2000). Hence, an object has inscribed in its very being something other than itself, and it cannot be perceived as pure presence or objectivity.

As the previous chapters have aimed to show, the urban void is constructed as the constitutive outside of notions of the City. They have shown that this *other*, the urban void, is as such, an outside within. The becoming of the urban void in relation to hegemonic discourses on the City should however not be understood as if the past is a blank sheet. Instead, "new identities are formed on the basis of, in the context of, even on the ruins of, a legacy of past and coexisting present identities" (Massey 1995:286). The *constitutive* outside is the creation of an identity that implies the establishment of a difference, one which is constructed on the basis of a hierarchy (as e.g. between form and matter, man and woman, black and white, etc.). One indication of such subordination as regards the urban void is, as we saw in chapter 2, that it is hard to find any denotations of the urban void that do not connote negativity or lack. As the City inhabits this 'other', and the urban void as such also is (part of) the City, it threatens a conception of the City as a well ordered and smooth running entity or, if you will, a growth machine. The urban void's mere existence questions such an understanding of the City.

Furthermore, this perspective on identity – and space – as relational actually precludes the understanding of the urban void as being excluded: as not urban, not of the City. With the notion of

the urban void as a constitutive outside, it will always be hinged together with that which constitutes it – the inside. The very existence of the urban void thus becomes a condition for the identity of the City, as without the other (the urban void) it would have no identity (Mouffe 1995:264). That is, nothing to project itself against. The urban void haunts the City by being present with an existence that continually destabilises any notion of the City as coherent and well-ordered. And since identities and relations are discursive, and discourses never exist in a given and limited totality but are forever incomplete, there is no identity that can be fully constituted (Laclau & Mouffe 2000:110f). A conception of the City as something which can, for example, be fully planned, or as a growth machine, is therefore always the result of an ever on-going constituting process that is never fully completed (cf. Mouffe 1995:264, Laclau & Mouffe 2000:111). In other words, the meaning of the City is never fixed, as concepts are indefinite, open and fluid (Thrift 1999:304).

There are, nevertheless, always attempts to fix a meaning. Or, in Derridean words, there is always some play in the structure even if the organising principle of the structure is to limit it (Derrida 2001:352). "By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the centre of a structure permits the play of its own elements inside the total form" (ibid.). Reading the present context with Derrida then, I take his argument here as a way of grasping how the urban void in the discourse on the city might take different connotations and guises, even though it is never allowed however, to be understood as anything other than an outside, the exterior.

The Derridean notion of context is limitless – "('there is nothing outside the text' [il n'y a pas de hors-texte])" (Derrida 1988b:136). And even though this 'context' is "the entire 'real-history-of-the world" (ibid.), there are a bundle of contexts, or discourses, within

the same context. The discourse is determined by the "socio-institutional situation, its language, the historical inscription of its gestures etc." (Derrida 1988b:137). And since it is rooted in a given context, however mobile and differentiated, it does not reject the values dominant in that context (ibid.). With the ambition of shaking up the dominant ways of conceptualising the urban void, and with Derrida "to pay the sharpest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualisation" (Derrida 1988b:136), the following explores what it would imply to move the notion of the urban void to another context, to juxtapose it with *other* surroundings.

So far, the urban void has been discussed from the perspective of discourses on the City that project it as an entity that can be fully planned, and/or as an engine for economic growth: both of which are discourses that have great influences on how cities of 'the West' are understood. However, these discourses do not, of course, only dictate conceptions of cities in the 'West', but also how the cities that are *not* conceived to be a part of the the 'West' are understood. Through these urban imaginaries there are distinctions made between particular western cities that are perceived as stereotypically modern, and so-called 'other cities' (Dibazar et al. 2013:647). "The presupposition that there is such a thing as 'other cities'", as Pedram Dibazar et al. write, "is produced by processes of inclusion and exclusion that sustain the conceptual category of 'modern cities'" (2013:648). Hence, the same kind of processes that produce the urban void as an*other* kind of space also mark the difference between cities and *other* cities. With this in mind, the following asks what happens, then, if the urban void is read in relation to a city that, within a paradigm of Western cities and urban planning, does not fully correspond to the dominant norm? I went to Athens, Greece, and brought my notion of the urban void out of context and into a crisis.

An urban void in Athens?

"There is an abundance of urban voids in the city. Demolition sites; gravel and/or grass. Cats and doves. Sometimes parking spaces. Often seemingly empty. Small urban meadowlands. The emptiness is loud, the absence of activity and constructions or buildings carry meaning. But how is this absence formulated in political terms? How might the absence be understood as a presence of politics?" (Field notes May 30th 2013).

I had just arrived in Athens, interested in studying urban voids in the context of the current economic and political crisis in Greece. Spending the first day walking the city, I saw "an abundance of urban voids". Coming to town with my habitual understanding of the relation between plans, the City, and urban voids, it seemed a relatively uncomplicated assertion to make. Of course it was not.

I had come to wonder in what way the on-going crisis in Greece could be understood to influence the production and prevalence of urban voids in the city. Walking through the city, there was no shortage of abandoned lots, and I started to search for an example where a lot had been appropriated and taken into use.[27]

In Exarchia, a central district of Athens, Greece, I found Navarinou Park, with the help of an Athenian architect. The park is "self-managed", i.e. built and maintained by residents in the neighbourhood together with activists (as opposed to managed by the municipality and/or the property owner). Navarinou Park does not stand out from the surrounding urban structure through its material appearance: had I passed without knowing its history I probably would not have noted it as anything other than a 'park', even though there was quite a punk approach in its design and it was not very neat. Merely doing observations

27. At the time, my dissertation project was explicitly focused on the conflicts between planning authorities and/or property owners and users arising when urban voids was appropriated.





Above: A corner of Navarinou Park, Athens, Greece, to the right in the picture.
Below: At Navarinou Park, in Athens, Greece.

in the city would not have taken me far. It was rather the story of the place, conveyed to me by people that I got into contact with, that caught my interest.

In the 1980's the 4-storey building that since the turn of the century had occupied the space which is today the park, was demolished. The plan was to replace it with an office building to host the headquarters of the Technical Chamber of Greece (TCG), who had bought the lot in the 1970's. The plan was never realised. In 1990, the TCG offered the land to the Athens Council in order to turn it into a public space and provided that it would be reimbursed by increasing the TCG building coefficient allowance in one of its other properties in another part of Athens. The ambition of the City Council was to turn it into a park, since there was little green space in this area. Due to several delays and changes in urban development law, the process was stalled and in the end the exchange never took place. Instead the lot came to be leased as an open-air parking space for years (Parkingpark blog; Park activist 2013[28]). When the car park lease ran out and the place in effect ceased to be a parking lot, it was still not turned into a park. It was an urban wasteland. Ultimately, people in the neighbourhood got tired of waiting. "It all started on March 7th 2009. And it was as an effect of the uprisings the preceding winter" (Park activist 2013), one of the people involved in the management of Navarinou Park tells me, and describes a meeting where 800 people both started to draw up the lines for organising the making of the park, and began tearing up the concrete of the abandoned former parking lot.

The creation of the park should be read in the light of the political crisis in Greece, as well as the major demonstrations taking place in Athens during the winter 2008-2009, sparked by the police killing of a fifteen-year-old boy in Exarchia on December 15, 2008. From such a perspective, the park can be understood as

28. Activist and member of the organisation managing Navarinou Park, Athens, Greece. Interview conducted June 2nd, 2013.

a citizens' response to the failure of the political system – taking things literally in their own hands – and thought of as an urban void in the sense that it a) represents a spatio-temporal moment of uncertainty since it is subjected to a stalled legal process, and b) was manifested as an undefined piece of land where people without the right to do so turned it into a park, and thereby defined it.

Turning to learn about the Greek planning system, however, the perspective shifts. The Greek planning system is relatively new (from the late 1980's), but what is more important in the present context – it is very weak (Lecturer 2013[29]). In practice, the ownership of a property gives you the full right to it, including what and how to make of the site (ibid.). In Athens, therefore, it would be more accurate to talk about a void of local plans than voids in existing plans. An argument to make out of this could be that where there is no systematic ordering of urban space, as e.g. in Athens, there can be no deviation, i.e. no disorder. When I asked the person from the park organisation if there had been any conflicts with the authorities regarding the DIY-construction of the park, s/he looked at me with surprise, and answered "no" (Park activist 2013). S/he then added that the Law originally arose – following the political uprisings in the city – only with the regular raids of the police searching for people to hold responsible for the demonstrations and violence, since they were expected to be found in the area (Park activist 2013). Seen from this perspective, one can trace no contestations either regarding the appropriation, or the use of this lot.

The way in which this lot was defined by appropriation, as a park, was in some sense in accordance with the way in which any urban space is defined in Athens: one does as one wishes with one's property. Only here the neighbours and the activists forming the park organisation could not claim ownership of the

29. Lecturer at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, Greece. Interview conducted May 30th, 2013.

property. Still, the property owner, TCG, has not reacted. When talking to scholars with deep insights in Greek urban planning, their outlook was that there are no urban voids in Athens, since there is no norm of planning that any void could be understood to be opposite to (Professor 2013[30]; Lecturer 2013). The post-war development of the urban fabric of Athens is characterised by "a process of uncoordinated change" (Chorianopoulos et al. 2010:249) and an "unplanned mode of […] expansion" (ibid:251) due to an "unreliable planning system" (Kandylis & Kavoulakos 2011:160). A "history of Athenian growth trajectories […] portrays a city that keeps on growing in an undesigned fashion, based on small, self-financed property development schemes" (Chorianopoulos et al. 2010:249). It results in "piecemeal urbanization in the urban periphery, mainly through irregular self-help construction" (Kandylis & Kavoulakos 2011:160). A reading of urban space in Athens must know this history, as well as the current state of Greece, which is deeply influenced by the on-going political and economic crisis.

The crisis have marked the urban fabric of Athens, and transformed downtown blocks to ones, by Maria Kaika described as, "of vacant retail spaces, boarded up facades, a city whose every niche is occupied by homeless people and beggars, and whose air is saturated with smoke from wood fires, which are increasingly used as an alternative energy source by people who cannot afford their gas or electricity bills" (Kaika 2012:423). It is a change of the city that includes a large influx of new inhabitants due to migration, increasing inequalities and sharpened urban conflicts, which in turn have altered and amplified a racist discourse in Greece (Kandylis & Kavoulakos 2011; Hatziprokopiou & Frangopuolos 2016). These are all dimensions to the crisis that currently influence the Greek society as well as the social and physical fabric of Athens (cf. Kaika 2012).

30. Professor at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens, Greece. Interview conducted May 30th, 2013.

And the crisis furthermore adds another perspective to the notion of public planning and urban voids in the city. During the preparations for the Summer Olympics in Athens in 2004 a new 'emergency' statutory framework was introduced in the name of speed and efficiency, focusing on the timely delivery of Olympics-related projects, in effect a deregulation of the planning system (Karatzas & Belavilas 2014:2; cf. Chorianopoulos et al. 2010:257). A few years later, when the crisis arose, this emergency model framework was reformulated as a permanent planning policy (Karatzas & Belavilas 2014:2, 7). Hence, in 2010 and 2011, a series of new laws were passed, laws that "essentially abolish the state's position of primacy in urban planning decisions, eliminate public consultation at local government level, and reduce environmental and archaeological controls. "In short", writes Georgios Karatzas and Nikos Belavilas, "the private sector has been allowed to establish land-uses that have transgressed previous town planning and environmental norms" (2014:2).

The crisis could therefore be understood as dismantling the already weak planning system in Greece: the laws that have been passed grant the private sector permission to establish land-uses that were contrary to previous town planning and environmental norms (ibid.). What was earlier the practice of (illegal) urban development (Lecturer 2013) was in the name of the crisis transformed into legal action. The concept of crisis, writes Narby, has an important function in relation to the act of ordering, by virtue of its location on the boundary between order and disorder, since it both protects order by making it appear normal and by removing that which undermines it, i.e. disorder (2014:12). Located at this liminal position in-between, the planning laws passed in Athens in the name of crisis in one sense (in regards the Law) inverts the norms of planning as they make legal what was illegal. Yet, in another sense (in regards common practice),

everything is as it has been since the urbanisation of Athens was ushered in, as the out of plan development is the *comme il faut* of urban development: an everyday practice that by effect was legitimate as it had no sanctions.

With this inverted situation forming the context of contemporary urban development in Athens, I read how the Navarinou park is being reported as a response from civil society to the crisis, at a time when "[t]he unavoidable reality of the Greek economy makes it hard to imagine urban regeneration initiatives working their way to the top of the government's priority list any time soon" (Karampatakis 2011:27). "But already", wrote Dimitris Karampatakis in 2011, "local entrepreneurs have started to invest in some of the most dilapidated areas and start-up groups have launched local regeneration projects, such as community gardens. For instance, near the foot of Lycabettus Hill, an unused corner site has been commandeered by local residents and transformed into a lively public park; children run about and parents sit with coffee among well-tended beds of young plants and trees. The vibe is upbeat and there is a strong sense of community, both within the park and in the surrounding cafés and shops that benefit from the new lease of life." (2011:27). Here, the commitment of civil society to the urban environment, in e.g. creating Navarinou Park, is construed as a reaction to the crisis, as an exception to the ordinary. At the same time, and on the other hand, the creation of the park is in accordance with the way in which urban development has been conducted for decades, i.e. since the post-war urbanisation of Athens (cf. Chorianopoulos et al. 2010:249). As this is illustrates, the crisis not only justifies exceptional action: by being premised on notions of order and disorder, and by being on the limit *between* order and disorder, it is also important as regards how these are determined in relation to each other (Narby 2014:12).

This highlights the theme of this section: the production of the urban void as relational, and the urban void as having no essential core. The example of Navarinou park, considered in the context of the Greek planning system and the contemporary crisis, invokes a feeling of being in a fun house – you stand in front of one mirror and what you see is yourself up-side-down and very much taller than you thought you were, but when you turn around you suddenly face another mirror where you look, well, just the same as you did when you last checked in your mirror at home. The relationality of the urban void considered in the Athenian context bends, as we have seen in the above, the perspectives on what is legal and what is illegal, what is private sector land-grabbing and what is civil society engagement.

The urban void has previously been argued to be the constitutive outside of dominant notions of the City, or in other words, to be the exception to the rule. In the above illustration, the urban void was investigated in a context where *the rule is the exception*, from the point of view of a highly ordered Western planning system. The rule could here be seen as exceptional in two ways. First, there is a very weak (or non-functioning) planning system (cf. Professor 2013; Lecturer 2013; Chorianopoulos et al. 2010; Kandylis & Kavoulakos 2011), in other words (metaphorically speaking), there is no rule. Second, the crisis was used as a motivation to make the 'emergency' statutory framework (created for the preparation for the Olympic games) permanent, which in effect was to deregulate the (already weak) planning system (Karatzas & Belavilas 2014:2; cf. Chorianopoulos et al. 2010:257); this could be thought of as a way of making the exceptional rule the rule. Is the argument getting too confusing? Well, before getting lost, one may note how the limit between rule and exception is far from static, but in flux. The constitution of this limit is what produces the urban void – it will always become in relation to that very limit and to

the context in which it (the urban void) is located. A notion of the urban void is formed on the basis of, or even on the ruins of, a legacy of past and present trajectories of urban space (Massey 1995:286). In contemporary Athens, an investigation of 'urban voids' indeed shakes up dominant ways of conceptualising the urban void and directs attention to the undecidable limit between rule and exception, while the void itself dissolves into thin air (cf. Derrida 1981:221).

Then what are we left with?

"And now, there has been no news from the authorities, not during the last two years. The more time that passes, the better for us, because now our plants have grown and it actually looks like a park, which it didn't from the beginning, and the more established our park gets. Everyone calls it Navarinou Park now" (Park activist 2013). It is a park among other parks in Athens, and the fact that it is not laid out according to plan does not single it out from other structures in the city. Essentially, there is no core to the urban void as a certain kind of urban space. It will always be produced in relation to its surroundings – in a concrete as well as discursive sense of the word.

Other stories

If space is the product of interrelations, then it follows that it is predicated upon the existence of plurality: There must be more than one entity in order for interaction to be possible (and, the interaction itself is what constitutes the production of the entities) (Massey 1999:28,33). So this is an argument about the possibility of heterogeneity, of which the political consequence is that a recognition of the simultaneous existence of others is forced into imagination. Others with their own trajectories and their own

stories to tell (Massey 2005:10f). It is a perspective that enables a revealing of the veil that a dominant Western orientation has drawn over its own particularity, while generalising for the world (Slater 2013:70). It then fails to be reasonable that the story of the world should be told from the viewpoint of the 'West' or the classic figure of the 'white straight male' alone. As feminists and scholars working within the postcolonial framework have argued for, such a viewpoint is a quite particular one, and not a universal, which it for so long have proposed to be (Massey 1999:29f).

Differences are always spatialised, always positioned in space (Murdoch 2006:21). An acknowledgement of a simultaneity however, is yet another demand for *time* and space to be thought together, as it implies the occurrence of things in space at the same time. Without noting how conceptions of time are imbued in conceptions of space, how would one un-pack statements of difference such as ones where some places are argued to be "behind" another place, or that some cultures are more "advanced" than others? This section highlights the production of the urban void as a negotiation of intersecting trajectories – a simultaneity – by performing a postcolonial reading of the urban void.[31] By way of arriving at an argument on the othering of the urban void in contemporary and historical urban exploration narratives, there is first a brief example of what a postcolonial reading of urban space might imply.

The 'suburb'

In chapter 4, it was noted how an idea of development as progress for long time has characterised urban planning and how that, in turn, have formed a part of a rational understanding of the evolvement of the City: According to a unified beat of causality, the movement towards the future is laid out as on a horizontal timeline. The urban void was conceived as contrasting to that beat, as it comes and goes repetitively, by a circular movement of

31. 'Postcolonial' is here used in a broad sense, to denote "a range of critical perspectives on the diverse histories and geographies of colonial practices, discourses, impacts and, importantly, their legacies in the present" (Nash 2002:221).

time, however at a rhythm that is unknown until it sounds. With the very same notion of progress, the unified beat of causality, one may also understand 'suburb' – constructed as something which is not yet "urban", but underdeveloped in terms of urbanity. Contemporary Swedish urban planning discourse can provide an illustration here.

In contemporary Swedish urban planning discourse, the discursive construction of the suburban (in relation to the urban) is as a place lacking a clear identity, or, as a place suffering an identity crisis between an urban and a rural identity (Tunström 2009:109f). The suburb become places identified as "problemareas", "exposed areas", or "segregated areas" (Molina 2007:100). It is a polarisation that is not only of a spatial dimension, but also of a temporal one (Molina 2007:115; Tunström 2009:70). Suburb translates into Swedish as "förort", where the prefix "för" means "pre" and "ort" 'locality' or 'district'. Hence, "förorten" is something that is somehow at an evolutionary stage *before* a proper and developed locality. The suburbs are as such constructed as no-places or kinds of space-between (Tunström 2009:121). In other words, as *other* places (Molina 2007:100). Here, we recognise the discursive mechanisms through which the urban void is also made a void. The suburb and the urban void share common positions in the hegemonic discourse on the City, not as un-ordered in relation to well-ordered (the suburb was and is planned), but in lacking a clear identity. They become kinds of places that are not in time/sync with the ideal – the urban.

On the horizontal timeline of urban development, i.e. considered from a perspective of development as progress, the suburban and the urban void are behind. It is an ethnocentric perspective on time, stemming from a colonial notion of the relation of time and space (Molina 2005:115). And it was in the same name – of

progress – one could argue, that the ahistorical polarity of the Orient and the Occident unleashed the exclusionary imperialist ideologies of the self and other (Bhabha 1994:19). Imperialism carried forward the binary typology of advanced and backward races, cultures, and societies (Saïd 1978:206). "Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was thus linked to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien" (ibid.). In refusing such alienation and in reclaiming the spaces where they grew up, and where they live, new generations of the Swedish "förort" have dropped the prefix. Instead, "orten", in the definite form, or even "Orten", with a capital "O", presents itself. The urban void has yet to see the emergence of such a refrasing.

Urban exploration of the void

Now, we turn to a narrative of 'urban exploration' to elaborate how a colonial view of the world plays out in the urban wasteland, to turn it into a void. 'Urban exploration' could be defined as "a transnational enthusiasm focused on exploring and recording liminal zones and derelict places, rooted in an interest for the past and a passion for the photography of the forgotten" (Garrett 2010:1448). Or as "the practice of exploring urban places that are legally off-limits or that regularly go unseen except by those who are authorized to access them" (Bunting 2015:607). Or as "the exploration of TOADS (Temporary, Obsolete, Abandoned, and Derelict Spaces)" (Paiva & Manaugh 2008:9). In other words, urban exploration (UE) is about exploring urban wastelands.[32]

32. Most often, urban explorers "recreationally trespass" (Garrett 2013:1) derelict architectural structures (e.g. closed mental hospitals, abandoned military installations, sewer and drain networks, transportation and utility tunnels, shuttered businesses), a kind of urban voids the present project has not engaged with. But sites like foreclosed estates, derelict industrial sites and other liminal urban zones are also explored: derelict sites rather than buildings, which are the kinds of places one might call urban voids.

Much of the language used within urban exploration "has heavy colonial baggage" (Garret 2010:1449). In what follows, a narrative prevalent in literature on and of (the pastime of) urban exploration representing the urban wasteland as a mesmerising kind of place, which then becomes as a fascinating *other*, is discussed. The point to be made is that there is more to the othering of the urban void than the previous chapters have shown: it does not only occur in terms of *negligence* – such as when the lack of knowledge or interest of/in the urban wasteland results in these spaces being labelled as 'voids', 'gaps', 'blanks' – it is also, as a kind of space, *exoticised*. With a post-colonial reading, this section traces trajectories of fascination in the otherness of the urban void between today's urban exploration narrative and the urban exploration undertaken in the 1800's by e.g. sociologists (cf. S. Hall 1997; Choi 2001; Lindner 2013). It thereby situates a contemporary passion for the derelict and dirty urban void, present not only in urban exploration but also as enabling the production of policies, such as the *Urban Pioneers* in Berlin discussed in chapter 3, within a wider exploration-narrative that contributes to producing the urban void as a fascinating other. It is true, as critics have argued, that this analysis gives "the text of the west" even more space, space that instead could have been given to seeking out other stories (Nash 2002:220). Nevertheless, a postcolonial perspective provides a way of questioning a colonial knowledge production, and to ask what other stories on the urban void it might silence (Rönnlund & Tollefsen 2016:123).

It seems widely accepted that the history of urban exploration (UE) as a pastime and subculture starts in the 1990's, when Ninjalicious[33] coined the term, internet forums devoted to UE emerged and an ethics of the subculture was written (cf. Bunting 2015; Mott & Roberts 2013; Schrock & Sittler 2015). Yet, the founding myths of UE include the story of a certain

33. Ninjalicious (Jim Chapman), the person usually credited with having coined the term 'urban exploration' (Mott & Roberts 2013; Bunting 2015). He himself defines UE as an "interior tourism that allows the curious-minded to discover a world of behind-the-scenes sights" (Ninjalicious 2005:3).

Philibert Aspairt, a Frenchman who in 1793 ventured down to the catacombs of Paris in search of a "lost" wine cellar, and of a certain Leidschmudel Dreispul who explored the New York subway system a week after its opening in 1904 never to re-emerge (Garret 2013:5; Infiltration).

However, there are other histories of UE to be written – other roots to be found. "It is imperative upon us that we urban explorers take the attitude of the classical explorers in our travels", Brain, an urban explorer, is quoted saying in the book *Invisible frontier*, which is part of the in-house-production of an urban exploration philosophy (Deyo & Liebowitz 2003:152). These are texts that intentionally locate themselves within a long tradition of exploration narratives (Bunting 2015:609). "The system is alive, adapting, and a wilderness is born, shaped by the very drive that impels us to explore it, too cast and promiscuous ever to be fully known, but always rewarding further searches. This is our frontier, and we've begun" write Deyo and Liebowitz (2003:28), urban explorers in New York. Ben Bunting argues, on the basis of the canonical texts of the movement, that one of the things that draw explorers to UE is the exploring ethos that for a long time has made traditional wilderness tempting to humanity (2015:610). When urban explorers set out into the urban void, as if going into the wild to discover the unknown, *difference is marked* in a way that has a colonial history (cf. S. Hall 1997:230).

The fascination for the obscure and/or hidden parts of the city is, as earlier noted, not new (Wilson 2002:258). "These lost corners had an enormous romantic charm for the flâneurs of the nineteenth century. Writers such as Dickens, Baudelaire, and his friend Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont provided a counter-chorus to the reformers and planners who wished to reshape the city and thereby to banish dirt, disease and crime" (ibid.). What they have

in common though, the flâneurs and the reformers and planners, as well as past and contemporary urban explorers, is the othering of the "forgotten" parts of the city.

"And it is imperative", continues Brain, "that we gather knowledge and hard empirical facts to share with our communities" (Deyo & Liebowitz 2003:153). It conveys a perspective of UE as being very much a matter of finding knowledge about the unknown, and of telling the story of "another world". "[I]t's all about getting a glimpse of places normally not seen by the majority of the city's inhabitants", as one of the informants in Garretts ethnographic study is quoted explaining (2013:7). UE is constructed in terms of identity, specifically of an explorer-subject who possesses some essential qualities as such (Mott & Roberts 2013:5). The explorer knows something that the others of us do not, and he is impelled to tell us. This narrative not only alludes to the above European explorers of the 15th-18th centuries, but is also related to the genre of journalism and non-fictional prose that emerged in the mid 1800's and was devoted to investigating urban horrors and unveiling the city's poverty and filth for a primarily middleclass readership (Choi 2001:562). It was a Victorian literature of urban exploration in which the city itself was the primary subject of investigation (ibid.). Note that the term used for the investigation of the "unknown", urban exploration, was used also for the activity in the 1800's (cf. Choi 2001, Lindner 2013:42).

"Having burnt my ships behind me", writes Jack London in his book *People of the Abyss* from 1903, in which he ventures to East End of London to report of the life of the poor, "I was now free to plunge into that human wilderness of which nobody seemed to know anything" (London 1903:12). The explorer sets out into the "unknown" in order to – explore – and to return with new knowledge about the *other* to tell those of us who stayed at home.

Decades after London's adventures in the wilderness of London, and on the other side of the Atlantic, the urban explorer Deyo writes about the "Jinx Athenaum Society", a group of urban explorers who convene in New York City: "Month after month, we gather together to pool our resources and intelligence, and to uncover more completely that which lies beneath the surface. With the growing complexity of our urban environment, we know that it is only through collaboration and social interaction that we can get a full picture of the city *as it truly is*. By creating an organisation specialising in human intelligence, and expert in a broad variety of subjects, from space administration to Orientalism, from poetry to communism to aesthetics, we can bring together the various disciplines that have shaped Western culture and apply their wisdom to our own practice" ([emphasis added] Deyo 2003:155). The explorer becomes, just like the orientalist in his own view, "a hero rescuing the orient from obscurity, alienation, and strangeness, which he himself had properly distinguished (Saïd 1978:121). That it is an integral part of urban exploration to share photographic or written documentation with others, indicate the importance of telling what you *know* about the *unknown* (Mott & Roberts 2013:1; cf. Garret 2010:1448). However, "unknown", just like "wildness", ought to be in inverted commas, of course. Contemporary UE, like that undertaken in the 1800's, shares the colonial travel literature's spirit of making the geographically near seem distant, to make the venture's character of an expedition appear credible (Lindner 2013:43). The place to be explored needs to be *made unknown*, in order to provide a reason for the exploration.

The activity, that of setting out into the "unknown", is based on the (coloniser's) "necessary yet contradictory assumption of an uninscribed earth" (Spivak 1985:254). UE re-inscribes wildness on the meaning-filled face of the modern city, argues Bunting

(2014:619). That is an active engagement and, as expressed by Ninjalicious, urban explorers "strive to actually create authentic experiences, by making discoveries that allow them to participate in the secret workings of cities and structures, and to appreciate fantastic, obscure places that might otherwise go completely neglected" (2005:3). Urban explorers both of today and of yesterday inscribe certain places of the city as uninscribed, voiding them, so to say. The conception of that which they (we) are exploring as 'blind spots', draw, in a post-colonial context, on the notion of the colonial text as "writing over a thereby obliterated other" (Massey 2005:110). And then, with the presence of the explorer, rumour can be replaced with information (cf. Spivak 1985:254). The explorer, in this context, commands what is to be known and what is to be unknown. It is as such a way of taking control over the urban voids – and here I mean it in a broad sense, including the urban voids that e.g. London's East End made up in Jack London's world – to master the unknown.

A yearning to master the unknown connects the practice of the explorer (at various times in history) to the strategies of ordering the un-ordered urban void as discussed in earlier chapters. For example, the fencing of vacant dereliction sites to keep people from defining them by appropriation (chapter 4); evicting people who have found shelter in the urban voids, to keep these places voids (chapter 3); or assuming an urban wasteland to be *tabula rasa*, a site to which it is possible to attach a new definition without taking the past into consideration, as Bunny Colvin does (chapter 3). A difference between such strategies, however, and the explorer practice, is that the latter to a greater extent is bound up with an image of the explorer subject as a kind of hero (which, well, to some extent is true also for the "Great Men in Planning" discussed in chapter 3 and to which the just mentioned Bunny Colvin is compared). As mentioned above, the UE narrative is largely about

the construction of the explorer as having some essential qualities as such (Mott & Roberts 2013:5). This is a trace that needs to be further elaborated – what does the notion of the 'explorer' do to the construction of urban void as another kind of place?

The relativity of risk

Urban exploration, as it appears in the defining texts, is a heroic achievement. It has the ring of Edward Saïd's description of the Orientalist as someone who after "having transported the Orient into modernity, […] could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old" (1978:121). His position, in relation to the object he sets out to explore, is as such unquestionable. This is illustrated by the following quote from Brain. Here he is again, in a debate on the connection of UE to explorers like Magellan, Columbus, de Leon and Cook, arguing that "we may not be discovering the world's tallest mountain or most remote island, but we do discover something a little more subtle, something that is a little harder to put into words. And unless you've been on the top of the Brooklyn Bridge, surrounded by death on all sides, it might be a little hard for you to fully grasp" (Deyo & Liebowitz 2003:153f). It seems to say that if you have not acquired that same position, by putting yourself at risk, you cannot understand what they know.

The pastime of urban exploration implies a risk-taking. "Pain forks through me, forcing my eyes shut", writes urban explorer Deyo in a report from exploring the Old Croton Aqueduct, the original New York water supply line. "Visions burst across my eyelids, hypnagogic phantoms like the ones you see when you're trying to fall asleep. I see tunnels diminishing to blackness" (Deyo 2003:4). There is a "desire to explore for the sake of exploring, to take risks for the sake of experience" (Garrett

2013:8). The self-representation of urban explorers highlights a prevalence of highly masculinised explorer-subjects (Mott & Roberts 2013:2; Bennett 2012). Feminist scholarship on earlier periods of exploration has drawn attention to the ways in which the explorer-subject was associated with ideals of rough masculinity, and to a wider implication in sociospatial processes underpinned by patriarchy, racism and heteronormativity (see e.g. Domosh 1991; Rose 1993; Morin 2008; Maddrell 2009). This has, however, largely gone unexamined in academic treatments of urban exploration, as Carrie Mott and Susan M. Roberts (2013:2) note. The contemporary UE risk-taker owes a debt to the archetypal explorer of earlier centuries. In 19th century London, it was the "unavoidability of urban filth and disease-generating miasma" (Choi 2001:562) that constituted the risk; in the 21st century it is instead the ceilings of ruined buildings that might come down when you are inside documenting the decay, or the risk of being caught by a security guard.

Let us remain with the threat of the security guard for a while. This risk is not the same for everyone, since avoiding or escaping from security guards and police may be an entertaining game for some, while for others the risks of such practices are far too great (Mott & Roberts 2013:9). "Heightened security in the face of concern with 'terrorist threats' in cities around the world only sharpens the risks to particularly racialized people who might reasonably expect to find it harder to persuade the police that they are 'not up to mischief' when they are caught popping up from a manhole cover on a Paris sidewalk", as Mott & Roberts rightly maintains (2013:9f). It explains how the role of the explorer is not for all, but for some. The risks implied in the exploration of urban voids, and the fact that they are relative to who you are – i.e. to the representations of your body when moving in the city – underline what a privilege it is to define the urban void as such.

As Garrett's study shows (referred to in the above, 2013:8), urban explorers take risks for the sake of experience. In other words, they are in the position of being able to choose to take the risk that staying for an hour or a day or longer at an urban void might involve. A risk that one chooses to take brings experience and maybe a sweet rush of adrenalin. I would argue that it is the very same position that enables one to view an urban void as fascinating, mesmerising, exotic: First, it is a position from which one is able to declare it as unknown, in order to explore and deliver new knowledge. Second, I believe that it is only if one chooses to take a risk, for the sake of experiential gain and self-fulfilment, that the rush of adrenalin can be sweet and engender a positive feeling about a place. Both of these make the place as such interesting to the explorer subject, I would argue, and it thereby acquires a fascinating characteristic. Compare this with the situation of someone who has not chosen the risk that trespassing on a derelict space might expose him or her to: e.g. the Romanian woman who lives in a trailer next to the railroad tracks somewhere in Stockholm (Aftonbladet February 13th 2014). She is happy to be alive, since the previous night she had been woken up by the trailer next to hers catching fire (ibid.). During the last few years in Sweden, there have been numerous reports of arson attacks at camps where homeless, often Romanian, people live. For a Romanian man at a camp in Helsingborg, whose tent and belongings were destroyed by fire one night in March when snow was falling, the focus is on surviving the coming winter night (Helsingborgs Dagblad March 21st 2015).

To make sense of what a narrative that projects the urban void as a kind of exotic place, or a *terra nullius* – which in the above is represented by urban exploration – does in relation to other possible stories to be told about the urban void, the palimpsest can be employed as a metaphor. The image of the palimpsest can

be used to read the production of space as a series of erasures and over-writings that have transformed the world (Rabasa 1993:181). As argued above, space is not a flat surface, but a multiplicity of trajectories (Massey 2005). The urban void thus consists of a myriad of narratives, and a history of a truth of the urban void is delivered by language. And what is the truth of language, ponders Saïd (1978:203), quoting Nietzsche: if not a "mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which, after long use, seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are" (Nietzsche 1954 [1873]:46f). The imperfect erasures in Rabasa's use of the palimpsest could then be understood as a source of hope for the reconstitution or reinvention of the world from other points of view (e.g. the inhabitants of East London in the mid 1800's, the native people of colonised countries, or other stories of the urban void). The overwritten stories, and the voices that have been suppressed, can then be heard and things thus be otherwise. The urban void need not be *made different* from the point of view of someone with the authority to master the unknown, nor of someone who does not take a risk in taking a risk.

It is never finished

What follows here are the last parts of the montage of this book, and they close the argument by leaving it open. It juxtaposes the idea of space as a continuous process of becoming, with contestations of concrete urban voids. The latter call attention to a conflict made apparent in the previous chapters, the conflict between practices of closing down the urban void on the one hand and practices of opening it up on the other hand. By way of picking up threads from earlier pages, and spinning new ones, the montage of this

final part performs a search for the formulation of a question that would capture this conflict, in order to leave the text open where it closes – with a request to the future. The future, you see, I believe is open, and just like space – always being made, never finished, and never closed (Massey 1999:28).

Such an openness to the future requires one to avoid conceiving of the world and its inherent relationships between past, present, and future, by setting its compass points through or against a discourse of progress (cf. Brown 2001:144). Instead, contrary to frameworks of 'progress' or 'development' or 'modernisation', which all propose scenarios in which the general directions of history, including the future, are *known*, this perspective is an insistence on the genuine openness of the future (Massey 1999:30). It is furthermore a conception of the world in which it is characterised by an irreducible instability (Derrida 2005) and of space as a process of always being made (Massey 1999:37). And that is ultimately a political statement, as the chaos and instability that permeates every order is what is a "chance, a chance to change, to destabilize" (Derrida 2005:86) and what politics, laws, and conventions have stabilised. "If there were continual stability, there would be no need for politics, and it is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible. Chaos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other" (ibid.). Approaching a social phenomenon such as the urban void, then, with a deconstruction inspired analysis is hyper-politicising, since it follows paths and codes that are not traditional (Derrida 2005:87). Analysing the urban void with the help of the Derridean notion of undecidables has provided a way of showing how the urban void performs a moment in the urban fabric that destabilises the very binaries that constructs it as an*other* kind of space. And this is an indefinite moment in

that it is never finished, never closed: "Undecidability is not a moment to be traversed or overcome and conflicts of duty are interminable" (Mouffe 2005b:10). As such, there is no end to the becoming of the urban void, and no final word that will mark a definitive definition of it.

Closing time

Recapped, with very broad strokes, the urban void has appeared in this book as something *other* to the ordinary, well-defined, urban space. This otherness is constructed both in terms of *negligence*, the void made a void, a gap, a nothingness, but also in terms of a kind of space that *fascinates*, that attracts by being obscured. Yet, as the book also has shown, the urban wasteland is a mundane space where people walk their dogs, live or skate. It is an analysis that has shown how the differences made between the urban void and that ordinary well-defined space are not given, but open to contestation. It is written as an either/or, with ambivalence – in order not to have to choose whether to represent it as either this or that – as an undecidable. That is a medium in which opposites are opposed to and connected with each other and where they are reversed, or where one side is made crossing over to the other side (Derrida 1981:127). Writing the analysis with the notion of the undecidable has thus left the urban with loose ends all through the pages of the book, as the undecidable is not something to overcome or solve. The loose ends, hence, do not only appear here in the last chapter, as they were already left in the earlier chapters. And they keep being left.

At the same time as I strive with this text to leave it open, there are constant efforts to close the urban void down. One of the practices that close it down is the naming of it as a 'no-space' or a 'dead zone', or a 'void' (cf. Doron 2000). This might be done out of negligence, reflecting a lack of knowledge of, or interest

in, a certain urban wasteland. An example of this is revealed in the interview, referred to in chapter 3, with the planner in Malmö responsible for the development of Norra Sorgenfri where Ödetomten is located, who declared the lot hosting art, skateboarding and homeless people to be "a vacuum", and "a bit dead" (Urban planner/civil servant 2011). But it could also be read as a response to the uncertainty that the in-between time of the urban void implies, giving the sense that anything or nothing can happen (cf. Kärrholm & Sandin 2011:1). The practice of negligence, i.e. producing the urban wasteland a 'blank' space, can be read as a reaction to such uncertainty. It is a production that works both through calling it a "void", or the like, and through physical interference to make it (or keep it) an empty space, or a gap.

Concretely, the latter could be the practice of fencing a demolition site, as that is one way to keep a space empty – to see to it that it is kept unused. It is also a way of defining the undefined as such – distinctly fallow land. Another strategy, for concretely producing the urban void, is to procure the eviction of anybody who uses it, of which an example from Stockholm was discussed in chapter 3. An eviction effectively erases any trace of human activity at the site. These strategies aim to make it difficult for passers-by to define the urban void by appropriation, and thereby to reduce the likelihood that anything (or nothing) might happen. In other words, they are attempts to stabilise a timespace in flux, to create order where there is potential for disorder to come about. It is not allowed to work as a unpredictable 'blank figure', which can be inscribed in a context with almost any kind of signification (Serres 2015; Hetherington 1998; Kärrholm & Sandin 2011:8). Hence, even if the empty lot as fallow land is 'in wait' and unproductive, and in consequence regarded as a hindrance to urban development (cf. Bishop 2013:137), such a

'nothing' appears less threatening than the 'anything' that can happen if the urban wasteland is defined by appropriation.

However, the attempts to close a space down to a less threatening 'nothing' by the strategy of evictions, can also come to have the opposite effect by turning it into 'something': During recent years in Stockholm there has, as indicated above, been a steady rhythm of evictions of homeless people, living in camps, from urban voids (and other places). After being evicted, those evicted have often moved to another similar place, from which they again get evicted, and so on, and so on. The practice of maintaining the vacancy of urban voids has been repetitive, as has also been the struggle for these people to find shelter. The constant striving by the authorities to keep these spaces empty seems to be counterproductive, since the rhythm of the process of evictions in the end only loads these spaces with meaning. It is a production of an ever-present rhythm of violence that obliterates not only the homes of people but also the silence of the places that the desired emptiness creates.

However, this is not an argument in favour of letting people live under horrible conditions in tumble-down trailers or tents at places lacking any sanitary facilities; nor is it an argument that encourages violation of the right of public access[34] that the settlements entail. Instead, it is a mode of thought that seeks to formulate a question that engages with the counterproductive rhythm of evictions and the production of the urban void to counteract any attempts to close it down, to end this thesis without closure. The formulation is, however, yet to be found.

Shaking the habitual

"[T]here are always – at any moment 'in time' – connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction […], relations which may or may not be accomplished" (Massey

34. Swedish: allemansrätten

1999:28). This means that space always contains a degree of the unexpected, the unpredictable (Massey 1999:37). This is the 'chaos' that Derrida proposes as the chance to change. The chance to change is dependent on an open system – even though 'system' is a word that accords ill with a notion of chaos – or a "formation of *potential*" (ibid.). "[P]recisely because it is the sphere of the potential juxtaposition of different narratives, of the potential forging of new relations, spatiality is also a source of the production of *new* trajectories, *new* stories" (Massey 1999:28). Things can always be otherwise, as undecidability is not simply a moment to be overcome, but something that inhabits any decision made (Derrida 2005:89).

According to Derrida, a common response in our private lives and in relation to events of history and politics, is to note that "well, that's the way things are" (ibid.). However, with the belief in the chance to change, and thereby in the possibility of politics, he writes "I believe that we should try to think 'the way things are' together with infinite responsibility, impossible choices and madness" (ibid.). The ultimate consequence of taking the statement of a possibility for things to be otherwise implies an infinite responsibility *not* to settle with the way things are, which in turn opens up a world of impossible choices. It is reasonable to imagine how madness may be a consequence of acknowledging such chaos. Concretely, in the process of writing this thesis, I have thought, *how can one write the urban void differently, different from the differences that construct the urban void as a void? What is the difference?* But since there is no reason to romanticise insanity, I have tried to keep my sanity and instead searched, responsibly, *where is it, the argument on the urban void that does not lead to the total abolition of planning, but is firm in maintaining that there is something not quite right here, the way we organise our cities, if we make voids out of places where people have picnics, birds nest, and dogs run.*

Attempting to think the new, to imagining things in a way that is radically different from what they are now, is to take a risk, writes Grosz (2005:156). Her argument is about the possibility to reconceptualise what thinking is (and its relation to the world of practice), but I think it is possible to read it as relevant to the ways in which one might imagine the future (in general). Find inspiration from the practices of those that seek out a future, the risk-takers, found in the cutting edge discourses. Look for the current sites of transformation, as they are our most direct means of welcoming the future and participating in it, producing it and ourselves (Grosz 2005:157). Once there, let's be inspired by the bravest, the riskiest, and boldest innovations that inform our present and use them as a kind of bridge to a future we cannot know or control but are inevitably drawn toward as it opens out in front of us (Grosz 2005:157).

I believe that the question I am searching for here/now is to be found somewhere between on the one hand the pounding beat of evictions and the threat thereof and on the other hand the sound of skateboard wheels against the edge of a DIY cast skate-bowl. The evictions referred to here remove the huts made out of tarpaulin and the people living in them along with their belongings from urban wastelands, and leave the homeless people to find shelter elsewhere. The sound of skateboarding is heard from another urban wasteland, where such use of the site is unknown to, ignored by, or appreciated by the authorities. The illegal appropriation of urban wastelands is (in effect) made legitimate, since the authorities and property-owners may choose to turn a blind eye to these activities or, as in the case of Berlin, to exploit the creativity at these places. Chapter 3 discussed an example from there of how the spontaneous use of urban voids by e.g. guerilla gardening or art projects has come to be viewed as an asset to the city and its

policy work to brand Berlin as a creative city (SSB 2007). It has also been noted how an increasing number of landowners are engaging in the promotion of temporary uses of their vacant property, to gain some kind of return from it while waiting for it to be properly developed (Bishop & Williams 2012:43). The homeless person and the skater here come to represent different appropriations of urban voids, which define the place and contribute to its becoming something other than it was before: and here it is not the appropriation *per se* that disturbs the order of things but what kind of definition it produces.

The stakes for e.g. a homeless person at an urban void are not the same as those for e.g. a skater. As discussed above, they bring to the fore widely differing conflicts in the urban fabric, which come to be mediated by different strategies of spatial politics. There is nothing new in this kind of conflict. Many have written of the right to the city, and how it is unevenly distributed (see e.g. Lefebvre 1996, Harvey 2000, 2008, Soya 2010). What, however, happens in this context, namely that of the urban void, is that conflict as in the above occurs at a space constituted as being outside the City, a space that is nothing in relation to that which is something. However, when the blankness, or the nothingness, of the urban void is undone by an appropriation that catches the attention of the authorities it enters *inside*. That is because the City, in order to remain in control over all its territory, must re-appropriate what has been illegitimately defined by appropriation. It does so either by recasting it as an urban *void*, voiding it by stripping it of any remnants of the illegal appropriation, as in the cases of eviction. Alternatively, if the new definition is found useful by the city, it might (as in the Berlin case earlier discussed) include it in its policy work and make the illegal legitimate.

Both these strategies, however, imply an incorporation of the urban void in the City's system of surveillance and control, which

in effect turns it into a place like any other in the city. At the same time, though, this occurs by way of making this place a *different* place: in the former, the eviction voids the place, yearning to create a *tabula rasa* in the midst of all the other places in the City brim-full with meaning, in a rhythm of evictions that in effect loads these places with meaning instead of erasing any; in the latter, with one stroke of a pen it inverts the illegal use of the urban void into legal ditto, creating an exception to the rule and a timespace in the urban fabric where the unlawful disturbance of a property owner's possession of the site is admissible (and maybe even decreed).[35] Here, at the undecidable limit of the City, the lines we draw between insides and outsides and the forces of inclusion/exclusion that they entail, come out as paradoxes. Yet, however deconstructed to appear as paradoxical, those lines are still there. Standing at the urban void, the uneven distribution of the right to the city as an *oeuvre*, a work, in which all citizens participate, is expressed in no uncertain terms (cf. Lefebvre 1996).

Throughout the pages of this book, we have seen how the urban void is constructed as the constitutive outside of the City, as an-*other* kind of space and that it comes in many different guises. It is a fascinating rabbit-hole of a hidden urban structure that one might trespass into as a hobby nurturing a sense of wonder in the everyday spaces we inhabit (Ninjalicious 2005:3). It is also a lot at the corner of an industrial site on the downgrade, with nothing much else happening to it than weeds growing in the gravel and every once in a while a bird passing, quite dull. It is also a little wood delineated by the highway in the west and the metro railway in the east, where a group of people have put up tents to spend the night. This thesis has shaken up dominant modes of constructing the urban wasteland as an urban void, and questioned the premises on which they are made by presenting it as an either/or, an undecidable. It has shaken up but it will not take

35. The choice of words here are inspired by a formulation found in the City of Stockholm Development Administration (CSDA) application to the enforcement service to execute evictions from their property, cited at p. 115.

down. Instead it will ask, is it reasonable to conceive of these very different places in terms of the same category of space? Have we not merely created a sorting frame labelled "Other" into which we discard what does not fit well into conventional categories of urban space such as "Street", "Public square", "Parking lot", or "Cemetery"? This "Other"-label proved a useful category, as what sort under it are spaces that lack an obvious definition, a designated function, and thereby also lack any strict norms on what this particular category is supposed to be used for/as. Compare with the "Street", where vehicles of different kinds are expected to move in certain directions according to a specific set of traffic rules, or the "Cemetery" where we bury our dead and keep our voices down. Not only does the absence of a manifest definition of a place sorted under "Other" invite passersby to appropriate it and thereby define it, but it also admits property-owners and other authorities, in a sense, to set the rules that they find apply best to the situation.

* * *

After having been walking long enough to leave behind my own neighbourhood and the streets I know I find myself in a field, the grass reaching my waist. I am still in the middle of the city. I pass a man walking his dog and as I make my way through the grass on a small path I end up standing in front of a little wooden hut. It is almost cubical, with three walls and the fourth an opening covered with tarpaper blowing in the wind. If this is someone's sleeping place or an art installation staging a place where someone could live, I don't know.

I believe that the question that demands to be asked is somewhere here: Imagine an urban spatial politics less dedicated to blueprints, plans and preparation for the unexpected, which should not be

confused with the total abandonment of planning (in a general sense), as it is required for political organisation and reorganisation. Imagine an adequate acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of futurity that would imply giving up on the fantasy that the future could be controlled, while not abandoning the responsibility of preparing for a better future than the present (Grosz 2001:149). If such can be imagined, what urban spaces could become from here, where the box labelled "Other" is turned upside down and emptied and the myriad of places falling out are reconsidered? Does that future City make space for all and not just for some?



"[A]s I make my way through the grass on a small path I end up standing in front of a little wooden hut. It is almost cubical, with three walls and the fourth an opening covered with tarpaper blowing in the wind." Berlin, Germany.

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Printed by Media-Tryck, Lund University, Sweden 2016

How is it that the left over, seemingly undefined, kinds of urban space where people walk their dogs, do art or find shelter for the night, are articulated and categorised as voids, gaps, or no-spaces? They are often anything but urban voids, in a literal sense, as they are not empty or deserted. Through a deconstruction-inspired analysis, thinking with the Derridean notion of an undecidable, the author investigates the becoming of the urban void as a deviance, as an*other* kind of space. The thesis shows, in the form of a montage and with illustrations from Athens, Berlin, Brasília, Malmö and Stockholm, the processes by which the most mundane space is made strange. It not only writes the urban void *into* politically relevant space but represents it in a way that makes it obvious *as a* politically relevant space. It brings the 'no-spaces' out of an (assumed) obscurity, yet at the same time de-mystifies the (same) fascinating places, in hope of a less polarised and more nuanced discourse on the urban wastelands. Only then can the existence of the urban void as a category of left over space be questioned, and the thesis concludes by opening up for future inquiry about what kind of city could become from a point of view where the urban void is just another kind of space.

LUND UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Political Science
Lund Political Studies 181
ISBN 978-91-7623-926-1
ISSN 0460-0037