INTRODUCTION:
TOWARDS A NEW POLITICS OF THE STREET

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This book is an attempt to think through two sets of questions. The first set concerns what might be termed a 'return' to the street. This is not a bright, new dawn. It is not the first steps out into the light following an environmental or technological apocalypse. Rather, this return concerns a renewed and heightened awareness of the vast social inequalities, violence and exclusion which continue to be perpetuated across the world. To challenge such inequality requires confrontation with the individuals, agents, institutions and authorities who actively promote and enact such violence and exclusion. It requires the occupation of sites and spaces which make visible such acts of exclusion. The street constitutes one such site of confrontation and visibility.

Identifying the street's continued importance as a highly visible space of confrontation requires consideration of the different motivations, stakes and tensions arising from this 'return' in the form of riots, protests and occupations of recent years. How might we situate this 'return' in relation to earlier political and social movements focused on and around the street?

The second set of questions is linked to the first and concerns more precisely the shifting role of public space and the everyday processes of inclusion and exclusion enacted here. How far does the street as myth, metonym and discourse of public space correspond to the private walkways, corporate-sponsored playgrounds and heavily policed pavements of today's urban centres? To return to the street is therefore also to acknowledge and challenge the ways in which public spaces have become private. This might be considered as part of a wider privatization of the public realm which includes the outsourcing of state provision including healthcare, education and law and order turning these into neoliberal 'quasi-markets'. Perceived as such, public services are eroded and welfare undermined in the name of 'competitiveness'.

The street, the square, the park have all become sites where spontaneous public exchange has been transformed into carefully regulated public performance and economic exchange, where one's access depends upon one's perceived (or performed) economic value. To accept this transformation is, at the

same time, to affirm one's complicity in the processes which exclude individuals and groups via terms like 'renewal' and 'regeneration'.

Real Bodies in Real Spaces

At the end of Jonathan Mostow's 2009 film, *Surrogates*, a group of neighbours step one by one out into their street, dressed for the most part in dressing-gowns and pyjamas, cautious, unsteady and blinking in the daylight. In this particular rerendering of Plato's Cave narrative, the world in 2054 is a world where it has ceased to be dangerous to go out quite simply because no one needs to go out anymore at all. Instead humans have been relegated to a life lived vicariously through their surrogates - robot replicas operated via headsets. This all changes when, for the first time in a number of years, a murder is committed. To destroy a surrogate is nothing more than criminal damage to private property. The murder enquiry led by a bored, jaded detective, Greer (Bruce Willis) forces society to call into question the vicarious mode of living they have come to take for granted.

Once liberated from their headsets, individuals are invited to embrace both a new dawn and a return to a former time of unmediated social and physical interaction with one another. The film's overriding and condescendingly predictable message seems to be that we should take heed of anything and everything that, whilst claiming to 'enhance' real experience and enjoyment, ends up circumventing such experience. At the same time, the film also suggests something else about our understanding of public and private space and the role of these spaces in identity formation.

Where the surrogates operated by the main character, Greer, and his wife, Maggie (Rosamund Pike), take the form of slightly younger, better groomed versions of themselves, narcissism is off-set against the 'inauthenticity' or even 'betrayal' of those who opt for surrogates of different appearance, race or gender. This sense of deliberate deceit is articulated at one point by Greer who echoes common persistent attitudes towards those who create online avatars especially when such personas assume a role beyond the limits of the Internet. However, in the world of surrogates, the risks of online grooming have faded since everyone is now embodied by their surrogate at all times. Homicide and violence have been replaced by theft and vandalism.

Throughout the film it is clear that surrogates are chosen by individuals according to established norms as to how a person should appear in order to command respect, acceptance and also desire in a given role. Beyond the pure superficiality of Greer and Maggie, explained away by the film as a mismanagement of grief, there lies an awareness that those who do not conform to standard representations of the male and female body, those who are overweight, infirm, old or simply unattractive are excluded or limited from public space and social

agency. If 'real' physical bodies are what matter, some bodies matter more than others (cf. Butler, 1993).

In *The Inhuman*, Jean-François Lyotard asks whether we can think without our bodies before suggesting that the very question itself is moot (Lyotard, 1991). As films like *Surrogates* amply demonstrate, hypothetical exercises in 'thinking' beyond and without our bodies end up reproducing fairly standard conceptions of the human body as stand-ins. Where this is perhaps necessary for the characters in *Surrogates* who are still required to operate their robot replacements via a prosthetic device, it should perhaps strike us as odd in *The Matrix Trilogy* that all those coma-induced bodies providing energy to the machines should need the construction of an imagined life-world based on a form of embodiment and body-image completely unknown to them. Bodies continue to matter and consist of matter. In the absence of telekinesis, technological prostheses continue to be mapped onto physical bodies, functioning as extensions to these bodies.

Wider debates about the body and space are key in explaining the importance of the street as both actual, physical space and ideological concept within late capitalist society. The street functions as a limit between public and private space, between here and elsewhere. It is both territory and trajectory. The street is where we encounter the other firsthand whether as friend, neighbour, stranger or enemy. In an age defined by our connection to the 'virtual', the physical street continues to function as the site where real bodies operate in real spaces even while such notions undergo radical contestation and reconfiguration. The street is therefore indispensable to discussions of political action, activism, responsibility and resistance.

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The essays included in this book approach the street via a range of different critical lenses, methodologies and objects of enquiry. Multiple sites and spaces are covered including the streets of London, Paris, New York, Sydney, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá, Port Louis, Nuremberg and Hillsborough. While various chapters are focused on site-specific analysis, notably, Yamin's examination of street theatre as pedagogy in Bogotá, Chapter 8, and Brar's discussion of the London Grime scene in Chapter 7, elsewhere a more comparative approach is taken to teasing out what is at stake in this space we refer to as 'street.' In Chapter 3, Andron and Ramos demonstrate the ways in which technology pushes the boundaries of the material street using the example of 3D street art and advertising. Also looking at street art in Chapter 2, Segal Hamilton explores the way in which Parisian street artists enact both a countermapping and re-colonisation of public space in and beyond their own 'territories'. In her chapter on 'Enlightened Streets', Simpson juxtaposes public education campaigns in Germany, Brazil and Mauritius in order to challenge existing notions of 'enlighten-

ment' within a postcolonial context. Highlighting the various tensions at work in the 'SlutWalk' events taking place around the world, in Chapter 12, Stupart considers what it means for women to be seen 'walking the streets' in various global cities.

While recent events constitute the starting point for thinking about a 're-turn to the street' as amply demonstrated in Kaulingfreks' analysis of 'unruly politics' in Chapter 5, the idea of 'return' is frequently explored via historical contextualization. Lavelle's analysis of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement in Chapter 11 situates this within a history of political activism, questioning the validity and long-term impact of such interventions. In Chapter 10, Ryan calls into question contemporary celebrations of street art in Brazil and elsewhere via extensive reflection on the Grupo Tupinãodá's art-based activism during the dictatorship. Taylor's reading of British skinhead subculture in Chapter 6 provides a wider contextualization for thinking about class warfare and the 2011 London riots.

Read together these interventions demonstrate the primacy of the street as an object of ongoing analysis, critique and debate for a range of disciplines including architecture, urban geography, gender and race studies, sociology, political science, history, cultural and media studies as well as the need for a multidisciplinary approach to exploring the uses and abuses of public space. In this respect, the book avoids offering a prescribed route in favour of a series of loosely linked explorations. Thus, Collier and Brebenel's attempt to escape 'Psy-chogeographical Cul-de-sacs' in Chapter 4 lends a self-reflexivity to the volume through a critical assessment of the legacy and continued validity of the Situa-tionist and Letterist movements.

Like all signposts, the chapter groupings are there primarily to be ignored unless you are cornered and desperate. It is perhaps telling, however, that the collection is bounded by two chapters focusing on the materiality of the street and its 'furniture'. In the chapter 1, Preston looks at the stairway and the exclu-sion and encounters it engenders as a common element of the cityscape, identi-fying its role in progressive town planning ideology and gentrification processes which privatize public space for consumer activity. In the chapter at the end of our journey, Henri looks the Deptford Anchor, the relocation of which repre-sents a gentrification process aimed at removing lower class drinkers from the streets. Like the street itself, the book is contained by both its physical and ide-ological limits. There is an awareness in each chapter that the street as a site of resistance and radical political potential risks recuperation at every moment by the very same forces that are being contested.

Reading and Writing the Street

There is, of course, a danger in overreading the street which is worth noting here. Not least given the rabid recuperation at work on all aspects of street life, culture, art, food and music. One of the main objectives of this book is to insist the street constitute an object of ongoing, rigorous and multidisciplinary analysis and critique due to the rapid erosion of public freedom and civil liberties occurring in postindustrial cities. This implies that crossing the street always involves looking both ways and taking some risks. It is not about keeping your head down and hoping no one bumps into you as you go on minding your own business. Rather, our street, the one found in the pages of this book, requires drawing attention, speaking out and acting up.

Consequently, when reading and writing the street, we should be particularly attentive to the problems involved in reducing space to 'literary analogy' as identified by Henri Lefebvre in *Toward an Architecture of Enjoyment*:

> The application to architectural space of a semiological concept, the zero degree, does not imply that we could use other concepts, such as "reading-writing." It's true that a monument and an architectural space can be read. But that they can be defined as texts is something else entirely. Neither the concept of reading nor that of writing are appropriate for space, nor is the concept of a code, mainly because practice (social and spatial) is not part of those concepts (Lefebvre: 2014, 124-5).

While the symbolic omissions, exclusions and violence perpetuated via linguistic categories are frequently acted out with real material and physical force in public space, to define everything that occurs on the street in terms of 'text' is to oversimplify and homogenize very different sets of acts, events and experiences within such spaces. The common result takes the form of a compromising romanticism which redefines those alienated or excluded by the street, its architecture, practices and agents, as 'readers' free to tell their own story. Thus, where Michel de Certeau's notions of reading the city in *The Practice of Everyday Life* were intended as tactics which enabled the city-dweller to 'resist' the overarching strategies of the urban planner and architect, Lefebvre reverses the notion of 'reading' to suggest that we are the ones being read here. 'Space decodes people's impulses…it is not people who decode space' (125).

Yet, the street with its multiplicity of surfaces and sign systems together with the unpredictability of the encounters it engenders, cannot but lend itself to an overeager academic enquiry which has thus far relied heavily on semiology. Such enquiry finds objects of analysis everywhere but fails to tell us anything new or useful about the world let alone provide the political impetus to change it.

James Agee pinpoints the difficulty of accurately 'writing' the street in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*:

> Trying, let us say, to represent, to reproduce, a certain city street, under the conviction that nothing is as important, as sublime, as truly poetic about that street in its flotation upon time and space as the street itself. Your medium, unfortunately, is not a still or moving camera, but is words. You abjure all metaphor, symbol, selection and above all, of course, the temptation to invent, as obstructive, false, artistic. As nearly as possible in words (which, even by grace of genius, would not be very near) you try to give the street in its own terms: that is to say, either in the terms in which you (or an imagined character) see it, or in a reduction and depersonalization into terms which will as nearly as possible be the 'private' singular terms of that asphalt, those neon letters, those and all other items combined, into that alternation, that simultaneity, of flat blank tremendously constructed chords and of immensely elaborate counterpoint which is the street itself. You hold then strictly to materials, forms, colors, bulks, textures, space relations, shapes of light and shade, peculiarities, specializations, of architecture and of lettering, noises of motors and brakes and shoes, odors of exhausts: all this gathers time and weightiness which the street does not of itself have: it sags with this length and weight: and what have you in the end but a somewhat overblown passage from a naturalistic novel: which in important ways is at the opposite pole from your intentions, from what you have seen, from the fact itself (Agee and Evans: 2006, 207-8).

More recently, Astra Taylor's 2008 film *Examined Life: Philosophy in the Streets* inadvertently demonstrated just how ill at ease academics can be when asked to engage with public space in anything other than abstract terms. In one chapter, Judith Butler takes a walk with Sunaura Taylor who is confined to an electric wheelchair. Setting off around San Francisco, Butler and Taylor identify the city as being one of the most accessible in the world despite its intensely hilly terrain and public transport system with far from comprehensive disabled access. Notions of walking, access and mobility are framed according to a U.S. worldview which continues to place the abled-bodied motorist at the centre of such notions. Yet, the most disturbing part of the exchange between Butler and Taylor is the moment they exhaust the potential of the street itself as topic of discussion and enter a vintage store. What is being implied here, albeit unintentionally, is that one's presence on the street is predicated less on one's physical mobility as a 'body' and more on one's ability to act as a consumer. Here, to analyse the street is to consume the street.

Written in the immediate aftermath of the Occupy Movement, David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* goes some way to declaring a return to the streets as essential to the anti-capitalist struggle. Harvey's point is basically the same as ours: real bodies in real spaces are what count, 'the collective power of bodies in public space is still the most effective instrument of opposition when all other means of access are blocked' (Harvey, 2012:161-2). But for Harvey such a struggle continues to be predicated on the figure of the abled-bodied, male worker. More focus is required as to how a crowd or collective risks reproducing existing forms of

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exclusion in claiming to speak for the masses as a homogeneous whole. Those whose access to the street is already restricted due to race, gender or disability must frequently concede their voices to those for whom the street is taken for granted as usable, occupiable and negotiable space. At the same time, a more critical stance is needed towards both the romanticisation and demonization of the crowd in public space. It is, for example, naive to think that issues such as the systemic street harassment of women in Cairo disappeared completely during the occupation of Tahrir Square in 2011, yet this was the rhetoric widely presented. Conversely, how might the pervasive politics of fear which posits the crowd as unruly mob or herd, keeping people off the streets, through the imposition of curfews and devices like the sonic 'mosquito' be redressed?

A new politics of the street would not simply take into account other figures and bodies – those who do not or cannot produce, consume and exchange – but accord such bodies primacy. Public space should be designed and organised according to the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. That disabled access should not be an afterthought or the token gesture that it continues to be in the most 'progressive' of cities became clear after the 2012 Paralympics in London. Where disabled access to the games had been facilitated to promote an image of London as disabled-friendly, in the years since the games, reforms to the UK welfare system has seen increasingly cruel and punitive measures targeted at disabled claimants.[1] Yet we are also witnessing new forms of disability activism taking place in the street. In January 2012, DPAC (Disabled People Against Cuts) chained their wheelchairs together across a street in central London bringing traffic to a halt on Regent Street.

Violent Spectacle

Implicit in the call to 'return' to the street, is the recognition that the body still remains the focus of a whole series of different power relations, subject to and subject of a range of techniques aimed at producing the docile body and normalising the deviant body (Foucault, 1977). In 1978, Michel Foucault declared that disciplinary power was all but over. In 1990, Gilles Deleuze announced the shift from a disciplinary society to one of control. Both, it seems, were too hasty in their prognosis.

If the growing prison populations in the U.S. and most of Europe demonstrate anything it is the continued prevalence of disciplinary power within late capitalist society. The taking to the streets – as a response to widespread changes in material, social conditions – demonstrates a belief, which a few years ago was considered to be outdated, a belief that this is where political, social change occurs. Although Facebook and Twitter along with other social media provide

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[1] The number of suicides and deaths linked to cuts in benefits rose sharply between 2011 and 2014, according to the *Disability News Service* (RT.com, 2014).

a space in which to construct accompanying commentary or narrative to such events, there is also the recognition of the limitations of such virtual spaces – the unreliability of the twitter feed, the issues of self-policing and surveillance engendered by social media - even as they remain tools of organisation along with the ability of different governments to regulate and control access to such media in the first place.

Yet, the open displays of police brutality we are witnessing in towns like Ferguson, on university campuses across the U.S. and in cities like London, Cairo and Hong Kong together with the fact that victims of such brutality frequently face charges for violent disorder also seem to imply something other than a disciplinary mode of power.[2] The direct use of blunt force publicly and unapologetically employed by those in power seems to embody a doctrine of might is right. The return to the street coincides with a return to the spectacle of the scaffold.

Public displays of force involving small town police chiefs posing by armoured vehicles or the Mayor of London ordering water cannons appear to supplement the open admission of torture by Western governments along with the photos of the Whitehouse 'Situation Room' purportedly taken during the shooting of Osama Bin Laden by U.S. Navy Seals. But perhaps this is not a 'return' to a sovereign mode of power or even, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) might suggest, a *thanatopolitics*, defined in terms of the persistence of the sovereign deeply embedded within the structures of the biopolitical. The relatively small incidences of violent disorder which erupted across cities in the UK in the summer of 2011 and which largely involved a series of arsons and lootings did not signify a reactivation of the unruly mob of medieval society. Instead, they seemed to signal the exhaustion of the biopolitical – what Agamben might call its moment of *inoperativity* – the point where it is both fulfilled and suspended. It is the very question of the biopolitical or, more precisely, the question that underpins the biopolitical, which is at stake here. What does it mean to be alive today? Who is really alive today? Slavoj Žižek asks these same questions in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002) where he, somewhat reductively, juxtaposes the Middle Eastern suicide bomber with the New York jogger. His point being that the radical calling into question of what it means to be alive can only ever involve risking everything that this is taken to mean. In this respect the 'Situation Room' is the image *par excellence* of this moment of exhaustion. Is this image of top government officials of a Western superpower watching a 'snuff' film (Hutnyk,

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[2] During the UK student protests in late 2010, Alfie Meadows suffered severe brain injuries requiring intensive surgery following a blow to the head by riot police. Meadows was subsequently charged with violent disorder before being acquitted by a jury in 2013. Mathieu Rigouste, a French political activist and author of *La Domination Policiére* (2012) about the rise of the police state in France was arrested and charged with violent disorder in June 2013. At the time of his arrest Rigouste had spent 3 days in hospital after being beaten up by police officers in Arnaud Bernard, a run down district of Toulouse earmarked for gentrification.

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2012) the final taboo – the only remaining transgression (besides paedophilia) – or is it the apotheosis of the Western biopolitical imagination? Here we are witness to the taking of life or the experience of death as mediated by the limit of the TV or computer screen. Again, what this possibly signals is the primacy of the physical body in real physical space. We are presented with a deferred image in which members of the Obama administration do the looking for us, themselves already at a distance from the events being relayed back. Where individual subjectivity is not formed wholly within the space of the Internet, it is precisely the mediatory space of the screen which enables and encourages us to actively deny all responsibility, agency and culpability.

Obama left the situation room seemingly blinking in the light of his own new dawn, facing the cameras and reaching out to the man and woman on the streets of America virtually inviting them to partake in the disgusting scenes of gross patriotic jubilation which ensued on streets across the country. Yet, the curious thing here is the double staging that went on, the press conference photograph was staged along with the one taken in the situation room – Obama gave the press conference, then re-enacted his arrival at the press conference for the cameras. The double deferral of presence here can be mapped onto the endless deferral of both power and responsibility. The *mise en scène* turned *mise en abîme* of these images reminds us that what we are witnessing is not a return of the sovereign but something far more sinister. And consequently, a return to the streets and other public spaces should be read as the refusal, no matter how limited, to deny or give up individual and collective responsibility.

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