



Title of the paper:

## **Rethinking Urban Commons in the Age of Augmented Transductive Territorial Production: Detecting Resilience in Semi-Public Space of Simulative Relational Assemblages**

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### **Abstract**

Considering social cohesion a primary factor for the development of sustainable and resilient cities facing the fast and radical anthropological changes generated by digital technology, this paper addresses the socio-spatial implications of the transformation of relationality networks. It focuses on the forces behind latent struggles in contested central urban spaces of rapidly developing contemporary cities. Firstly, it formulates a theoretical framework to analyse how hegemonic economic powers have enhanced crucial urban problems, such as socio-spatial fragmentation, polarisation, and inequality. Secondly it discusses criticalities and opportunities emerging from the conflicts between the forces that control and expand the digitally augmented networkability of key common urban asset.

The theoretical framework is developed from a comparative critical urbanism approach inspired by *the right to the city* and the *right to difference*, and elaborates the discourse on sustainable development that informs the United Nations' *New Urban Agenda*. The discussion is structured to shed light on specific socio-spatial relational practices that counteract the dissipation of the "common worlds" caused by sustained processes of urban gentrification and homogenisation. The analysis of digitally augmented geographies focuses on their capacity to reintroduce practices of participation and commoning that reassemble fragmented relational infrastructures, translocally combining social, cultural and material elements. Empirical studies on the production of advanced simulative and transductive spatialities in places of enhanced consumption found in Asian and Australasian cities ground the discussion. These provide evidence of the extension in which of the agency of the augmented territorialisation forces in the reconstitution of inclusive and participatory systems of relationality.

The concluding notes, speculating on the emancipatory potential found in these social laboratories, call for a radical redefinition of the approach to the problem of the urban commons. Such a change would improve the capacity of urbanism disciplines to adequately engage with the digital turn and efficaciously contribute to a maximally different spatial production that enhances and strengthen democracy and pluralism in the public sphere.



## 1. Appraising the complexity of contemporary urban commons

As part of the 'world in common', inclusionary urban commons are key civic institutions – crucially also including public space – for the affirmation of the collective dimension of the city and its development as a just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable and resilient place (Borch & Kornberger, 2015; Flusty, 1997: 11; Garnett, 2012: 2012-2018). As such, these commons are available and accessible to each member of the collectivity with no mediating party, and constitute common and non-commodifiable assets. Their conception, construction, management and usage is expression of a collective, pluralistic and democratic society. As free, open and participatory networked associations, they comprehend three main domains: a) production, consumption, and safeguard of public services and goods; b) physical and digital communication, interaction and encounter; and c) culture, creativity and, most important, democracy (Lefebvre, 1996; Purcell, 2002; Stanek, 2011; Harvey 2011; 2012; United Nations, 2017; Susser & Tonnelat, 2013; Hardt & Negri, 2009).

Modern problems affecting the 'world in common' have been central to the discourse on urbanisation at least for the last three decades and have recently informed the elaboration of the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (2017), the highest level document including global principles, policies and standards for urban development. Among the streams on relations between space and political spheres, and critical changes in urban society, a leading area has concentrated on public realm and the critique on the decay of the public condition with the crisis of public interactions and expressions (Sennett, 1977; 2008; McQuire, 2008). Causes linked to the expansion of private power and control systems have been discussed with fundamental references to the work of Hannah Arendt, who focused on the occlusion of the political sphere towards plurality of human difference (1958); Jurgen Habermas, who examined societal contradictions of the modern 'feudalisation' of the public sphere in relation to the negation of citizenship rights (Calhoun, 1992); and Nancy Fraser, whose discourse on the multiplicity of publics and the publicness of some private elements addressed emerging issues of inequality and relationality, segmentation and subordination (Fraser, 1993). Critical stances on these issues has consolidated and become robust particularly around issues of spatial control (Foucault 1995; Harvey, 2003; Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008a), socio-economic polarisation processes concerning privatisation (Low, 2006; Dawson, 2010; Minton, 2012; Soja, 2010; Lee and Webster, 2006); spatial justice (Low and Smith 2006; Mitchell, 2003); socio-spatial segmentation (Dawson, 2010; Harvey, 2003; Hodkinson, 2012); consumption and alienation (Debord, 1983; Miles & Miles, 2004; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), and selective deprivation of public space (Mitchell, 1995; 2003; Harvey, 2003; Davis, 1990; Sorkin, 1992).

In the production of public realm, the penetration of the private sector affects all levels of conception, delivery and governance and progressively expands globally. Recent decades have seen its very acute diffusion in contexts of rapid urbanisation both in Asia and Australasia, starting from the decolonising territories, such as Hong Kong, Singapore Australia and New Zealand, to massively propagate in the growing economies of largest East and Southeast Asian countries, such as China and Indonesia.

For the appraisal of the growing complexity of this phenomenon a comparative urbanism approach is adopted here to address the way regional differences produce specific countering forces and organisations that strengthen the resiliency of local communities and their capacity to protect the commons. This approach can critically analyse the complexity of these antagonist forces in their contexts and systematically understanding similarities and differences among different processes to contribute to the development of the discourse on such a rapidly evolving matter. By establishing an intimate relation between theoretical work and empirical practice, it is not only possible to align the nature of the research practice to that of the studied phenomenon, but, importantly, to entirely appreciate the contribution to theory of particular phenomena emerging in urban laboratories, such as the Chinese Special



Administrative Zones, that present non-generalisable power relations. This approach uses a mixed methodology that disentangles, while maintaining associated, complex and concurrent aspects of each process spatial production: the conceived, lived and represented dimensions.

This investigation is framed by and bridging between major research traditions in critical urbanism: firstly the work on space of Henry Lefebvre (1991, 1996, 2003, 2004; Kipfer, Milgrom & Schmid, 2008; Soja 1998, 2000; Purcell 2002, 2014), secondly Richard Sennett's idea of open city (1977, 2008, 2018), and lastly territorial research related to actor-network and assemblage theories (Latour 1999, 2005; Law, 2009; Murdoch 1998; Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 2000; Farías and Bender, 2010; Anderson & McFarlane 2011; McFarlane 2011). A specific development of ANT, territorialological studies, provides important support to address the "unpredictable multiplication, interpenetration and ongoing production" of territories that characterise the commons of our age (Kärrholm, 2012; Brighenti, 2014: 3 and passim; Merriman, 2012).

Territorial behaviour studies help understanding the spatial production of enduring networks where plasticity has become a fundamental characteristic. They provide instruments to unravel individual practices as well as complex associational processes within specific translocalised, distributed and diffused systems where nodes (people and things), bodies (stabilised sub-associations of nodes) and sorts (stabilised patterns composed by variable nodes) establish a large variety of open, mobile, migrating and non-linear configurational dynamics over space and time. The concentration on strategies of occupation, tactics of appropriation, and effects of association of socio-spatial constitutive processes progressively expands from individual acts and actors into multidimensional assemblages of practices and apparatuses with heterochronic relations. The analysis of practices and apparatuses elicits the irreducible specificity of each actor - or to use Bruno Latour terminology, *actant* (1999: 303, 2005: 71) – in its physical (devices, materials and objects), social (routines, bonds, alliances and conflicts) and semantic (languages, signs and representations) aspects. The *actants* are also explored in their permanent involvement in loops of establishing and re-establishing "chains of activation and reactivity" (Brighenti, 2014: 20) through processes that are either routine or *ad hoc*, confined and translocal, and tangible and intangible. The chains are addressed evaluating their effectiveness and efficaciousness in shaping, organising and transforming public socio-spatial systems of the city. Each peculiar form, dynamic and effect generated by situated aggregations of associative systems is seen as expression of chains of relations reflecting the fundamental tension between territorial grounding and relational responsiveness (Massey 2007).

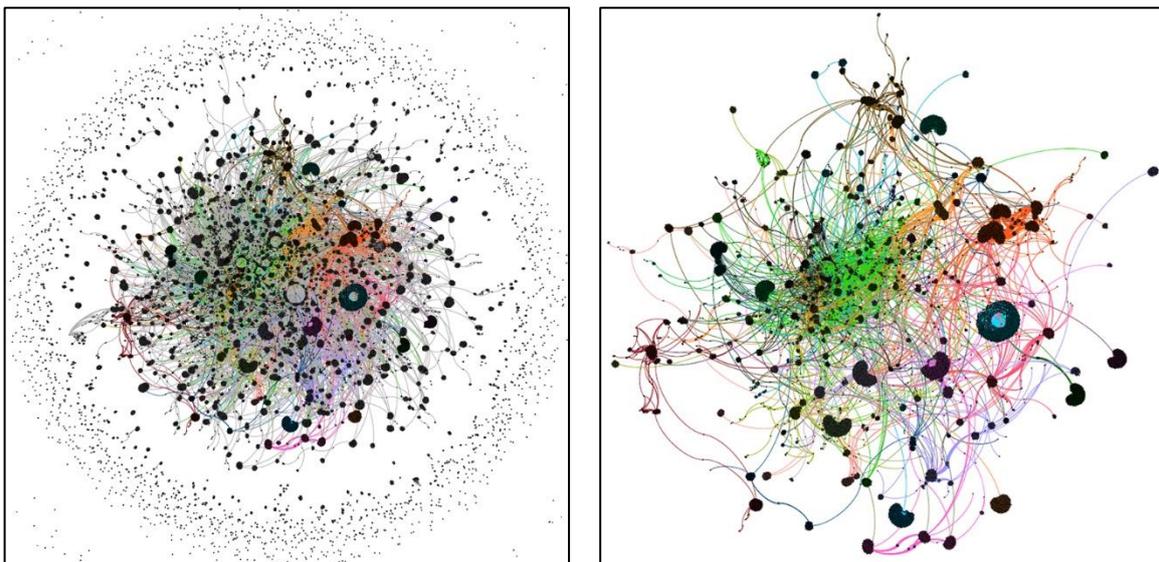
Particularly relevant in the background of this discussion on spatialisations of relational systems is the contention of the ontogenetic capacity of urban space and the correlative citizen's *right to the city* (Park, 1967; Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008) that concern historically specific material, conceptual and quotidian practices of appropriation, association and control (Lefebvre, 1991). This tenet has been recently adopted by the *New Urban Agenda* (2017), advocating for a pluralist and inclusive public sphere that constitutes an effective antidote to the progressive fragmentation of the social, cultural and environmental body of the city. Plurality, freedom, autonomy of thought and action are seen as paramount to establish emancipatory and equitable spatialities of integral relationality (Villa, 1992). This also underlies the idea of a democratic *agonistic pluralism* that sustains equitable participation in social dialogue and exchange of increasing cosmopolitan condition, acknowledging conflict as essential elements of the political in a complex civil society (Mouffe, 1999, 2008).

Considering difference as a central, irreducible and non-substitutable value, the framework of this study is setup to provide theoretical instruments to detect and evaluate the growth and appearance of concrete instances that operate to overcome divisions, repetitions and

confinement to set free diversifying forces that enable to “make and remake ourselves and our cities” (Harvey, 2008: 23). Differentiation is addressed as the exercise of collective power over the processes of urbanisation and socialisation. Its maximal expression is considered a fundamental “right,” which defends against the attempt of hegemonic economic groups to negate it to expanding their power. It counters processes of abstraction that normalise differentiation and homogenise diversity. It develops within and in antagonism to abstract spaces, opposing their deceptive stratagems that with ‘induced diversity’ make appear sameness multiplicity and produce conditions of “reifying alienation,” where “the milieu of the commodity has itself become a commodity” (Lefebvre, 1991: 50).

Author’s previous studies on the East Asian and Australasian cities of Auckland (Manfredini & Jenner, 2015), Changsha (Xin et al, 2018), Hanoi (Manfredini & Ta, 2016; 2017) and Istanbul (Manfredini, Zamani & Leardini, 2017) have shown that most tangible forms of ‘insurgent citizenship’ for the reconstitution of urban integrity are diffused and transversal to societal strata (Figures 1 and 2). However, these are often short-lived due to the power – also granted by unaware citizens’ complicity – of hegemonic forces of the post-civil (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008a) and meta-consumerist society (Miles, 2010) to implement systems of spatio-behavioural of control that identify, homogenise and fragment the antagonist “seeds.”

Research on the contribution of this insurgent citizenship has highlighted its invaluable agency in reverting the unequal and unjust commodification of goods and services necessary to secure physical, social and cultural wellbeing (Banerjee 2001; Holston, 2009; Minton, 2012; Manfredini & Jenner, 2015; Manfredini, Xin, Jenner, & Besgen, 2017; Soja 2010). It has a demonstrated capacity to contribute to establish common grounds to multiple and often contradictory and conflicting parties, where they can democratically compete for the affirmation of their ideas and values, guaranteeing the establishment of positive space-based ontogenetic processes that directly and permanently involve the participation of all stakeholders, foster inclusion, autonomy and social interplay. It triggers concurrent actions to associate networks and institute mechanisms of territorial production that establish open, anti-hierarchical and participatory relational systems.



Figures 1 and 2. Network analysis showing the larger communities (more than 1% of total interactions) in the main POI of Instagram in Sylvia Park Metropolitan Centre, Auckland, New Zealand, in 2017.

## 2. Urban commons production and urban restructuring issues



Problems affecting the traditional commons are directly related to growing sustainability issues of progressive process of socio-spatial fragmentation and deterritorialisation in urban society. The neoliberal governance model, implemented in most global jurisdictions in recent years, has overridden the political hindrances to the affirmation of an enhanced version of the original liberalism, and brought about a strong delegation of state responsibilities, promotion of the free exercise of individual self-interest, and increased support to capital accumulation (Brenner & Theodore, 2005; Harvey, 2003; Smith, 2002; Parr, 2015). Aiming to deliver social good through a market-driven approach it has trusted the capacity of the market to offset inequalities by enhancing economic growth. A consequent reduction in both direct and indirect state intervention has led to the implementation of free forms of regulation that transfer to or share with other than the public sector responsibility of providing services to population. Fiscal limitations faced by local governments have led to important divestment in the existing public urban infrastructure and profound restructuring of public asset and deployment of resources. Existing commons have been subjected to an increasing difficulty in the delivery of services. The private sector has promptly seen new opportunities for capital reproduction. Commons and their operations have been colonised, transformed or displaced, and assimilated to market resources (Bollier, 2002a).

The new meta-commons have attracted much criticism for the “failure of individualized private property rights to fulfil common interests in the way they are supposed to do” (Harvey, 2012: 75). Various mechanisms of property and/or governance transfer have been developed and implemented for public space. New initiatives, such as Business Improvement Districts, have shown limited institutional legitimacy and prevention of creeping privatisation that generates disparities within local communities (Garnett, 2012: 2020; Steel & Symes, 2005: 332). The underlying economisation of community wellbeing has degraded the traditional unnegotiable primacy of social responsibility in safeguarding and promoting the quality of people’s ‘common world’ (Hardt, 2010; Hardt & Negri, 2009). The diminished public control and negotiating power of the state over the effectiveness and efficaciousness of the civil infrastructure has further facilitated urban gentrification processes and the related social polarisation issues. Inhibitions of spontaneous unfolding of political possibilities, genuine forms of relationality, participation, collaboration, encounter and exchange have manifested.

The penetration of hegemonic private organisations in the key nodes of the relational infrastructure has often brought about deterritorialisations of consolidated spatial systems on social, cultural and temporal axes. The following reterritorialisations, established to financially capitalise on “local advantage” (Harvey 2012), have implied the transfer of territorial control on strategic parts of civic life centres to the private sector and exposed their socio-spatial bodies to irreparable damages. Dispossession and displacement of civic commons from their communities have disrupted their physical networks, planning capacity and everyday life. A striking example of displacing effects was found by the main author, during a study on the radical transformation the People’s Park district in central Guangzhou, China in 2011. Interviews of two displaced members of a residential settlement under demolition were effectuated in the only remaining alley of the quarter. The former residents, approached while wandering in a vain search of their former neighbours, treasured and shared their memories triggered by the smallest material evidence linked to their missed decades-long daily practices that no ‘mod cons’ could have ever replaced.

The extent of socio-spatial alienation produced by these processes is related to the entity of the “rationalisation,” restructuring and consolidation procedures introduced with the new conception and management models. It can seamlessly affect all scales, from macroscopic to microscopic, ranging from the formation of large exclusionary urban enclosures to the introduction of individual building’s regulations that exclude it from the access of ‘undesirables’, such as anti-social youth and homeless (Doherty et al., 2008).



These reterritorialisations often include strategies that economise local cultural advantage that preserve the relationships between local communities and places limitedly to superficial representational forms. Several creative cities led urban redevelopments, renewals and re-imaging programmes have included staging and simulation of authentic elements and disrupted the relational chains that can guarantee a sustainable development and preserve a sense of belonging and identity of places (Shepherd, 2002; Mommaas, 2004; Zukin, 1991). The survival of isolated fragments of both tangible and intangible historical networks and institutions that support physical, social and cognitive spatial dimensions of locales is often conducive to their complete dismissal. This not only affected the local communities that have shaped themselves and their spatialities over time, but also the wider society that shares what it has in common through the network of consolidated relational assemblages “not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and those who will come after us” (Ahrendt, 1958: 55; Benhabib, 2000).

This replacement of common worlds with users’ alienated semi-public enclosures also brings about problems of suspension of democratic accountability. Research shows the critical effects on communicative acting of exclusionary, censorship surveillance practices enacted in privately governed urban places (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993; Minton, 2012; Atkinson, 2003). The deprivation of possibility to participate in open processes of publicly relevant urban spaces creates “strangely ‘placeless’ places, cut off from their original wellsprings of local life and vitality”, undermining trust, citizenship and democracy places (Minton, 2012: 4). In places like shopping malls the deprivation affects basic rights is deliberately exercised and explicitly stated in regulations or codes of conduct. The ban on any activity purposely disturbing the public peace or interfering with the flow of visitors behavioural limitations often includes the negation of relevant freedom to assemble, congregate in groups of three or more, wear apparel that disguises, obscures or conceals the face, and engage in expressive activities not sponsored by the organisations. Some privately owned public spaces, such as the “excess plot ratio” networks of corridors, halls, plazas and flyovers of Hong Kong, usually have publicly approved regulations allowing their governing bodies to “cleanse” social space, with actions such as excluding “any person causing nuisance” or restricting usage to mere right of passage (Cuthbert & McKinnel, 2001).

Economised urban infrastructures, surrogating and supplanting the public ones, constitute systems of institutions that interfere with the continuity of the physical and social spatialities of the commons network in the traditional city. The presence of these infrastructures often causes important socio-spatial disruptions, as the spatial distribution – planned to strategically intercept people flows rather than facilitating it – can displace spatial practices and perturb spatial perception. As set of engrafted prosthetic organs – prepossessing urban commons, such as theatres (cinema) and marketplaces (atriums) – it redefines centralities, deterritorialises consolidated geographies and reterritorializes them around its main nodes. These nodes have been described as all-inclusive and semi-autonomous enclosures. Mini-cities with enclavic character that exacerbate the on-going segmentation and polarisation of the wider city (Shane, 2011: 329-338). Their antagonism to the traditional open network is manifested not only in their introversion, rather in the seamless transitional spaces that interconnect them. These armatures, such as urban freeways and subways, have high capacity and social neutrality, and transform the scattered mini-cities into city-wide rhizomatic assemblages

Specific of the enclavic assemblages is the strong transductional capacity (i.e. the ability to use information to iteratively transform perception and usage of space) that make them a peculiar kind of Foucauldian heterotopias. Their extended rhizomatic assemblages transform into a normalised and ubiquitously accessible habitual presence their introverted, displaced and disjointed places. Their all-inclusiveness reproduces as an allegoric mirroring the “real” centre of the city that they interrupt. By making discontinuity normality and reproduction



actuality, they contest, suspend, neutralise or invert the set of relations that they simultaneously designate (Foucault, 1995; 2008: 17).

Most importantly, they produce sequences of conflicting juxtapositions that both formally and semantically frame the displaced reproductions with the most obvious representational and functional reference: the ideal city. As described by Gernot Bohme (2012: 258) imposing meta-narratives of 'cityness' evokes meanings, experiences and patterns of what is 'other' to them. Overarching structures of coordinated typo-morphological reproductions of stereotypical representations mirror "past or distant public places" (Goss 1993: 19). Pseudo-commons, such as arcaded streets, fountain squares, local market halls, establish the backbone of their urban structure with imitative layouts, massing, material connotations and naming. Places are often named to proclaim their virtual publicness as 'civic plazas,' 'town squares' (Manfredini, 2017); occasionally, ostent bold explicit themes, such as the 'post-renaissance Venice' of the flagship Sands's Venetian mega-resorts. Corollary function of these 'fixed scene' is to set the tone for sub-otherness of shopping and entertainment that can be nestled 'ad infinitum'.

### **3. From ambivalence to contradiction: the illusionary compensation of 'othernesses' and the abstractive differentialism of simulacra**

Among the numerous theoretical interpretations that analyse the efficaciousness of the hyper-spatialities of these heterotopic places in establishing themselves as prime social catalysts in our cities, significant ones focus on their capacity to constitute apparatuses that lure their users by producing illusionary environments. Particularly useful, to critically address the evolution of this discussion on the age of pervaded augmented representation, is the specific contribution to the discourse on illusion and simulation in complex relational systems of Michel Foucault and the duo Deleuze and Guattari.

Elaborating the concept of heterotopia, Foucault delineates a systematic description of its constitutive principles, including one that concerns its function to relate the real and the imaginary (De Cauter & Dehaene, 2008b: 25, 27). Function of this principle is to regulate the relations between this place – heterotopia – and "the rest," by embodying the non-real spaces of utopia and making it the vehicle to access the wonder – the most precious treasures concealed in the "gardens" of the world (Foucault, 2008: 22). Means to achieve this range between two extreme poles: illusion and compensation. Compensation is delivered by places that deploy an abstracted reality "as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed and sketchy" (Foucault, 2008: 17-21; Shane, 2005: 37-42). Illusion is afforded with very special mechanisms that, whilst providing conditions to satisfy desires, deploy the crucial awareness agency of enabling the subject to understand the illusive nature of the 'real' and the suppressing nature of the superstructures in "the interior of which human life is enclosed and partitioned" (Foucault, 1995: 21).

The urban enclavic transductional assemblages adopt this functional principle in a very peculiar way. They conflate the two extreme delivery means of the functional principle by packaging illusion and compensation in a simultaneous, yet disjointed, conveyance. On the one hand, digitally enhanced transductive simulation is used to deploy compensatory conditions that make real or virtually accessible idealised paradigms of civic order and social harmony, on the other, illusion is employed to offer semi-fictional conditions that embody desired realities "supposed to lift us out of the mire of our everyday lives and [lead us] into the sacred spaces of ritualized pleasures" (Zukin, 1995:1). Their awareness agency unveils the ineffectuality of these mirrored pseudo-cities exposing the mechanisms of control and deception that leave the forces triggered by desire hindered and unable to unfold their "greatest reserve of imagination" (Foucault, 1995: 22). The consolatory and relieving compensation is crushed by the limitations of unilateral governance's policies (e.g. rigid codes of conduct, opening hours and location of augmented reality Points of Interest (POI))



and procedures (e.g. panoptical and integrated physical and digital surveillance methods). The illusory experience unveils the superstructuralism of the systems manifesting the untimeliness and non-appropriateness of the reified practices and rites (e.g. the minimal relationship building capacity of McDonaldised coffee shop and parochial spaces created with augmented reality games).

A paradox presented by these augmented and simulative Foucauldian 'floating pieces of space' - 'heterotopias par excellence' that are updated equivalents to the ship as utopian embodiment in colonial times (Foucault, 1995: 22) – is their growing in popularity in spite of their manifested deviousness. In other words, they develop a contradictory condition where the contrasting play of desire and control produces a fallacious mirroring repetition that intensifies associative processes of social meaning and personal identity creation. A relevant evidence of this autonomous individual elaboration and spatial production is the disproportionately high amount and quality of spatial representations found in these places on the POIs of image-based, locative digital social media, such as Instagram and Weibo (Manfredini & Rieger, 2017; Xin et al, 2017).

The theory developed by Deleuze in his discussion on simulation illuminates this representational paradox. He identifies a subversive force that counteracts the enforced suppression of the imaginary capacity: differentiation through repetition. Differentiation results from a form of repetition that constitutes instances of individuation. Rather than creating homologating, inauthentic and impure copies, repetition actualises ideas and reconstitutes or re-creates a type of spatial instance that does not replace reality, but rather produces reality by appropriating it through a "despotic overcoding" (Deleuze, 1994: 38, 67; Deleuze & Guattari, 2000: 210; Smith, 2006). The overcoding results from an independent and creative interpretation of what is repeated through a fabulatory processes that uses 'redundancy or 'excess' to reassociate and open to infinite new interpretations elements that have been disjoined for dominating and controlling purposes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 114).

The recognition of simulation as productive force constituted by a differential nature of repetition that opposes homogenising forces reflects what Lefebvre identifies as 'presence'. Presence is a creative and inventive condition, created by repetition through the dramatic becoming of the haecceity. It opposes what is 'present' as cunning repetition conformed to a standard that effaces the 'immediate' and interrupt interaction (Lefebvre, 2004: 39, 47). This opposition is the same of "differential" to "abstract" spaces (1991: 352-400), where by simulating presence hegemonic powers erase differences and surrogate relations with derivatives that disdain life to implement oppressive and repressive strategies of control, homologation, hierarchic order and segregation.

In the following sections, the discussion on the paradoxes emerging in the conflictual relations between abstract and differential spaces explores the simulatory spatial production of enclavic transductional assemblages. It will be guided by the theory of Deleuze and Guattari on the internal dynamics of their conflicting yet consubstantial abstractive and differential forces.

#### **4. Abstractive forces: simulation and desire control**

To succeed in attracting people into heterotopic assemblage that are socially and spatially isolated, segmented and compartmentalised, abstractive forces rely on simulation to implement controlling apparatuses that capture, deflect and commodify the drivers of desire to consumerist ends. Simulation enables these forces to associate antithetic dyads, such as simulated/'authentic', qualitative/quantitative and homogeneous/fractured are purposely generated, smothering and replacing them in compensative illusive apparatuses that appear consistent (Lefebvre, 1991: 352-256, 636). This de- and re-joining process is particularly



affecting desire and needs, which are associated, uncoupled, then “crudely cobbled back together,” pushing repetition to the point of automatism to annihilate its disruptive differential force (Lefebvre, 2004: 40; 1991: 38-39, 309; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 211-212)

These simulative processes and the resulting contradictions have attracted a large amount of critique, which provides comprehensive descriptions of the surreptitious forms in which desire is exploited by established economic powers to their own specific aims using ‘satisfying’ methods to influence and control users’ behaviours and choices. This includes the appraisals of the transformational experience economy and its ‘participatory’ approach to creativity, choice and self-realisation that, as described by Rem Koolhaas, produce ‘strangling seduction’ conditions and form of a seamless global network of ‘junkspace’ of Debordian ‘spectacle’ spatialities (Koolhaas 2002: 176). Elaborations address the discourse on spaces of consumption and the novel forms in which commodity fetishism and consolatory hospitality deprive – whilst making accomplice – a public of customers that remains without an adequate fulfilment of the promises (Witkin, 2003: 3-5; Zukin, 1995; Miles & Miles, 2004, Harvey, 2012: 11-14; Miles & Miles, 2004: 87-95).

This instrumental use of the power of desire has been particularly efficacious in conditions of enhanced socio-spatial fragmentation, dependency and isolation, such as modern suburban areas, where there is a scarcity of urban amenities and delivery of services to population. There, with the deployment of actualisations that simulate the connective and associative agency of desire a disruptive development of the previous types of heterotopic places, such as malls and entertainment centres, has occurred and created new hypermediated relational assemblages. Very sophisticated techniques are adopted to implement their core ‘abstractive’ strategies for reproducibility, molarity, bounding, rigidity, discreteness and continuous induced mutation, as listed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 210-13), to (dis)simulate their ‘differential’ opposites: individuation, molecularity, openness, suppleness, continuous produced mutation.

Individuation and molecularity are dissimulated with the introduction into the consumption systems of front-line participatory production practices. Personalised engagement using artificial intelligence, predictive analysis, the Internet of Things activates various forms of independent labour and creativity of the consumer (e.g. digital shopping assistant services that allow the customer to order multiple meals from different restaurants within the same mall, select dishes and their ingredients, and set the preparation time according to desired collection routine). The dissimulation also includes advanced individual profiling of expressed and monitored preferences, and personalised emotional labour. These services, whilst substantially improve the customer’s experience, choice and effectiveness, produce radical homogenisation that affords major competitive advantages to large international corporations over small local organisation (e.g. requiring major investments in setup and maintenance of services subject to steady innovation involving big data analytics, enterprise cloud and cyber security).

Openness is provided by participatory digital spatial transduction that enables individuals to access multiple spatial and social sub-realms and engages them in inexhaustible number and combinations (e.g. providing multidimensional links to the multitude of actants that visit the centres). Openness is also combined with suppleness in the use of transduction to grant personal ‘tunability’ of places and atmospheres by making the experiential multiple layers modifiable and adjustable to individual needs (Coyne, 2010). There, the plasticity of their environments is finely orchestrated to manipulate behaviours and coordinate the kaleidoscopic conflation of goods and services for hyper-consumption (e.g. cunningly placing points of interest in a mall courtyard to encamp parochial realms of AR games, such as Pokémon Go’s ‘stops’ and ‘gyms’)



The combination of participatory consumption, transduction and tunability in conditions of improved experientiality and relentless eventfulness affords an internal incremental production, becoming and continuous mutation. This expands networkability by providing infrastructure and services to assist multimodal access to and multidimensional communication with a widening multitude of people and things both compresent and remote, spatially and chronologically (e.g. the intense social campaigns of mall operators to improve experience and support the expansion of digital communities on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest). The increments in social networks, particularly acute in on digital media, are strongly supported, monitored and controlled by the hegemonic organisations, since participatory processes occupy more and more a central role in marketing strategies.

Overall, artfully compounded deceiving and simulation tactics unfold systems of overabundant social, material and cognitive loops with apparent self-sufficient character. They capture desire with relationality-forming mechanisms that entrap it in closed loops centred on commodities. This is achieved by providing pre-constituted locked assemblages of disparate elements, such as scripted events that spark controlled social play between unacquainted people, or making available predetermined and programmed assembling devices, such as activating networking POIs of locative digital social media.

To afford imperviousness to these mechanisms, their domains are endowed with close, self-referential systems that guarantee control and prevent the development of autonomous forces that enable genuine engagement in open, productive and creative acts. Within these loops, simulation, paraphrasing Daniel Smith's comments on the concept on simulacrum, renders indiscernible and internalizes the difference between heterotopia and the city itself – 'the rest,' the left over –, "thereby scrambling the selection and perverting the judgment" (2006: 102).

## **5. Conclusion: resilient commons, differential forces and the liberating power of desire**

The creative and productive power of desire triggers differential forces that express the resilience embedded in the autonomous socio-spatial assemblages. Constituting open systems with molecular associations and incremental production in continuous evolution that thrive in enhanced places of participatory consumption, transduction and tunability, it introduces disruptive challenges in the closed systems of the illusionary heterotopias and develops autonomous forms of socio-spatial relationality and territorialisation.

In their discussion on territories and networks Deleuze and Guattari state that the power of desire operates in a dual relational process of primarily social kind, where connections and productive associations are simultaneously assembling and being assembled (1987: 212, 399). Similar to the Lefebvrian 'production of space', the ambivalence of desire consists of its capacity to produce associations whilst producing its desiring subject. Its autonomy and independence towards differential production contrasts the closed circles of redundancy of the abstractive spatialities of the instituted powers. As Lefebvre puts it, referencing Nietzsche's 'Grand Desire' – desire strives "to overcome divisions — divisions between work and product, between repetitive and differential, or between needs and desires" and liberate conflicts and differences that are therewith materialised (Lefebvre, 1991: 392-393).

Desire penetrates in abstractive, spatially transductive and tunable commercial assemblages through the gap opened by their false alliance with participatory consumption. It introduces its core differential agency in the progressively autonomous dynamics of the new modes of production of the collaborative economy that the abstractive simulation process intends to mirror, yet cannot dominate. In a resilient development, it generates what Lefebvre calls "transitional state" where growing internal conflicts that cannot last indefinitely (1991: 374). In



the perspective of integral sustainability of Deleuze and Guattari the contradiction between on the one hand the segmentation and compartmentalisation of the ever expanding simulative mechanisms controlled by the instituted powers, and on the other hand, the steadily growing autonomous production of emancipatory associative and experimentally creative desiring machines becomes increasing untenable.

Examples of the crisis of these conflicts in everyday life can be found in the digital sphere: whilst the abstractive forces steadily enhance the performance of their digital media infrastructure to implement their core hyper-consumerist strategies, reinforce their socio-spatial hegemony and cope with the democratisation imperative of the sharing economy, the very same infrastructure supports the growth of the autonomous aggregations and associations and associations that are a key characteristic of the latter. Two relevant paradoxical cases concerning non-compliant digital media usage are: a) the concurrent veto of taking photographs and videos in shopping malls – as warned at each of their entry points – and the contrasting support given to interaction on image-based social media services; and b) the development of ‘online to offline’ retail systems – that merge traditional and online marketing of the same company – and openly accept brazen purchase practices of customers that straight after trying and selecting the goods proceed to buy them from cheaper on-line competitors.

The difficulty in controlling the antagonist forces generated by the freeing agency of simulation exposes these de facto ‘empty bodies without organs’ (bodies that for Deleuze and Guattari (2000: 9-17) enable overpowering organisations to homogenise and disestablish spontaneous organisational life, creating a city of scripted relationality with manufactured ecologies taking the place of indigenous ones) to their most threatening adversaries: the relational processes that permanently increase the number of “deviant” associations and connections. These processes are bolstered by the subversive agency of the productive desire and strengthen the capacity and power of autonomous actants to establish autonomous association that deterritorialise and reterritorialise the ever expanding realms of augmented transductional contextualisation. Haecceity-driven becomings have already shown phenomena of mall “cannibalisation” (Susilo & De Meulder: 149) that transvaluate the context, “letting its parts fly free to connect in diverse ways” (Petrescu, 2005: 45). Guaranteeing the exercise of the Right to Difference (Lefebvre, 1987: 396), these assembled/assembling heterotopias efficaciously reactivate the lived temporality of “the rest” – what has been abstracted, excluded and marginalised. By widening the fractures of the closed systems, the play of the commodity spectacle and the fabricated metanarratives of control are unmasked, unveiling the way desire is subjugated by control mechanisms that manipulate the flow of interaction and the formation of associations.

The repression of relational needs loses its effectiveness, destabilises the gained complicity of the user in the production of the consumerist spectacle of goods, and unlocks the productive production of the loops of redundancy or ‘excess’. The metamorphic networks and the multiple ‘lines of flight’ granted by the democratisation of the simulative digital atmosphere of transduction set free unrestrained simulative chains of spatial production. These, in turn, pioneer forms of antagonistic re-appropriations and re-association of individuals and spatialities, responding to the demands of productive desire to transform the simulated common-world into an actual one. The reintroduction of individual autonomy and independence supports novel collective forms of a political project for the reinstatement of the Right to the City and Difference, which includes the resistance against rigid segmentation, dispossession, segregation and abstraction of the ‘civic’. New civic institutional systems, counter-hegemonic organisation and commoning forces operate a restructuring of the deterritorialised commons, building “alliances and linkages across space in such a way as to mitigate or challenge the hegemonic dynamics of capitalist accumulation that dominate the historical geography of social life” (Harvey, 1989: 16) for the affirmation of a “space of the



dream” (Lefebvre, 1991: 35) with supple commons where desire has full play to sustain a robust and integral wellbeing.

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