

TRANSPOLITICAL URBANISM:
SUBURBAN ANOMALIES
AND AMBIENT FEAR

Marcus A. Doel and David B. Clarke

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Marcus A. Doel

School of Social Science, Liverpool John Moores University

&

David B. Clarke

School of Geography, University of Leeds

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M A Doel (School of Social Science, Liverspool John Moores University)
and David B Clarke (School of Geography, University of Leeds)

Violence is anomic, while terror is anomalous.

(Baudrillard 1990b: 170)

Terror degree-zero: another kind of fear

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this notion.

(Benjamin 1969: 257)

The law is a rule, whereas the norm is a curve; the law is transcendental, whereas the norm is a mean.

(Baudrillard, 1990b: 164)

Street Wars are quintessentially political, with their allusions to conflict, crisis, violence, madness, revolution and transgression. Indeed, politics has always been intimately associated with the urban fabric in general and the topology of the street in particular. From the cityscape to the nation-state, the street has been the site for politics *par excellence*. Specifically, the street has been the exemplary stage upon which the competing socio-political forces of an age have crystallized into decisive face-to-face encounters, yielding those singular moments through which Universal History is continuously forged. In short, the cityscape is littered with the impact sites of force against force, and in their shadow, the rest of cityscape fades into the banality and serenity of everyday life. Little wonder, then, that these impact sites should be gendered hot, phallic and male, whilst the still-waters of everyday life should be feminized through a gendered code of passivity and lack. Indeed, from the perspective of hot conflict, Real Men make their appearance on the wide, open, public spaces of Universal History, face-to-face on the street. Consequently, the streets are quite literally the striations etched into the physical spaces of the *socius* by the exercise of a phallogocentric power—in short, the eternal recurrence of a heroic struggle for phallic stability, bathed in the harsh light of Universal History, and standing against the banal fatality and castrating flood of a feminized everyday life. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how else politics could have played itself out, except upon the wide, open, cinematic screenscapes of the urban street. Yet the politics of the street has already departed from this classical role, even before the theorists of the urban have begun to understand the differences between the street, the city and the State (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Ross 1988). The energies which inscribe themselves into the contemporary urban social spaces of the West are now subject to a process which is dedicated to the annulment of the phallogocentrism of hot conflict. This is not to say that classical urban social movements are dead, but that moves are afoot to render

such deliberate political acts mere senseless blips on a smooth, statistical and aleatory surface saturated with a new, quotidian, ambient fear (Massumi, 1993).

Despite the apparent proliferation of armed conflict and local wars, the axiomatic status of conflict is in decline. It is always and already everywhere subject to a process of deconstruction and disappearance, although it is important to emphasize that this is not of a mortal kind. Rather, it takes the form of a seduction—something is *withdrawn* from the orders of the visible and the articulable (Doel 1993; 1994). The first thing to be withdrawn is the centrality of the face-to-face encounter: such is the onset of ambient fear. Moreover, the idea that ambient fear saturates the social spaces of everyday life does not necessarily suggest that it is fear of an authoritarian nature. To the contrary: 'BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU' is no longer the exclusive slogan of totalitarianism; today it provides the slogan of a bureaucratized, yet decentralized, *Nervous System* (Taussig, 1992) which has locked itself into hypertelia, passive surveillance and fatal banality: George Orwell's *1984* began on April Fool's Day; whilst conspiracy theories themselves are more often than not thought up by a powerful, faceless elite. Nevertheless, things continue to happen. Hence the fact that everywhere one encounters the same crazy obsession with a 'search for responsibility out of all proportion to the event—this hysteria of responsibility which itself results from the disappearance of causes and from the omnipotence of effects' (Baudrillard 1990b: 171-2). 'Liberty, security, terror: in every domain, we have passed through these successive stages.' However, it is important to resist the temptation to force ambient fear into a nostalgic apologia for a classical revolutionary politics. All that—it has changed for ever, caught in a malicious curvature which neutralizes qualitative differences and systemic contradictions in the quantitative modulations that are registered impassively on the virtual depth of the city's screenscapes. In the hereafter of ambient fear, the face-to-face encounter is always and already everywhere an aleatory and senseless blip.

Accordingly, it is the 'malefic curvature which puts an end to the horizon of meaning' (Baudrillard 1990b: 163) that ushers in the arrival of a truly transpolitical world, a world of (over)exposure, absolute proximity and transvestism—in short, a world which no longer acts in accordance with dialectical laws, and retroactively ensures that it will never have done so (Baudrillard 1987a; 1990a; Clarke and Doel forthcoming a). Increasingly, we are bearing witness to the proliferation of events without quality or consequence—events captured under the asymptotic curvature of a statistical norm which proliferate serially in accordance with a metastatic, cancerous process of potentialization (*Steigerung*), their obese forms filling up all of the space available to them to the *n*th dimension. First and foremost, the transpolitical is the obesity of the political—immobilized in a metastatic inflation and a movement to extremes. The entire edifice of the city—the scene of re-presentation and the theatre of the political—is increasingly inclined to slide off toward an ob-scene and fatal hyperspace. It is in the process of becoming a screenscape, characterized by the objective indifference of the masses, subject only to the mutant figures of anomaly and supremely immunized against transgression and anomie. Ours is a Universal History given over to ambient fear and the transpoliticization of the city, white walls and black holes, surveillance and the fatal strategies of the masses. The Dead Eyes of the future-anterior city begin to stare, passively recording the eternal recurrence of

events without consequence, digitizing their qualitative nuances as a quantitative stream of presences and absences: 'the face, what a horror' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 190).

Anomie is that which escapes the jurisdiction of the law, while anomaly is that which escapes the jurisdiction of the norm.... Anomaly operates in an aleatory and statistical field, a field of variations and modulations now oblivious to that margin of transgression characteristic of the field of law, since all of this is neutralised in a statistical and operational equation—a field so normalised that abnormality no longer has any place in it, even in the form of madness or subversion. Yet anomaly still exists.... It is anodyne in a sense, anodyne and inexplicable. It quite simply belongs to the order of appearance, to the emergence of something on the surface of the system. (Baudrillard 1990b: 164)

Henceforth, we are all anomalies, mutants, hostages, survivors, by-standers and terrorists on the normalized surface and asymptotic curvature of statistical indifference. We are all Dead Eyes appended to the nervous systems of a paranoiac *socius*, screenscapes for the routinized projection of ambient fear. In the passage toward a fully fledged *Risk Society*, risk has become socialized, instrumentalized and commodified to such an extent that it becomes not only a *productive force* and speculative source of profit, but also a banal commonplace saturating the entire *socius* (Beck 1992; Smart 1993). Furthermore, when risk becomes a fundamental axiom of the system, it effectively short-circuits and neutralizes both the distinction between the system's smooth functioning and its accidental breakdown, as well as the possibility of a fully insured society (Ewald 1993). Consequently, it is only a slight perturbation that dislocates our Dead Eyes away from the paranoiac paralysis of passive nihilism towards a suicidal nihilism which would rather will nothing than not will at all (Baudrillard 1990a; Kroker and Cook 1988). Thus the ironic possibility of a recent advertisement by the *Enlightened Tobacco Company Plc* for their *Death™* and *Death Lights™* cigarettes, which opens with the caption: TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN CANCER RESEARCH. SMOKE OUR CIGARETTES. And just to underscore the aftertaste of ambient fear, the Health Department's Chief Medical Officer closes the advertisement with the aporetic warning: PROTECT CHILDREN: DON'T MAKE THEM BREATHE YOUR SMOKE!

SOPHISTICATING THE UNINSURABLE IN A SOCIETY HOOKED ON RISK: such is the phallogocentric terrorism of everyday life, a terror whose locus turns inwards, away from the wide, open, public spaces of the cityscape—the hidden face of the stranger—and towards the interstices of the *socius*—home, family, body, mind and the overexposed faces of the relative, partner, neighbour and friend (Brown and Merrill 1993; Crary and Kwinter 1992; Deleuze and Guattari 1984; Massumi 1993). In her *Women and children first—terrorism on the home front*, Felshin (1993: 270) succinctly distils the phallogocentric aura of ambient fear: 'From the bedroom to the living room, the living room to the office, and from there into the streets and the community—these are the primary landscapes in which women are subject to fear and violence. These are the landscapes in which all of us encounter the misuse of power for the first time.'

Strange weather: transpolitical (over)exposure

The sky's gone out.

(Bauhaus *Exquisite Corpse*)

Without a trace of irony, the *British Broadcasting Corporation* announce that future weather bulletins will, on occasion, include a supplementary choropleth map emblazoned with the caption '*Burn Times in Minutes*.' It will summarize the effect of prevailing levels of solar radiation on human skin. This unpropitious pictogram will be transmitted in addition to those which currently convey more mundane meteorological information, such as cloud cover, temperature distributions, pollen levels, wind speeds, frontal movements, air quality, wind-chill factors and sunshine/rainfall league tables. By way of illustration, a sample graphic cheerfully informed viewers, through a garish patchwork of green, red and orange, that across most of Britain, exposed 'medium skin' would burn in 40 or 50 minutes. The interlocutor was obviously amused by the fact that Birmingham—a place usually associated with grey skies and incessant drizzle—appeared to have the lowest burn time and therefore the most intense radiation. Reassuringly, this vivid simulacrum was accompanied by a brief discussion of different types of radiation, stratospheric ozone depletion, skin cancer and several clichéd jokes about British weather. Such is the contemporary nature of civil defence, reduced to the omnipotent banality of ambient fear.

Bizarrely, the announcement for cartograms displaying *Burn Times in Minutes* was broadcast as a segment of a prime-time 'infotainment' programme with the edifying title—and less than inspiring catch-phrase—*How Do They Do That?* Somewhat implausibly, the *TV Times* magazine characterized the programme as one which looked 'at stories of remarkable achievement in the arts and science.' Perhaps it was only a coincidence that this particular episode was billed as the 'last in the series'—although we suspect that it will be the 'last' only in the sense of the alcoholic's 'last glass' or the addict's 'last fix.' Nevertheless, the virtual flicker of this 'last' instalment relayed itself across the airwaves to the Dead Eyes of our screens, dutifully intoning the silent majority to await the immanent arrival of the strobic flash that will illuminate the nation, irradiate their exposed skin and necessitate the mapping of *Burn Times in Minutes* as the remarkable series of achievements in the arts and sciences reaches its apocalyptic anti-climax—'class society has dissolved into mass society, and... mass society has dissolved into the TV blip' (Kroker and Cook 1988: 279). Such is the terror of light and the consequent fear of (over)exposure to phallogocentric irradiation. And just in case your Dead Eyes are tuned to another channel, *Independent Television*—the *British Broadcasting Corporation's* principal competitor—has recently announced that it will also screen *Burn Time* maps in its own weather bulletins.

In the wake of the Cold War, with its paranoiac fixation upon the serial erasure—or *seriasure*—of successive cold, warm and occluded fronts drifting interminably from

West to East, British weather bulletins will henceforth prepare themselves for the silent and transparent irradiation of social and physical space in a virtual Holocaust. HIROSHIMA. NAGASAKI. THREE MILE ISLAND. CHERNOBYL. SELLAFIELD. BIRMINGHAM.

*Turn on—Tune in—Burn out
in the carcinogenic light
in the asphyxiating air
in the acid rain.*

Henceforth, the virtual flicker of *Burn Times* that accompanies every weather report makes manifest what everyone has been aware of for a long time: that the very fabric of the body is terrorized by the elements and continually 'risks' stroboscopic (over)exposure to banal and probabilistic occurrences: one photon too many, like the 'last drink' for an alcoholic, the 'last fix' for an addict, or the 'last diet' for the obese—imperceptibly, everything changes (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). A cell departs from its usual metabolism. A program momentarily loses its code. An anomaly registers itself on the screen. A difference emerges in the serial repetition of the Same. A mutant figure cuts a dash for a concrete underpass. Things happen. But herein resides the locus of terror: to be always and already everywhere (over)exposed to the probabilistic occurrence of events without consequence—a cigarette, a drink, a diet, an assassination, a fault, an accident, a particle, a riot—rather than to be *targeted* by an apparatus of power or a harbinger of violence. In short, we are all hostages to a stroboscopic pulsation of haecceities, to a statistical indifference that inaugurates a *socius* of *total anonymity* and *total responsibility*. And whilst the fixation on the *seriasure* of cold, warm and occluded fronts allowed one to differentiate more or less between 'good' and 'bad' weather, the statistical indifference of socio-spatial irradiation is articulated through undecidable 'thresholds' and 'balances.' Qualitative differences of nature have been elided into quantitative differences of degree. Our bodies are bathed in the statistical indifference of banal fatalities, fatal banalities and catastrophes without consequence. Each occurrence has the potential to change everything. Hence the need vigilantly to monitor even the banal minutiae of everyday life, forcing the real to become *hyperreal*: *Neighbourhood Watch*; *Business Watch*; *Vehicle Watch*; *Body Watch* and the whole paraphernalia of remote sensing and passive surveillance. Quite literally, on a plane of singularities and haecceities, one is always and already everywhere (over)exposed to too many: a glance, a bullet, a photon, a fall, a word, a street. 'Hyperrealism... is a vision that hunts down seduction by means of visibility,' suggests Baudrillard (1990c: 30) —'by giving you a *little too much* one takes away everything.' 'And where does that leave freedom?' asks Baudrillard (1988b: no pagination). 'In nowhere land. There is no choice, no final decision.' We are henceforth (over)exposed to an 'uncertainty that terminates our freedom', to an uncertainty that is paradoxically exacerbated through its statistical operationalization and perfection. 'SOPHISTICATING THE UNDECIDABLE'—the reign of the transpolitical has commenced (Baudrillard 1990a, 1990d; Clarke and Doel forthcoming a).

In the nowhere land of statistical indifference and stroboscopic pulsation, viewers are advised to adjust their Dead Eyes to the Great Universal History of Ambient Fear—to become attuned to the fact that they are always and already everywhere (over)exposed to one event too many, to the statistical indifference of *It happens*, eternally. Indeed, in the Great Universal History of Ambient Fear, banality equals fatality. ‘Death as such is inevitable; but each concrete instance of death is contingent.... We do not hear of people dying of mortality. They die only of individual causes’ (Bauman 1992: 5). Henceforth, fear is no longer confined to so-called ‘exceptional’ events—wars, famines, murders, catastrophes, epidemics, apocalypses, genocides. Rather, one fears the very ‘taking place’ of an event; one fears the event *itself*—to eat, to drink, to breath, to walk, to cut, to live, to drive, to rest, to sleep, to watch. Such is the internalization of terror: “a body becomes its own worst enemy” (Massumi 1992: 186). Hence the vacillation between the fear of (over)exposure and the joy of disappearance, between the health fascism which accompanies a risk society and the suicidal nihilism which accompanies a cancelled *socius*, and between the urban street and the suburban home. In such a climate, ‘The fear campaign attains victory through the humiliation of its targets: successive chunks of lay knowledge and know-how are redefined as instances of ignorance’ (Bauman 1992: 23). Everything has become hazardous: from transport, communication and energy systems, through domestic appliances, office furniture and cuddly toys, to the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, and the ten million potentially dangerous sports injuries in Britain each year. ‘The horror of mortality has been sliced into thin rashers of fearful, yet curable (or partially curable) afflictions; they can be fitted neatly into every nook and cranny of life. Death does not now come at the end of life: it is there from the start, in a position of constant surveillance.... Fighting death is meaningless. But fighting the *causes* of dying turns into the meaning of life’ (Bauman 1992: 7). Every fold in the hyperreal tissue of the *socius* must be constantly exposed, screened and recorded. This is the ob-scene screen of pornogeography. Little wonder, then, that Britain is currently experiencing an unprecedented explosion in the incidence of mental illness, self-abuse, but above all, of eating disorders. For the moment, however, we are all survivors living on borrowed time. Did we say ‘survivors’? TIME’S UP.

An aged relative? Here’s the perfect gift, as featured in the latest Sharper Image catalogue. “All lives are finite,” runs the copy. “In fact, the average life lasts only 683,280 hours or 2.5 billion seconds. This new Timisis Personal Life Clock reminds you to live life to the full by displaying the time and the actual hours, minutes and seconds remaining in your statistical lifetime. It is the most profound number you will ever see. By monitoring every precious minute, it arouses you to the joy of living. The display also flashes 150 motivational messages to inspire you to take command and act.” No mention of what to do should the user outlast a statistical lifetime. The clock only carries a 90-day warranty.

(Bussmann 1994: 3)

‘Which is more frightening,’ asks Massumi (1992: 186) beneath the heading *Dress Rehearsal For an Even Darker Future*. ‘The accident or its avoidance?’ Terminating

the interminable or sophisticating the undecidable? Ultimately, there is little to choose between the future-past of the event without consequence—*will have fallen*—and the present of consumption—*will have been*. Hence the fact that a ‘near miss’ is by definition a ‘hit.’ Little wonder, then, that so many should choose to flee the streets in order to glue themselves to the screen. Moreover, events which take place on the streets are increasingly produced in order to be screened. Lights. Camera. Action. In Beijing, ‘Pro-Democracy’ demonstrators carried videos to record the events in Tiananmen Square and portable TVs to watch themselves on transnational news bulletins. Likewise, in London, protesters recorded the machinations of the so-called ‘Poll Tax Riots’ in order to indict the police, whilst British and Japanese tourists continuously crossed and re-crossed police lines in order to video the clashes from both directions. Meanwhile, in several British cities, so-called ‘joy riders’ performed high-speed skids, turns, wheel-burns and commissioned stunts in stolen cars whilst being videoed by friends and spectators for future entertainment. Similarly, rioters in Los Angeles sold recordings of the events which they had filmed on stolen videos to global news networks. In recent years, British television has seen an explosion in the number of ‘infotainment’ programmes devoted to the reconstruction of violent crime and near-fatal accidents, whilst viewers are continually offered life-saving tips, factsheets and phone-ins for every conceivable occurrence. British television has also seen an explosion in the number of programmes screening apparently hilarious home-videos of catastrophes without consequence. Even the British police have released compilation videos of incredible feats of dangerous and reckless driving on public roads, much to the delight of the viewing public. In short, spatial practices are increasingly falling under the influence of videotape philosophy: events so close that they short-circuit their re-presentation—‘It is all too true, too near to be true’ (Baudrillard 1990c: 28). *Is it Live or is it Memorex?* The theatrical scene of representation—with its mirror-play of virtual depths—is giving way to the ob-scene screen of pornogeography—with its (over)exposure of superficial images. Life on the streets is increasingly a simulacrum of demonstrative suicide (Baudrillard 1988a).

In fear of light: a phallogocentric peregrination

I have seen too much. Wipe away my Eyes.

(Bauhaus *The Man with X-Ray Eyes*)

Everywhere one sees the relentless movement of the apparatuses of phallogocentric reproduction towards the degree-zero of pornogeographical voyeurism: *Neighbourhood Watch*; *Business Watch*; *Vehicle Watch*; *Body Watch* and closed-circuit TV—‘One is in front of the screen; one is no longer in front of the mirror; it no longer reflects’ (Baudrillard 1993: 84). ‘Every discourse is threatened with this sudden reversibility, absorbed into its own signs without a trace of meaning’ (Baudrillard 1990c: 2). However, there is nothing new in this scopic fixation; the streets have always been a site of (over)exposure and ‘a mad obsession with the real’ (Baudrillard 1987a: 23). From the Greek *polis* centred around the open, public space of the *Ekklesia* (an area exposed to the sun in which the men—and *only* the men—gathered to govern the city), through the revolutionary masses swarming amongst the cityscape in a choreography that sought to deterritorialize the State’s

rigid stratification of social and physical space, to the utopian topographies of citizenship, community and democracy, politics has always dreamt of wide, open, phallogocentric spaces. Politics is pure cinematography—the art of projecting virtual depths onto an indifferent screen. In traditional political theory, this conjuring of virtual depths has been synonymous with the projection of *public* space onto the cityscape. For many, ‘the association of politics and community with speech and the space of appearance will not be given up lightly and without major contestation’ (Yanarella 1993: 73). Nor will they easily give up the romantic association of *Street Wars* with the face-to-face encounter, even though power and conflict are increasingly concerned with the articulation of speed, visibility and distantiation (Davis 1990; Gooding-Williams 1993). Moreover, and as we have seen, this phallogocentric privileging of face-to-face interaction and co-presence in wide, open spaces has as its corollary the projection of feminized, *private* spaces into the dark and dissimulated suburban interstices of the cityscape: home, family, body and mind. In short, in order to render a space of appearance visible—so that it can be valorized as a public space of politics—one must also render a space of disappearance invisible—in order for it to be residualized as a private space of non-politics. Or again: the spaces of appearance and disappearance form a double movement of the self-same gesture. The supposedly private spaces of the mind, body, family and home are in actuality *screens* for the public projection and divestment of desire. They are rendered banal and impassive in order to cast the hot conflict of *Street Wars* into *bas relief*, to raise these face-to-face encounters into the high points of a Great Universal History. But this longing for moments of public climax is just a trick of the light—phallogocentric politics is pure cinematography.

Recently, the great panning shots of the Cold War that opened our Dead Eyes onto the wide, open, public spaces of Great Universal History have decomposed into the ‘stereo-porno’ and stroboscopic pulsation of events without consequence. Henceforth, screenscapes such as *Burn Times in Minutes* no longer fix our Dead Eyes on the infinitely receding horizon of Great Universal History—an horizon which literally sucks the present into the future by projecting a vacuum in front of it, just like a jet engine. Rather, these simulacra plunge our Dead Eyes into the ambient fear of a plane of singularities and haecceities. We are henceforth always and already everywhere (over)exposed—but to what? Everything: *a photon, a bullet, a virus...* Nothing left but the blank screen of the transpolitical and the irradiated space of the cityscape upon which the Great Universal projection of *Street Wars* merges with a plane of events without consequence. Ours is a *fin de siècle* cinematography of ambient fear: a phallogocentric peregrination that is always and already everywhere lost and in fear of light (Doel and Clarke forthcoming).

In a lightening flash, it happened. Zero. An event without consequence scrolled across the screen. It happened—therefore nothing happened. ‘It was an event to be remembered. Vaguely. Blurred into the series. Like the others, all that would remain of it... would be an aftertaste of fear and a dim foreboding of future events of the same kind. “Like the others... of the same kind.” The media event is the generic event. Broadcast as the advent of the event without qualities’ (Massumi 1992: 178). For Massumi, such a *seriasure* of generic events without quality or consequence inaugurates an era of ambient fear through which we are transfixed by ‘a general

disaster that is already upon us, woven into the fabric of day-to-day life. The content of the disaster is unimportant. Its particulars are annulled by its plurality of possible agents and times: here and to come. What registers is its magnitude. In its most compelling and characteristic incarnations, the now unspecified enemy is infinite. Infinitely small or infinitely large: viral or environmental' (Massumi 1992: 184-5). Hence the inclination for the phallogocentric apparatuses of paranoiac surveillance to become interminably suspended in the realm of the undecidable: *Is it (but what?) happening?*

Henceforth, everything becomes Cool-COOLER-COLD as we await retrospective and counterfactual confirmation that our bodies will have been touched by an event without quality or consequence, (over)exposed to one event too many, to an haecceity that changes everything, to a banal fatality and a fatal banality—a bacterium, a photon, an egg, a bullet, a crash. On the basis of this motif of (over)exposure, it should be easy to understand why Massumi should present the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy whilst travelling through sun-drenched streets in an open motorcade as the exemplary event without quality.

The winner was not the rifleman. If there was a winner, it was the bullet. The senseless, instantaneous impact of the "will have been." Cracks began to appear from all around. There was no longer any safe ground. The shot could come from any direction, at any time, in any form.... About that time, planes started raining from the skies. It was bad enough that Ralph Nader had already soured the romance with the car, turned killer. Even pleasure no longer felt the same. Smoking was the insidious onset of a fatal ailment. Food became a foretaste of heart disease. The body itself was subversive of the "self".... Terrorists, feminists, flower children, black power militants, people who don't buckle up, guilty smokers, eaters, polluters, closet exercise resisters... Everywhere, imminent disaster.... An unspecified enemy threatens to rise up at any time and at any point in social or geographical space. From the welfare state to the warfare state: a permanent state of emergency against a multifarious threat as much in us as outside. (Massumi 1992: 183)

Everywhere, imminent disaster: we are all hostages to the *seriasure* of this null hypothesis as it distends a hollow surface across which events without consequence are distributed as a plane of haecceities through the eternal recurrence, stroboscopic pulsation and statistical indifference of banal fatalities and fatal banalities (Doel 1993, 1994). 'As objective hostages,' writes Baudrillard (1990b: 170-1), 'we are collectively answerable for something—but for what?... We are henceforth in a permanent state of suspense and exception.... But we are also subjective hostages. We are answerable for ourselves, we act as our own cover, and the responsibility for our risks rests on our own heads. This is the law of an insurance society.' Moreover, once risk had become instrumentalized, socialized and commodified as a *productive force* rather than simply externalized onto nature or God, risk management and insurance 'could no longer be optional.... It became mandatory, a moral and social obligation.... the punishable offence was now to neglect to insure oneself' (Ewald 1993: 227). In short, there is no obligation to avoid an accident or (over)exposure, merely to be covered for

the costs incurred. Indeed, the instrumentalization and socialization of risk actively short-circuits the ability to employ a practice of accident avoidance or prevention: 'As if the "failure" were not programmed into the product from the moment of its production or implementation.... [s]ince the production of any "substance" is simultaneously the production of a *typical accident*.... Oceangoing vessels invented the shipwreck, trains the rail catastrophe, fire the forest fire' (Virilio 1993: 212).

Consequently, one could venture the claim that we are living through the mutation of an insurance society founded on the rule of a phallogocentric Law into a risk society founded on the standard deviation of the Norm. For how can one insure against a virtual plane teeming with a multitude of singularities and haecceities, especially when the associated risks are being compounded to infinity? 'One could undertake the most complex risk analysis imaginable, but when all was said and done the only conclusion would be that an acceptable risk is an accepted risk' (Ewald 1993: 225). Sophisticating the undecidable. Chernobyl tours begin at \$100, an extra \$30 will secure you lunch. Reassuringly, Geiger counters are included in the price. 'Before any formulation of "political catastrophe theory," the apocalyptic revelation of the public accident implicitly promotes the administration of civil fear, and thus indirectly the massive, conspicuous consumption of substitutes for and other fallout from the concept of security: guarantees, comprehensive insurance, inspection, surveillance—in a word, the principle of conservation' (Virilio 1993: 213).

Accordingly, we are all objective and subjective hostages to the statistical indifference that will have always and already everywhere (over)exposed us to the wholesale irradiation of social space. Such a reign of terror is exemplified in the actuarial *Burn Times in Minutes* pictogram insofar as it leaves an aftertaste of fear, a dim foreboding, and a reminder that one should not venture out into the phallogocular light—particularly in the open and public spaces of the city. In short, the continuous irradiation of social space is a judgement of God coupled to a logic of obligatory deterrence: keep off the streets in order to minimize the probability of (over)exposure—or risk the statistical indifference of total anonymity and total responsibility! In an age where more and more people are becoming self-consciously embroiled within the probabilistic, asymptotic and hypertelic *seriasure* of events without consequence, the cartogram of *Burn Times in Minutes* bears witness to the fact that even light itself should be considered a source of torment, pain, terror and ambient fear. Such is the Gift from on High.

Is this our postmodernity, to live in fear of (over)exposure, and yet to have been always and already everywhere (over)exposed to the (almost) imperceptible caress of the light? To raise this question is to draw attention to the fact that the streets—as visible, open and public spaces *par excellence*—should be such a source of fear and terror for so-many people, particularly many women, children, ethnic minorities, the disabled, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and transvestites, all those people who are usually deprived of the *transparency* which is afforded by the envelopment of oneself in a *reflecting skin* that returns an image of the Same. Hence the fact that many have attempted to escape the apparent hyperexposure of *urban* streets by withdrawing to the apparent underexposure of the *suburban* street and the Dead Eye of the media screen. 'Seduction versus terror: such is the wager, since no other exists'

(Baudrillard 1990b: 183). In a *socius* of ambient fear, the silent majorities have attempted to withdraw (but to where?). Henceforth, perhaps only suicidal nihilists and Real Men will be stupid enough to bathe themselves in the phallogocular light of the street.

On the street: the transpoliticization of the cityscape

In order to make fear reign a space of fear must be created; the earth must therefore be rendered uninhabitable. (Donzelot 1977 cited in Massumi 1992: 198)

Writing in the historic shadows of the Paris Commune (cf. Ross 1988), Virilio (1986: 3) feels compelled to write that 'The revolutionary contingent attains its ideal form not in the place of production, but in the street, where for a moment it stops being a cog in the technical machine and becomes itself a motor (machine of attack), in other words a *producer of speed*.' Writing from the hyperreal and transpolitical world of *America*, Baudrillard seductively and provocatively departs from the classical definition of the street as a site of revolution (Clarke and Doel forthcoming b): 'In Europe, the street only lives in sudden surges, in historic moments of revolution and barricades.... The American street has not, perhaps, known these historic moments, but it is always turbulent, lively, kinetic and cinematic... change, whether spurred by technology, racial differences, or the media, assumes virulent forms: its violence is the very violence of the way of life' (Baudrillard 1988a:18).

The hopes and fears of the revolutionary fervour instantiated by the era of the political has found itself caught up in a new kind of space, and the transliteration of violence onto the plane of the virtual marks a virulent irruption into the scene of the political, transforming the nature and status of the street, politics, conflict and the city. This transpoliticization of the city is the same theoretical concern of which Jameson (1988: 347) writes: 'I am addressing a subject about which I know nothing whatsoever, except for the fact that it does not exist.' There can, therefore, be no easy definition of 'transpolitical urbanism.' Most importantly, though, it must be recognized that the transpolitical is in no sense defined in opposition to the political. The relation between the two is one of intensification and redoubling: the redoubling of politics plunges it into a realm of pure simulation—the transpolitical. It is this quality which carries profound implications for the screening of *Street Wars* in the contemporary city insofar as 'There is no more system of reference to tell us what happened to the geography of things' (Baudrillard 1987a: 126).

The irruption of the transpolitical into the cruel theatre of the street redefines the city as a screen and marks the end of all irreversible movements with the announcement of the arrival of a world of immanent reversibility. 'The world is not dialectical,' asserts Baudrillard (1990a: 7)—'it is sworn to extremes, not to equilibrium, sworn to radical antagonism, not to reconciliation or synthesis.' Thus Virilio's definition of the revolutionary potential of the street as a producer of *speed* can only seriously be read as an affirmation of the irruption of the transpolitical. Speed is 'the sole perfect expression of mobility, because it is unlike movement (which has meaning and

direction)' (Baudrillard 1990a: 34). Thus, there is nothing left in the category of the political, nor in its roots in the space of the city, to guarantee it an escape velocity, along a pre-defined trajectory, toward a utopian, eutopian or dystopian *telos*. To the contrary, the hypertelic character of the transpolitical world ensures that 'each political, historical, cultural act is endowed... with kinetic energy which flings it out of its own space forever, and propels it into hyperspace where it loses all meaning, since it can never return.' (Baudrillard 1986: 19).

Hyperspace can be diagrammed through the figures of transparency, ecstasy, obesity and obscenity, figures which nudge and seduce everyday life away from the supposed *overexposure* of the urban public arena, towards the apparent *underexposure* of an atomized and serialized suburbia. In short, these figures carry the cityscape away from the streets which used to define the spaces of the political *par excellence* towards the immaculate form of semi-detached dwellings scattered along circuitous highways, and overcoded by the omnipotent Dead Eye of the screen. Whilst the urban street was always assumed to lead towards the Civic Centre of a civil society, the suburban road leads only to nowhere land, becoming lost in a virtual time-space of endless circumnavigation. Little wonder, then, that the capital city of the twenty-first century is Los Angeles: 'In years to come cities will stretch out horizontally and will be non-urban' (Baudrillard 1988a: 21). The suburb's forced relation to the city *qua* political space (*sub urbe*) is no longer in place. The two-dimensional world of the suburb instantiates a surficial, transpolitical space *par excellence*. The suburb—like the transpolitical—is remarkable to the extent that the active indifference it engenders is judged as unremarkable: 'this indifference *ought* not to be, hence it has nothing to tell us' (Baudrillard 1983: 12-13). This is precisely the irruption of transparency: to the dismay and perplexity of the politician, there can be no mirror to reflect the suburb. There is nothing to represent here, only a hyperreal '*image in which there is nothing to see*' (Baudrillard 1987b: 31). And yet the *underexposure* of the suburb remains something of a myth since it is precisely this ellipsis which permits the hyperspaces of the postmodern city to be considered ecstatic spaces. 'Ecstasy is the quality proper to any body that spins until all sense is lost, and then shines forth in its pure and empty form.' (Baudrillard 1990a: 9). The redoubling of space produces a disorientating, vertiginous hyperspace: everything has become overexposed through absolute proximity. Yet this disorientation is perceived of as problematic only by those anxious to re-animate the body politic, who furiously refuse to accept the senselessness, placelessness and dis-placement of suburbia:

**Thieves ... vandals ... drunks ... developers /...brewers ... rat-runners
... bad landlords ...**

(Local Election Flyer, May 1994)

This paranoid list of reckoning—suitably furnished with a proliferation of ellipsis marks—defines the impossible contours of ambient fear in an inner suburb of a northern English city. It is clearly a forced or ventriloquized list: politics is a machine designed to produce the level of anxiety necessary to generate a desire for oedipalization. The suburbs, however, present themselves as a paradox because they always and already everywhere spontaneously short-circuit this phallogocentric desire.

The suburban dwelling: a mere space among spaces, registering a tautological norm—the private place *par excellence*. Yet it is also the exemplary site of ambient fear and social anomaly. Media coverage of the suburban serial killer, of bodies bricked up in semi-detached houses and buried under concrete forecourts and manicured lawns, of ritual abuse and patriarchal terrorism, increasingly position formerly anonymous suburban place names onto the media map, for their fifteen minutes of infamy and their eternal recurrence in the guise of ambient fear. The street no longer has a monopoly on violence and fear insofar as the suburban anomaly has become the very locus of everyday fear. Indeed, the home is the immaculate form of the transpolitical equation: banality equals fatality. It is the degree-zero of terror. ‘In concrete terms, it means that there are no more acts or events that are not refracted in a technical image or on a screen, not a single action not YEARNING to be photographed, filmed, recorded, not yearning to flow into this memory and through this memory, not yearning to be eternally reproduced’ (Baudrillard 1988b: no pagination).

The suburbs are, therefore, neither anorexic nor anaemic. They are characterized by *displacement* rather than lack—an ironic comment on the gendering of suburban and urban space (Saegert 1981; Spivak 1983; Nietzsche 1974). In fact, the suburbs exhibit nothing less than a form of obesity insofar as the suburban populous pursue a metastatic, monotonous form of expansive change, taking the form of potentialization (*Steigerung*) rather than dialectical sublimation (*Aufhebung*). This is precisely why the hyperspace and screenscape of the city, operationalized in the cancerous and cinematic proliferation of suburbia, is ob-scene: ‘It produces too many. It destroys distance. It is the monstrous rapprochement of things’ (Baudrillard 1993: 28). Moreover, since this obesity and obscenity defines the pornogeography of the transpolitical city, it is necessary to accept the contention that the city is increasingly codified in the vertiginous cinematography through which ambient fear is projected onto its screenscapes.

The Möbius spiralling of theory and cityscape

Obscenity is another world.

(Baudrillard 1993: 62).

We have offered a perspective which suggests that the metastatic processes transforming the spaces of the city are intimately linked to a ‘malicious curvature’ that adsorbs hot conflict onto the smooth, aleatory, asymptotic and statistical surface of ambient fear. In short, *Street Wars* are no longer characterized by the face-to-face encounter. To the contrary, we are all always and already everywhere in the danger zone, on the front plane—and above all we are all survivors. From revolution and transgression to the transpolitical and the anomalous, the cityscape has provided the topography for the definition of the social. The saturation of social space with ambient fear and the transformation of the cityscape from a theatre to a screen thus marks the end of the social and the labyrinthine passage into hypertelia. However, this su(pe)rificial future of the cityscape cannot be simply denied, circumvented or rejected. Neither can it be taken as something to bemoan or lament.

In conclusion, we offer a double underscoring of the situation we describe. First, the superficiality of the postmodern cityscape should not be domesticated as a lack of depth. As Touraine has noted: 'It is a strange prejudice which sets a higher value on depth than on breadth, and which accepts "superficial" as meaning not "of wide extent" but "of little depth," whereas "deep," on the other hand, signifies "of great depth," and not "of small surface"' (quoted in Deleuze 1993: 261-2). Second, it must be emphasized that lamentation and denial misrecognize both the banal and fatal character of the transpolitical. At the end of the social, the masses function according to a mode of disappearance which carries within it the possibility of a scrambling of the old phallogocentric order and a movement to a different register. Similarly, theory can no longer be conceived of as an engagement with a banal strategy of ventriloquized realism: 'The realization of the world is a utopia which has lost in advance' (Baudrillard 1993: 39). Rather, it is a matter of seduction. There is a curve in time-space which even the speed and mobility of phallogocentric light cannot escape. Summarizing the fatal strategies of the silent majorities and the role of theory in an age of ambient fear, Baudrillard (1990c: 22) has suggested that 'There is above all, a strategy of displacement (*se-ducere*: to take aside, to divert from one's path).' This is precisely the irruption of transparency, hyper-visibility and (over)exposure on the pornogeographical ob-scene and the transpolitical irradiation of the phallogocentric screenscapes haunting the ruins of theory and the ruins of the cityscape. In short, there is a plane of haecceities which we cannot escape.

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