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Slavoj Zizek defines the "parallax gap" as "the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible." This absence of common ground, it is claimed, occurs as a shift in perspective (subject) displaces the object itself. And turning to Lacan, Zizek claims, "The subject's gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its 'blind spot,' that which is 'in the object more than the object itself,' the point from which the object returns the gaze." Here Zizek's particular dialectical materialism "means that the reality I see is never 'whole'—not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it." In an attempt to avoid a relativist trap, Zizek claims truth—the Real—lies in the transition—the gaps—between subjects; in the innumerable voids between materialism and being. Synthesis and metalanguage are therefore rejected in favor of exploring the parallax gap(s).[1]

On reading these three texts from the disciplines of urban planning, urban anthropology, and urban history, one cannot help but reflect on Zizek's philosophy. Why? Because in the texts similar stories of urban decline and renewal are approached and conceived of so differently one often wonders if synthesis is possible, if normative judgments should be made, or whether one can rest easily with a sense of relativity. These questions are particularly accentuated where the texts discuss cities in the United States (note: two of the three texts solely focus on U.S. cities). As Michael Dear notes, so much of urban theory—indeed, if we can talk of such a thing as "urban epistemology"—has been developed with the American city in mind, whether that is in terms of capital, race, or gender.[2] As a consequence, where these texts diverge in their accounts of U.S. urban problems, one begins to question how disciplinary and epistemological traditions can lead to vastly different accounts being regaled and the engagement of different politics. Could it be that different subjectivities simply render the (urban) object of the various gazes into something deeply connected to our own making? And if so, what type of debate must we have to fruitfully explore the distinctions so obvious in these accounts? Using Zizek's parallax gap as an analogy, these questions of urban epistemology are explored here.

Schneider and Susser's edited collection employs the metaphor of "wounded cities" to bring together an impressive international group of scholars examining urban inequity and uneven development in the context of globalization. The strongest chapters of the text not only put the "wounded" metaphor to best use through documenting the extent and, if I may, the severity of incisions into the urban body politic but also use it to illuminate how the hegemonic political economy relies on a process of self-harm to recreate itself. David Harvey, for example, uses the wounded metaphor to examine how capitalist urban "ecology" inevitability involves the infliction of harm. However, Harvey seems acutely aware of the limitations of the book's central thematic. Referencing his own critique of the current neoliberal hegemony, he claims, "The whole history of liberalism and neoliberalism stridently proclaims, the 'road to serfdom' . . . can all too easily lie in adoption of a political philosophy and system in which individual judgement is surrendered (either through consent or coercion) to the all-embracing will of some larger organic entity (such as the polis or the nation state)" (p. 27). Here then, the utility of the organic metaphor, with all of its seductive appeal, is highlighted as being loaded with negative potential. As Harvey notes, this can be conceived of in terms of neoliberal hegemony and the associated contrasting of "freedom" and "collectivism," but such potentiality is also evident elsewhere, for example, in respect to explaining Heidegger's philosophy and his personal political affiliations.

This critique of the book's central metaphor rings throughout of the text. Despite a number of insightful contributions that use the "wounded" metaphor to powerfully illustrate urban plight and injustice in cities including Mexico City, Ulan-Ude, Bangkok, and Palermo, it is difficult to embrace the structuring thematic. For example, in Humphrey's chapter on the power generation and, consequently, a heating crisis in Siberian cities during 2001, an amazing story of postsocialist urban infrastructure collapse is told. Central to this story are the ex-Soviet residents' sociopolitical assumptions about the state's responsibility to provide power and heating. It illustrates that while the privatization—if one can describe the process of creating Russia's oligarch-centered economy in such terms—of urban infrastructure has been achieved incredibly quickly, the time lag surrounding the establishment of capitalism's ideological and cultural apparatus in peripheral Ulan-Ude stimulated a crisis. Without "consumer consciousness," residents were left unprepared for their newly acquired "market sovereignty." While this account of sociopolitical disjunction powerfully illustrates the requirement of humanist theory to any account of political economy, one is left wondering about the utility of the wounded metaphor.

"Wounded cities" captures the notion that part of the urban collective being is distressed, bleeding, paralyzed, and hurt. However, it also implies that this harm is felt as a whole, that a wound to any part affects the entire body. Yet it is simply not the case that an urban wound is a problem for the entire city polity. Indeed, when various contributors use the metaphor, it is incredibly difficult to decipher just what inflicts the wound and who feels it. Many of the chapters explore the wound-inflicting impact of globalization on various cities. However, this creates an imaginary of wounds being inflicted externally. This, it would seem, is far too simple, not to mention potentially damaging for a progressive urban politics.

As Doreen Massey has recently argued that the notion that globalization comes from outside is flawed in the context of urban studies since it fails to capture the deeply situational, place-based practices that embody globalization.[3] Cities such as New York and London make and remake globalization on a daily basis; the notion that the process originates externally enables these practices to remain unpoliticized. To call for the urban polity to be healed as a collective whole therefore risks that the diagnosed problem is purely constructed as originating from beyond the city limits. Indeed, as the other texts powerfully reveal, albeit in different ways, urban wounds are often deeply internal affairs. Yet they are not self-inflicted; rather, certain parts of the urban polity are subject to harm and injustice. So when the editors claim residents of contemporary cities are coming to appreciate that globalization and global corporations are responsible for both reconstruction and deconstruction, come to both harm and heal, the urban problem is not to be found in the social antagonisms of existing residents. Struggles between working classes and middle classes, between white and black, between Catholic and Protestant, and so on are either obscured or subjugated. A wound for one would appear to be a wound for the other.

If there is one particular urban studies debate that best challenges this notion it is that of gentrification. Often under the shadow of Ruth Glass's description of working-class neighborhoods being invaded by the middle classes, the gentrification literature regularly captures the socioeconomic antagonisms contained within the capitalist city.[4] However, Lance Freeman's *There Goes the 'Hood* presents a starkly different interpretation. Through fifty-one interviews conducted with predominantly black residents in the New York City neighborhoods of Harlem in Manhattan and Clinton Hill in Brooklyn, Freeman offers a more nuanced account of the process in light of what he identifies as a lack of evidence for gentrification causing displacement. To reconcile this, the book almost schizophrenically swings from thoughtful discussion of the criticisms of gentrification to a near wholesale endorsement of the process. As such, one is left with the impression that all of Freeman's careful consideration of existing literature has been unsuccessful. Arguments against why critical accounts of gentrification are incorrect rely on the presented empirics.

In the introduction, Freeman sets out the entry points and motivations behind his research. This exercise is truly impressive and serves to establish an honorable transparency to the book. Freeman explains how a concern with displacement motivated this work and that the absence of displacement he found led him to reconsider gentrification. As the book documents this absence and the consequent set of neighborhood social relations that are seen to stem from this pivotal absence, Freeman concludes, with regard to the gentrification "problem," that "the most pertinent debate seems to be how to strike a balance between allowing the market to do its thing while correcting for some of the undesirable outcomes inherent in market capitalism" (p. 209). Unlike Schneider and Susser's edited collection where the urban body politic is urged to fend off destructive globalization processes, Freeman's work therefore finds few enemies or antagonisms. Rather, the urban problem in question is reduced to a technocratic concern, what Zizek characterizes as capitalism's now-dominant mode of government: enlightened liberal-technocratic populism. For Freeman, gentrification is reduced to "proper management." This culminates in Freeman stating, "Gentrification, then, provides the opportunity to improve the quality of life of deteriorated neighborhoods and mix residents from differing socioeconomic strata with benefits for both the indigenous residents and the larger society" (p. 169).

This conclusion, along with the book's references to "the market doing its thing" and "the inherent problems of market capitalism," demonstrates the lack of theoretical engagement and reflection throughout the text. What exactly is Freeman talking about with reference to "the market" or "market capitalism" here? Instead of engaging with these theoretical constructs—and those others that he deals with in similar fashion—the book relies too heavily on the presented interviews: many of the interviewees, by Freeman's own admission, are hardly representative of gentrification's losers; indeed, many are middle-class gentrifiers. This lack of theoretical engagement is demonstrated where Freeman uses interview quotes to dismiss what are central concepts within the gentrification literature. In particular, I was concerned with how Freeman asks his relevant interviewees to fully comprehend their own (potential) displacement, a task not particularly easy to accomplish within the context of hegemonic neoliberal discourses.

Furthermore, in an absence of observed "class discourse," Freeman dismisses class as an integral urban antagonism. For example, with reference to class consciousness, Freeman argues that community residents often pursue neoliberal approaches and that this may relate to some kind of false consciousness, but he dismisses this because "such arguments have a paternalistic air about them" (p. 207). Surely, such an off-the-cuff dismissal is unacceptable in the context of a text on gentrification. The process is reliant on socioeconomic inequity, not to mention the fact that cities such as New York have witnessed growing inequality over the past twenty-five years.

Furthermore, a close reading of Lukács makes it evident that the charge of false consciousness is hardly a de facto paternalistic assertion; rather, it represents an attempt to understand the sociological praxis of the conscious subject. As such, Freeman's undeveloped dismissal of class antagonism based on a perceived paternalistic tone seems wholly inadequate.

Howard Gillette's urban history of Camden's postindustrial fate offers a markedly different account of urban decline and renewal. Gillette begins by sketching out an image of industrial Camden, contrasting the ill-fated state of Camden today with the optimistic modernity of the mid-twentieth century. This is wonderfully evocative, describing the industrial growth of a city and the forging of collective identity by and between various ethnic groups. Central to Gillette's account of this period is how trust, not contracts, made neighborhood economies work. It is romantic, shifting emphasis from ethnic division, racism, and working-class struggle to neighborhood communities, modest wealth, and trustworthy political institutions.

As if to accentuate the fall, Gillette follows this with a discussion of Camden today: Camden as a symbol of the American city's decline, the Rust Belt par excellence. Here, Gillette starts with a common story: the flight of white residents to the suburbs of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The pace and extent of this decline remains shocking. Between 1950 and 1980, Camden lost over 75 percent of its manufacturing jobs and its white population shrank from around 100,000 to 26,000. Placed within the context of abandonment, Gillette turns to document the following political events and struggles of the city. Here, political twists and turns, the impact of civil rights activism, various political personalities, and overwhelming economic decline driven from outside are convincingly narrated.

In chapter 4, Gillette analyzes Camden's strained suburban relations. Here, issues well known to urban scholars, such as stretched and fragmented municipal services and declining tax revenues, are narrated in the context of local political personalities. Time and again, personal political ambitions and Camden's economic depression intertwine in continuous attempts to revitalize a city struggling with its national and global context. Three particular revitalization efforts are examined: waterfront renewal, neighborhood policies, and legislative amendments. The story of waterfront renewal contains a common postindustrial urban narrative. The cookie-cutter set of sports stadia, aquarium, architectural competitions, and hotels is present. Gillette points to the deep contradiction embodied in this scheme, namely, that the deprivation of Camden's residents does not constitute a tourist spectacle, nor does tourist spectacle ameliorate the problems of deprived residents.

The concluding section of the book deals with a prospectively different approach to Camden's plight, one based within the context of President Bill Clinton's third way political philosophy. For those looking for more than a historical account of Camden's decline and struggles for renewal, this will be of greatest relevance. It documents the political machinations involved in the New Jersey State legislators stepping in to address Camden's continuing decline. Of particular interest in this story of technocratic governmental reorganization are the personal political ambitions that shape this process. As Gillette argues, the revitalization goals of all parties concerned "were not necessarily favored in the incessant search for personal or political gains" (p. 215). This leads Gillette to consider the normative basis of urban renewal. Focusing on regional equity and racial justice, he questions the ethics of the urban political structure of Camden, and more generally American cities, where fiscal resources and municipal services that are divided along class and racial lines are normalized by an individualizing political rhetoric that obscures key social relations.

From the wounded city metaphor to Freeman's gentrified ghetto and to Camden's postindustrial struggles, the object of inquiry throughout these texts remains the spaces and problems of the city's poor. Whether presented as victims of neoliberal reforms, racial segregation, or corrupt city governments, the lens does not shift significantly. Notably though, each of these texts tells us something different about both the state of this urban problem and the prospects of change. My question then, and returning to the Zizek and the parallax analogy, is how we can understand how the changing personal and disciplinary perspective of the various authors affects our object. How does the subject insert itself into the object so that the object defines the subject? Through this question, we can ask how far these texts can be synthesized and indeed where they cannot—and I think they often cannot—what these gaps reveal about the urban problematique.

We can start this by asking how the "wounded" metaphor translates to other texts. For both, one could certainly say it fits: both New York and Camden can be said to have been wounded by decline and injustice. However, if we take the political economic basis of *Wounded Cities* and compare it to Freeman's account, the translation becomes more unstable. In Harvey's contribution to *Wounded Cities*, his Marxian perspective locates the act of wounding with processes of creative destruction and capital's constant requirements of exploitation and circulation. This theme also runs throughout the text. Yet this understanding of wounds (inflictor and inflicted) differs greatly from both Freeman's and Gillette's. Throughout his text, Freeman sparingly engages with the political economy, but he ultimately rejects this perspective to support a solution of "managing" gentrification. Clearly, this rejects the notion that the capitalist city and associated class relations require wounds in favor of an approach that foresees some kind of justice through technocratic efficiency. While it is not my intention to support one interpretation or the other here, what I think this contrast demonstrates is not only a disagreement over solutions but also differences over the problem itself.

Zizek claims that "parallax means *the bracketing itself produces its object*."[5] What Zizek refers to here is the way in which various modes of critique rely on some kind of abstraction; and that in this abstraction the object is itself constructed. In this sense, it is the (passive) subject that is constructed by the (active) object. To see the urban problematique, all these texts perform this procedure. The bracketing of the object occurs. And in doing so, the whole is unable to be viewed. Of course, as Zizek argues, this view is never possible, not even through synthesis given the fact that the action of bracketing itself constructs both that which is bracketed and that which is not. The point, therefore, is that the different perspectives brought by these texts cannot be read as various takes on the whole, that planning, anthropology, and history bring together the urban picture, but rather that each itself represents a particular construction of the object.

The consequence of this is that conversations between the perspectives (and politics) offered by the books require ontological and epistemological consideration. With reference to Zizek's parallax gap, this should start by considering how the minimal difference has emerged between the ontic (physical) and ontological (conceived) in each case. More specifically, some thought is required about how the urban object is constructed in each case. In this sense, a true comparison of these texts requires an understanding of the urban epistemologies deployed and their ontological basis.

One particular example illustrates how these gaps might be productively explored. Schneider and Susser's wounded city metaphor and Freeman's interpretation of gentrification present starkly different views of urban antagonisms. For the former, globalization (or rather, a globalized capitalist economy) represents an external antagonizer, while the latter finds few irreconcilable conflicts. While this difference appears clear, there is space between them to engage a conversation on their object (and potential politics).

Zizek relates the practices of the enlightened liberal-technocratic elite to an inherent populism. This populism represents the universal dimension of the political, the generation of particular political demands that produce "the people" as the universal political subject. Particular political struggles therefore become between "us" (people) and "them." The key here then is the externalizing of the enemy. This requires that the master signifier for the enemy remains vague. In the case of the two texts contrasted here, this vague externalizing includes references to "market inefficiencies" and "globalization." The point here then is that the abstract nature of the identified urban antagonisms unites these two texts with radically different political positions. They both engage, albeit in different ways, in populist reasoning through the way they construct the urban problem. As a consequence, perhaps the personalized political narratives in Gillette's text offer insight here. However, the main point is that in both cases the bracketing of the urban problem as external generates a certain urban epistemology. With regard to how to approach this gap, I leave the last work to Zizek himself: "For a populist, the cause of the troubles is ultimately never the system as such but the intruder who corrupted it (financial manipulators, not necessarily capitalists, and so on); not a fatal flaw inscribed into the structure as such but an element that doesn't play its role within the structure properly."[6]

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Notes

1. Slavoj Zizek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 4, 17.
2. Michael Dear (2005) Comparative Urbanism, *Urban Geography, 26*(3), 247-251.
3. Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge, UK, 2007).
4. Ruth Glass, "Introduction: Aspects of Change," in Centre for Urban Studies, ed., *Aspects of Change* (London, 1964), xiii-xix.
5. Zizek, *Parallax View*, 56, emphasis original.
6. Slavoj Zizek, "Against the Populist Temptation," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006): 551-74, 555.

Bio

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