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Tacit Alliances, not knowing togetherness

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A while ago, speaking of alliances, Guattari and Negri stated: "One thing [. . .] is to reveal new social productive forces and another is to organise them outside and against capitalist and/or socialist structures." (Guattari and Negri 2010, 94). Translated: an alliance is one thing, its politics quite another. Take the January 6th Capitol rioters, now officially rendered as "patriots" by the seating US President. By all means and measures - even the role of urbanity in it - their coming together speaks of an alliance and one of a multitude of kinds. We do not aim to offer a gratuitous provocation, but a gesture to indicate a question from which to (re)start. Rather than asking what is an alliance, we might query what is in an alliance. What kind of affective capacity engenders the coming together of individualised subjectivities, who might or might not share structural traits (at the class level, gender, ethnicity, and more)? Grassroots politics of the XIX and XX centuries showed how 'coming together' can be marshalled through the force of ideology. But that same marshalling also showed how its assemblage left more out of what let in (as the operaista recalled, "Ideology shatters; it only unifies on the level of appearance", ibid, 2010, 80). So, given past failures and current alt-right urban activism, instead of jumping straight into the politics of alliance we need to stay with the more basic question of what is in coming together.

In the sort of political coming together, we are used to - for liberatory or repressive purposes - individual subjects gather around a collectivisation of subjective intents. A vocalisation of sorts is required, either through discourse or through the bodily presence of alliances Butler spoke about (2011). There is a 'talking' of sorts, an annunciation. The performative gathering of being coalescing into action. One could consider this as pertaining to the second part of the opening quote - the organising, implicit or explicit, of a force "outside and against" systemic structures. The urban here provides the ground upon which two crucial things for such an assemblage to emerge: its territorialisation, or emplacement, in iconic physical spaces through which collective meaning can be articulated and diffused beyond place, and the fundamental resourceful density, allowing for people to construct and share intent in the first place (i.e. the focus of the Lefebvrian 'right' to the city; McFarlane 2021). But another form of political coming together, more common and volatile, might reveal something about what gets activated when - as fragile and ephemeral as they can be - "new social productive forces" come to the fore.

The regenerative capacities of popular districts in cities such as Jakarta, Delhi, Mexico City, Lagos, to name a few, to endure through what have substantially been autoconstructed modalities of inhabitation and economy. While continuously vulnerable to extractions and manipulations of all sorts, such districts, often through subterfuge, dissimulation, and uncanny affective intelligence, continuously remake themselves to revitalize core modalities of urban practice. Old fashion solidarities and reci-

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procities exist of course, and these districts could not exist without them. But the prevalent sensibility is that securing life and livelihood rests not so much in the predictable rhythms of neighbourly cooperation but in the unspecified outcomes of all these densities colliding and acting on each other, producing eventualities of all sorts. Not readily or even always clearly discernible as virtuous or destructive, these eventualities become the things that will alter lives, lift households beyond mere survival, become that which is lived for.

Such eventualities are a collective product of the district, as important as the combined labour of the street seller, the deliverer, the repairer, the construction worker, the child minder, the cook, the cleaner, the metalworker, transporter, and so forth. Residents are quick to point out that though things have not changed all that much for them, that they know others, just down the lane, for whom things did change and substantially, even if, at times they were reluctant to make these changes visible. That eventually, their own lives would change in unexpected and welcomed ways, because these eventualities were indeed the results of the very density of things taking place in the district. The work the urban does in these districts can also be seen as that of institutions honed over long periods of time. These institutions are less instruments of governance than of figuring, recalibrating and experimenting; institutions such as shrines, burial societies, ethnic associations, and guilds. In addition, more ephemeral forms of collective life also play in role in circulating personal experiences and perspectives through an array of networks and neighbours without fixing residents to specific positions and responsibilities. It is this circuitry of movement and exchange that drives a continuous process of incremental adjustments and sometime inexplicable leaps in the compositions of space (Featherstone 2012).

While not immune to biopolitics, these districts instantiated themselves in temporalities of what Neyrat has called pasts that have not live enough and futures that will never be born—proximate to forces not consolidated or consoled by power, but where finitude was ever present, where the specifications of regulated life did not forestall the dramatic presence of the inexplicable. From the interminable open-ended conversations among anyone interested in the Sufi shrines of Lahore, to the convocations of Mexico City brutal techno fanatics under the metro stations of the nearby peripheries, to the inventive cosplay of working class hustlers in the elite nocturnal spaces of Lagos, to intricately orchestrated and festive coordination of a hundred thousand street traders in El Alto, the preoccupation is not simply the fortification of existent "constitutions" but attention to what can be born within the limits of ecologies whose operations will partly always remain opaque and the multitude of ghosts—lives for whom there is yet to be justice—that inhabit each convocation. It includes the tentative always exploratory ways that multiple and limited sovereignties—cartels, syndicates, local authorities, religious activists, women's associations, and market guilds—continuously negotiate accords to render consumption affordable for the lower classes in Mexico City; or the ways in which the scores of small Islamic *zawiyya*—reception centres—in Ibaba Cairo reach toward each other as a means of materializing the faith of devotees that they are potentially availed an enormous range of connections and social ties and; it includes the maritime solidarities forged by migrants coming and going on long ferry rides across Eastern Indonesia under the cover of always emergent sense of "blackness", where they interlink their itineraries in exploring collaborations that inscribe small scale but extensive circular economies based on diverting things from mines, plantations, and ports.

What is embodied in these practices is an indifference to what David Marriott (2024) has called "the crisis of truth"—where the circumvention of uncertainty entailed in the fact that language always articulates unanticipated and uncontrollable meaning that have no logic is intensely racialized, consigning a thought that has no discernible position or cause to incivility, a life without life. Rather these districts hedge their endurance on what might be, what could have already been, not with any empirical certainty, but an addressing to and witnessing of the irrelevance and irreverence of its



own enactments, for they believe they are surrounded by something else other than the normative conceptualizations of problems and their amelioration, despite the sufferings endured.

This is not a radical politics of prefiguration, for figures themselves are always prompting inexplicable cognitive and practical engagements with entities and processes that appear distant, for which no relationship is seeming possible, prompting messy deals and hard bargains. A thin and sometimes oscillating line often appears between vociferous collective actors waging antagonisms in the interest of a justice to come and those interested only in their own self-aggrandizement. The circulations of pirates, cartels, hustlers, brokers, mercenaries, traders, priests, fabricators, casual labour, "advisors", tricksters extend the operations of molar organizations, but also topologically open "strange" collaborations that neither institutionalize themselves or yield discernible results, but nevertheless exert an unsettling force, undecidable in terms of virtue or destructiveness.

Ash Amin enquired along these lines a while back, questioning what makes for a "togetherness without relational ties, of productive collective venture without strangers having to develop close affinities with each other" (Amin 2012, 56). In asking this question, Amin was interested in "extending awareness of how the world at large shapes local habits of encounter" (:63), suggesting, in a vitalist sense, "that humans develop particular sensory antennae and affective dispositions [. . .] through their experience of public space as an entanglement of bodies and things" (:60). What 'urbanity' does in such a process is of a different kind from the emplacement and resourceful density evoked above. It is not 'giving space' nor 'offering spatial affordances', but allowing for an unconscious inter-subjective circulation of energetic matter, a cosmos referring "to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable" (Stengers 2005, 995). Geographers have discussed the affective capacities of these matters extensively. Here, we are interested in highlighting once more the underlying unconscious affections of such circulations in the makings of mundane alliances that do not compile within the grammar of the revolutionary left but might nonetheless provide for multitudes of revolutionary intent.

After all, to be alive in the city - to transverse its spaces and safely make it everyday 'back home' - requires a multiplicity of taciturn journeys. Not in the sense that things are not happening in the background and foreground, but these things need to be managed for the most part without a judgement, without assessments of efficacy; enabling a multiplicity of errancy and transversals to take place, knowing that everyone needs a base to work from and that base might be your neighbour, friend, co-associate, and that whatever transpires across an elongated field of practice might be brought home, not necessarily in terms of intelligence reports but in demeanour, gesture, conviviality, or generative antagonism. Here, we are not evoking an individualist take on what it means to inhabit the urban, but to expand upon what is canonically considered to make up for such inhabitation. Keeping equilibrium across the city is more than 'moving on'. It requires ongoing preconscious negotiations with all sorts of 'others', including their making as such, across a vast array of encounters - which we might call, tacit proximities. Before their socialisation - a smell one does not like, an ethno-fascist or sexualised connotation - takes place a form of witnessing the world that does not require the subject to know. Through togetherness (Massey 2005), but without the requirement of knowing togetherness.

Whose kind of "new social productive forces" are at work in there, before a bodily alliance can even be thought of? Contemporary financialised racial capitalism works by recursively computing new transversal landscapes of extraction, creating disposability (Tadiar 2022). Much of this work, as shown (Parisi 2017), takes place in background operations escaping cognition. Notwithstanding the importance of critique toward the operational structures allowing for the (re)production of such a landscape, how subjects engender these precognitive and affective unfolding matter. Clearly, to

define new subject formations but also, we hope, new traits of entirely differential and differentiated political wilfulness, as unknown to the wilful subject as might be. An ideology and a call to action might well wrap such subject up - as increasingly needed to fight Zionist and Fascists all around - but how such a 'wrapping' takes place might change once the tacit, vitalist intimacies negotiating mainstream forms of urban habitation are taken into the fore.

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