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Cities as aesthetic subjects

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the theory of the subject and of subjectivity in relation to recent debates on the emergence of cities as spaces that are transforming global politics and international relations. Engaging with the contributions to the theory of the subject in the work of Michael Shapiro, Gayatri Spivak, and Jodi Dean, the argument develops an account of the city as an aesthetic subject. In this account, subjectivity is not a property of an individual human but is instead a force and resource emerging through the subject's engagement in the aporetic boundary practices that define and delimit the subject's possibilities. This understanding of subjectivity is then developed in relation to the material metaphors of urban fabric as explored by China Miéville in his novel, *The City & The City*. The article concludes by revisiting the idea that cities have emerged as crucial spaces or actors in response to diverse global crises, arguing that accounts of cities that reproduce the model of the subject as an individual with defined properties–in terms of the qualities attributed to the city as it seeks to become a node in globalised networks–also fail to account for the politics of the city as an aesthetic subject. This politics is a 'wild politics', unbounded by the borders that seek to contain and separate fiction and fabrication, concept and material.

KEYWORDS
Subjectivity; cities; urbanism; China Miéville; aporia; aesthetic subjects

The state-centric triadic structure of modern sovereign politics – citizen, state, international, or, in the vernacular of International Relations (IR), man, the state, and war – has been criticised both for the exclusions that its limits generate and for the forces through which its limits are reinscribed when subject to challenge or crisis. As one of the exclusions from this triadic structure (Walker, 2010, p. 92), contemporary cities have been seen as a crisis in both modern state-based politics (Magnusson, 2011a) and in the modern international (Roy & Ong, 2011; Brenner, 2014). Emerging out of millennial globalization debates, an important body of urban-oriented literature reconsidered world politics by taking into account the role of certain dominant 'global cities' in organising and controlling the global distributions and flows of capital, of power, of people, and of knowledge and information (Friedmann, 1995; Sassen, 1994; Sassen, 2001; Acuto, 2013). Debates about 'global cities' and 'planetary urbanization' (Brenner, 2014) have highlighted political questions that were previously obscured by the blind-spots created by disciplinary investments in the nested hierarchy of citizen-state-international system and the limits inscribed by its 'territorial trap' (Agnew & Corbridge, 2005). Global cities have even been figured as the foundation for a newly emerging

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international system (Curtis, 2016), though with the additional warning that attention to the international political significance of global cities should not come at the expense of integrated analyses of 'everyday life' and the 'mundane experience of the individual subject in the global city' (Acuto, 2013, p. 186). While these analyses of networked cities governing transnational spaces suggests a politics that escapes the limits of modern sovereignty, we are concerned to question the stakes of ongoing investments in an individualized, psychologized political subject, a subject that far too often is imported without critique into ostensibly new modes of theorizing politics of both the 'international' and the 'global urban'.

We share this concern with other scholars in critical traditions within politics, international relations, and urban studies who argue for more serious engagements with the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and political implications of the 'crisis' that global urbanization has generated in dominant configurations of both international politics and political subjectivity. Within the diversity of urban studies scholarship, the frames of planetary urbanization and global cities have been criticized as either abstracting from or universalizing experiences of everyday life, with suggestions of the alternative configurations and analyses of urban/global politics that emerge from feminist, queer, decolonial, and other approaches that centre pluralities of ontologies and epistemologies of subjects and objects (McLean, 2017; Buckley & Strauss, 2016; Ruddick et al., 2017; Oswin, 2016). Magnusson (2011a) has articulated a powerful case for urbanism not simply as a globally-extensive way of life but as a political ontology of non-sovereignty. Isin (2002), Closs Stephens (2010), and Coward (2012) use, respectively, genealogies of contested citizenship in historical cities, material aesthetics of design and architecture in Berlin, and the material infrastructure of global urbanization to revisit and reconceptualize citizenship and community as the terms through which subjectivity becomes political and individual and collective subjects act politically. If global urbanization has generated a crisis for disciplinary IR that has been managed by incorporating the global city as the new form of international order, then it has also generated a crisis for the disciplinary figure of the modern subject – the subject of security, autonomy, and mastery – that has been managed by seeking new ways 'of figuring the relation of a subject to the plurality' which, according to many of these authors (if in different ways), 'characterises urban life' (Coward, 2012, p. 468).

The repetition of such patterns of crisis and crisis management, which recreate the sense of inescapable structural over-determination, is characteristic of the logic of aporetic boundary practices. An aporia has been figured as an impassable gap or drawn line (Derrida, 1993, 11), a negative analytical deconstruction (Massey, 2006, pp. 49–54), a black hole (Magnusson, 2011b, p. 1, 5, 32), or a site of imperfectible order that remains 'always prone to fracture' (Walker, 2010, p. 258). These metaphors of aporia as absence or gap give shape to the constitutive vulnerabilities of modern subjectivities of finitude: the operative spatiotemporal dynamic of aporetic boundaries generates cycles of crises that are used to require and justify forms of sovereign authority to secure that which is insecure (Tedesco, 2012). Recognizing this dominant dynamic, we emphasize that aporetic boundaries are also interactive, multispatial and multitemporal practices that displace and exceed modern subjectivity, modern sovereignty, and modern accounts of their crises. We understand aporetic boundaries as inter-constitutive: every practice of touching is bound with being touched, sensing with being sensed, materializing with being materialized, thinking with being constituted in and by thought. We therefore investigate how aporetic boundary practices include an aesthetic register of sensory perception (Buck-Morss, 1992; Rancière, 2010).

In our reading of the aesthetic – i.e., sensible – registers of aporetic boundary logics, we suggest that the repetition of patterns of security and insecurity as crisis and crisis management operate

through material metaphors. We derive this notion from accounts of how metaphors work to give material form to the political world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Shapiro, 1985/6). Metaphors have been used to develop new political approaches and configurations: Magnusson's extension of the literal global city to the metaphorical use of the global city as the political world formed through the global extension of urbanism as a way of life (Magnusson, 2000); Isin's characterization of the city as a 'difference machine' that 'generates differences and assembles identities,' and in so doing, constitutes an active agent in intersubjective processes of becoming political (Isin, 2002, pp. 45–51, 283); Fishel's reconfiguration of the body politic from a metaphor for the bounded unity of states and individual subjects into a metaphor for complex and interwoven modes of political practices and subjectivities (Fishel, 2017). We extend these through a reading of explicitly *material* metaphors as patterns of form-making imaginaries that operate to pattern political practices – of subjectivity, spatiotemporality, relationality – but that do not create over-determining structures. This enables us to reconfigure *urban fabric* as a material metaphor for interwoven, emplaced political subjectivity constituted through aesthetic, affective, and sensorial practices, including our own subjective practice of engaging the subject in crisis as a problem we both perceive and embody.

An aporetic reading of this problematic subject, using the dominant approach to aporetic logics noted above, would figure it as over-determined: every attempt to go outside the structure of subjectivity, to the past or the future or the alternative, reproduces the terms of the structure. Our emphasis, on the other hand, is on aporia as practices that are under-determined, even *wild*, by the standards of disciplinary IR. We draw an intentional parallel, then, between images of the urban as too wild and ungovernable for proper (statist) politics, and modes of subjective practice perceivable through an aporetic approach to material metaphors of the contemporary city that similarly can open possibilities for politics as a wild practice. We do this by explicitly refusing the psychologized and individualized subject of the state and the international, engaging instead with the urban not just as a site of aporetic subjectivity formed through practices of aesthetics, perceptions, and affects, but the urban itself as an aesthetic subject, active in the formation of the political world. Our contribution troubles the epistemological and methodological externality of 'crisis' and demonstrates how we might feel our way towards encountering and embodying aesthetic subjectivities as a wild practice of politics.

Our argument proceeds as follows. First, we engage three approaches to subjectivity that disrupt the model of the individualised subject that underpins modern conceptions of politics and international relations: we consider Michael Shapiro's articulation of a form of subjectivity that does not psychologize, interiorize, and individualize, an aesthetic subject that Shapiro also situates in the contemporary city; we engage Gayatri Spivak's explorations of the predications of the subject, the subject's situatedness in the world; and we engage Jodi Dean's critique of the enclosure of subjectivity, the consequences of which produce the psychologised, interiorised, and individualised subject. Following these disruptions of the individualised subject, we extend the notion of the aesthetic subject as one that emerges through densities and movements within the sensorium of everyday life, as captured by the material metaphor of *urban fabric*. We develop this approach concretely, through an exploration of aesthetic subjectivity in and of urban spaces in China Miéville's novel, *The City & The City*. We extend this reading to develop a notion of the urban as a non-individualized aesthetic subject that emerges in the substantive, active, felt spacetime of the boundary. The boundary practices that configure subjectivity render the subject undecidable: the subject is formed within the aporetic logic, but clearly is still operative. Therefore, unlike common conceptions of the aporia as a gap, absence, lack, or black hole, we theorize the sensory, material, and affective

practices that make the space of the aporia a place of active political configuration and reconfiguration, a fleshy density resonant with political life.

WHAT SUBJECT IN CRISIS?

In *Studies in Transdisciplinary Method* (2013), Mike Shapiro begins his argument by explaining his dissatisfaction with how political science conceives of the subject. In much conventional political analysis, a subject is an actor with certain psychological attributes or attitudes. The goal of political science is to reveal the psychic orientations or attitudes of the subjects under study and to correlate these attributes with political behaviours. Such a subject is reduced to a 'mode of apprehension' (Shapiro, 2013, p. 2) and subjectivity to a fixed, timeless, and universal state of being. In her decentering of the subject in IR theory, Jenny Edkins avers that sovereignty as a master signifier of the nation state in the international system similarly reduces politics to a particular resolution of social antagonisms (Edkins, 1999, p. 138). These reductions erase precisely what is political in subjectivity: its contentiousness and the historically shifting possibilities for being a subject.

Against this 'psychological subject', Shapiro draws on Rancière to propose *aesthetic subjects*: ' … those who, through artistic genres, articulate and mobilize thinking' (Shapiro, 2013, p. 11). Without reducing one to the other, Rancière understands both politics and aesthetics as *aesthesis*, involving partitions or distributions of the sensible (or perceptible). Aesthetic interventions, like political action, '[frame] a new *fabric* of common experience', a disruption and redistribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2010, p. 141; emphasis added). Such interventions and actions are, for Rancière, 'a matter of subjects', or subjectification: ' … the production through a series of actions of a body and capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience' (Rancière, 1999, p. 35). Aesthetic subjects do not re-present the interior lives of individual consciousnesses: 'their role is not to reflect individual attitudes but to enact the complex political habitus within which they strive to manage responsibilities, to flourish, or merely survive' (Shapiro, 2010, p. 7). Aesthetic subjects 'articulate and mobilize thinking' by staging clashes of heterogeneous elements that disrupt the taken-for-granted, invisible, and common-sense premises that inscribe the boundaries around the assumed limits to perceptual or political possibilities. Subjectivity is a *property* of the psychological subject, something the subject *has*; in mobilising thinking, subjectivity is something the aesthetic subject *does* in its encounters with other subjects and with the world.

The conception of subjectivity at work in Shapiro's notion of the aesthetic subject challenges not only the disciplinary boundaries between political science and, for example, literature, but also the boundaries that confine the subject as a container of psychological properties. The political scientist might respond to Shapiro by defending the disciplinary boundaries separating political science from literary theory: Shapiro's aesthetic subject, in this disciplinary view, is an appropriate figure for analysing novels and films but political science studies embodied, fleshy subjects in the world who make decisions and act upon one another. However, Shapiro's critique does not simply posit an alternative conception of subjectivity for figures rendered in forms of art; it is a direct challenge to the theory of subjectivity itself, a challenge that blurs these disciplinary boundaries by demonstrating how the boundaries between subject, space and time are much more blurry than the separation of subjects from the values they are supposed to 'bear and signify', or the separation of 'artistic genres' from 'real life' might suggest. The radical implications of Shapiro's critique become more evident if we consider that the aesthetic subject cannot be confined within the pages of a book or the frames of a film, but rather is an account precisely of the subjectivity that

emerges in and through the reciprocating co-production of subjects and the world. The tripartite structure of modern politics (citizen, state, international) depends, as Walker and many others have clarified, on the constitutive outsides that have made this structure possible, even as these constitutive outsides necessarily create the conditions for the crises in this structure – and thus, operate as a crisis of structure. Aesthetic subjects do not map easily *onto* this tripartite structure and the forms of political crisis it perpetuates. Rather, Shapiro suggests that they map *out of* their location 'within the densities of their regional and city locales' (Shapiro, 2010, p. 7), and thus, in aesthetic *and* spatial terms, constitute new topologies which must be traced (Secor, 2013).

Gayatri Spivak, in 'Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value' (1988), makes a slightly different but complementary argument about the place of aesthetics in the conception of the subject. For Spivak, idealist and materialist philosophies assert mutually exclusive predications of the subject: the idealist predication of the subject is consciousness, or the subject's irreducible intendedness towards the object; the materialist predication of the subject is labour-power, or the irreducible possibility that the subject is more than adequate to itself (Spivak, 1988, p. 154). When the idealist predication brackets consciousness, it disentangles consciousness from worldly determinations that come after an idealised subjectivity, shaping its intentions or acts and presenting the subject as an ideal form that can bear or present externally given attributes; the materialist predication brackets labour-power to root subjectivity in the historical configurations of power that shape the possibilities of subjectivity. The idealist subject encounters the world through its intentions; the materialist subject is of the world that it produces and that produces it. Though Spivak does not say so explicitly, this mutual exclusivity makes the subject undecidable and aporetic, for each bracketing excludes precisely the conditions that make subjectivity possible.

In her deconstruction of the idealist and materialist predications of the subject, Spivak does not eschew the irreducible intendedness of the subject towards the object nor the irreducible superadequacy of the subject towards itself. Subjectivity, however difficult conceptually, evades its analytical fixing and remains a wild practice in politics (Spivak, 1988, p. 174). In their mutual exclusivity, Spivak finds that these predications of the subject are metonymic accounts, parts standing in for putative wholes; they cannot afford a rigorous concept of the subject but rather, they invite fictive accounts. By this, we do not understand 'rigorous' to mean superior. On the contrary, a rigorous conception of subjectivity will necessarily fail to conceptualise the subject, because it remains fixed, abstracted, and subjected to the externalities of analysis. Efforts to conceive the subject 'rigorously', in that sense, result in defining and constricting the political possibilities of the subject. 'Fictive', on the other hand, suggests to us that the subject is produced, an always not quite adequate description that, in falling short, impels ever new fictions.

Crucially, like Shapiro, Spivak opens the exploration of subjectivity to the aesthetic. Spivak shares Shapiro's suspicion of the reduction of subjectivity to 'state of mind.' Although her reading of the predications of the subject focuses on textual strategies, these are, specifically, strategic: ' … even textualization … may be no more than a way of holding randomness at bay' (Spivak, 1988, p. 162). When Spivak asserts the political subject's orientation towards wild practice rather than theoretically grounded analysis, she opens the notion of an aesthetic subject not only to literary genres but also to *readings*, to perceptions and sensations. Aesthetics, in order to provide a philosophically informed account of art, for example, must also refer to the materiality of the imbrication of subjectivity with the world. Wild practice – practice which necessarily escapes analytical reductions and which does not necessarily hold randomness at bay – belies any notion of the subject as a coherent, self-identical summary of traits and capacities.

The aesthetic subject, then, is not only an artistic or literary critique of the individualised liberal subject, but it also escapes the page (or frame). The psychological subject that Shapiro questions is also the product of a kind of inscription. Jodi Dean makes a provocative assertion regarding the inscription of the subject by likening it to an enclosure: the appropriation of a common resource and exclusion of those who had made common use of it (Dean, 2016). Dean inverts Althusser's formula – for Althusser, ideology, as the imaginary relation of individuals to the real, interpellates individuals as subjects. Dean argues that bourgeois ideology interpellates the subject as an individual: '[the] individual form becomes itself the site of struggling desires, drives, ideals, and anxieties, organic processes localized at best in a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements' (Dean, 2016, p. 386). Bourgeois ideology transposes the wild practices of the crowd onto the individual psyche. Even when, as in Freud's psychoanalysis, this transposition does not inscribe a reasonable, self-aware liberal subject, it nonetheless encloses the wild practice of collective and materially imbricated subjectivity into an 'interior' instability of neuroses:

> [r]ather than a dynamic force of collective willing, desire appears as personal longing. Rather than an inescapable circuit of activity, drive appears as addiction. … Recognizing the people as a collective subject becomes all the more challenging because the terms of what counts as the act of a subject are truncated and distorted. Instead of being heterogeneous, conflictual, temporary, unbounded, and in need of support from objects and figures that exceed it, the subject as individual is impossibly, fantastically independent and enduring (Dean, 2016, p. 386).

Shapiro, Spivak and Dean each take the individual modern subject as a question and a problem: not a question to answer or a problem to solve, but a contingent formation that manages provisionally to achieve the status of inevitability and the security of self-identity. Where the subject is often simply *there*, in the centre of certainty, these accounts draw our attention to questions of the processes, practises and instabilities of subjectivity. At the same time, though, they offer concrete strategies for locating practices of subjectivity that actively work with, rather than diminish, the instabilities that destabilize and decentre claims about the modern subject. Shapiro, in reading genre fiction in text and film, helps us see the aesthetic processes that cohere into a subject of and with perception of the political world as sensorium rather than laboratorium. Spivak, in emphasizing the irreducibility of the subject to its orientations to the world, its continual excess of wild practice that cannot be captured and contained, helps us see the subject as fictive, not only in genre terms, but in terms of practices of definition, analysis, and consolidation that can only ever be temporary. This suggests to us, in turn, that the aporetic logic with which she redefines subjectivity entails a further redefinition of methodology – away from 'rigorous' practices of abstraction, determination, separation and enclosure, and towards the practices of sensing and perceiving that enable the formation and dissolution of boundaries that demarcate the fleshy affective density of the political world. For Spivak, the rigorous modern subject is a metonym, a metaphor for self-identical presence that, while impossible, is materially present through the real effects it has on the political world. This link between the aporetic and the aesthetic subject enables us to pose the question of what other material metaphors might be better suited for perceiving aesthetic subjects. However, following Dean, the aporetic logic of unstable or undecidable boundaries, when pushed to its limits, calls into question the boundaries that would demarcate and secure subjectivity in individualized terms. So we are further brought to ask what other forms of aesthetic subjects are, or might be, operative, and how, methodologically, might we make sense of them by sensing them?

CITIES AS AESTHETIC SUBJECTS: MATERIAL METAPHORS, URBAN FABRIC, AND FLESHY DENSITIES

Reading Shapiro, Spivak, and Dean together suggests that forces of decision (or intendedness towards an object) and action (or the creative and reciprocal making of the world and the subject) can centre on collectives as well as individuals, and on a range of material political sites, such as the urban, that both operate within and exceed the spatial and temporal containers imposed by the tripartite structure of citizen-state-international. Here we wish to explore whether these urban densities might be more than just an external space or crucible from which aesthetic subjectivity emerges, and whether they might instead operate as aesthetic subjects in their own right: the city as aesthetic subject. By holding space against these definitive foreclosures, at least temporarily, we explore the methodological and political value of posing two open-ended questions: what material metaphors might help us sense and make sense of cities as aesthetic subjects? What forms of wild practices of politics do cities as aesthetic subjects generate?

Operating in both conceptual and material registers, metaphors offer a methodological entry to the question of wild practices of political subjectivity. Metaphors do not function as definitive statements of what *is*, or objective analyses of *what is known*, but as evocative practices that build relations of meaning via 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 5). Rancière also emphasises the importance of such evocative practices: '[the] argument linking two ideas and the metaphor revealing a thing in another thing have always been in community' (Rancière, 1999, p. 56). Crucially, to be a metaphor, there must be a gap between two concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Without a gap, there is no metaphor, only singularity; with this gap, a metaphor is by definition aporetic, emerging from the boundary practices that both separate and connect the terms, perceptions and experiences set in relation. While metaphors interact with and depend on other metaphors to constitute complex and more-or-less coherent patterns of meaning, as aporetic, these patterns are operative without being inevitable.

Shapiro further situates metaphors as 'grammatical, rhetorical, and narrative structures' that not only 'create value [and] bestow meaning' but that 'constitute (in the sense of *imposing form upon*) the subjects and objects that emerge in the process in inquiry' (Shapiro, 1985/6, p. 192; emphasis added). In other words, a metaphor is not only a figure of speech, or a conceptual tool, but also a practice of *materialization and dematerialization* (Squire, 2015). While materially operative, the aporetic logic of 'metaphorical structuring' ensures that relations and connections between metaphors are never fully consistent and never final, as there is always 'part of a metaphorical concept [that] does not and cannot fit' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 460). These structures of meaning may materialize some forms of relationship, but they also systematically occlude and dematerialize other relations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 458).

Shapiro (1985/6, p. 195) politicizes the under-determination of aporetic material metaphors, evaluating metaphors as having a 'conservative' or 'radical' performance according to whether they materialize or dematerialize subjects and objects of inquiry as essentially discrete and disconnected, or whether they have 'the effect of refiguring and disturbing [this] otherwise tranquil domain'. Stefanie Fishel's *The Microbial State* (2017) offers a powerful example of how metaphors that have dominated modern politics and international relations – such as the body politic – might be shifted from a conservative to a radical performance. By putting the body politic into metaphoric and material relation with emerging knowledge about the diversity and magnitude of life within the microbiome of the 'human' body, she creates a poetic politics of collectivized subjectivity (2017, 15-20). Envisioning new material metaphors, therefore, may open possibilities to develop new patterns

of relation and coherence: new frames for the politics of subjects and knowledge that take the aporetic dynamics of 'crisis' as both *positive* (in the sense of operative and not absent) and *radical* (in the sense of disturbing the claims of sovereignty).

We see the common expression *urban fabric* as a material metaphor that can embody some of these radical possibilities of non-individualized subjectivity and wild political practice. We highlight some aspects of the web of meanings and feelings that interact to materialize the urban fabric, and then we weave these together to enable a further investigation into the material, aporetic and collective indications of the city as aesthetic subject, which we render sensible through our reading of *The City & The City*.

First, in urban fabric there is the play between meanings of material, from the fleshy density of living bodies, to the material forms of urban built environments (themselves materializations of economic, social and political productions), to the weaving together of material and social urban infrastructures (Simone, 2004; Coward, 2012; Cowen, 2017), to the more literal sense of material as fabric and textiles. Urban fabric is both a material metaphor for the city as aesthetic subject and an index of a production process, a fabrication of the world (Kangas, 2017). The *fabrication* of the subject, in Spivak's materialist sense of the subject being super-adequate to itself, takes on a role in interlacing the structures of meaning through which material metaphors become operative. Here, read with Shapiro, urban fabric becomes an apt material metaphor for the fabrication of forms of subjectivity that are neither individual nor sovereign. Further, material metaphors of textile practice, as opposed to more common metaphors of politics and knowledge as concrete, architectural structures (such as foundations or building blocks), suggest shifts from stability and permanence to patterning, stitching, and piecing as sensory, aesthetic practices (Collins, 2016, pp. 2–3). Feminist political agency has been enacted in many geographical contexts by concrete acts of fabrication alongside the mobilization of textile-derived metaphors, such as knitting, threading needles, weaving, or stitching together (Pérez-Bustos et al., 2019). More generally, in explorations of the ways that 'metaphors structure our thinking,' we can see that 'knitting, weaving, tapestry, embroidery and quilting variously represent kinship, identity, complexity, time, structure and style' (Collins, 2016, p. 2). In other words, the shifts towards textiles and fabrics in conceptions of politics open other, possibly more radical performances of subjectivity, authority, and epistemology.

Second, just as an aporia does not exist 'as such', objectively or abstractly, but only as an outcome of aporetic boundary practices that both take place and make place according to complex multi-temporal and multi-spatial dynamics, textiles also both take and make place, through practices that are both 'site-specific and community-based' (Kettle, 2019, p. 333). However, unlike Euclidean notions of place as fixed and singular within geometric space and linear history, '[t]extile-making, with its metaphorical resonance, enacts the non-linear and iterative processes that connect, pull, draw through, knot, and loop back into themselves to make a new fabric.' In so doing, textiles both 'actively participat[e] in this *movement* of place-making' (Kettle, 2019, p. 335, citing Ingold 2000; emphasis added) and 'are residual to their making' (Kettle, 2019, p. 336). In other words, metaphors of textiles and urban fabrics are particularly adept at materializing the simultaneity of complex spatiotemporal dynamics of embedded aesthetic subjectivity, with its undecidable aporetic predication. On the one hand, following the idealist predication of consciousness as the intendedness towards an object, we might envision the self-conscious, thinking subject in relation to textiles and fabrics as its object. Here, textiles express and are the object of meaning, thought, intention and thus authority. On the other hand, in the materialist predication of the subject as labour power, textiles are a material expression of the superadequacy of the subject: textiles and fabrics are the remnant and the excess of subjectivity as practice, as making, as doing.

By extending this aporetic subjective undecidability towards the collective and place-making aspects of textiles, we suggest that the common notion of 'urban fabric' becomes uniquely useful as a material metaphor for the city as an aesthetic subject. As Spivak locates her assertion that the subject is super-adequate, always something more than itself as the source of (surplus) value, the notion that the subject is a *product* of its relations with itself and with others becomes available for the critique of the city as subject: the city as a subject is *fabricated and fabricating* in social relations of political production (see also: Isin, 2002). Individuation shapes the subject through a political logic of sovereignty: a claim that the subject authorises itself to act. The aporias of subjectivity emerge from the cleavage of the subject, its separation and binding together, which problematizes the sovereign subject, and which locates the intertwining of subjects in urban fabric as both processes and results of material woven, knitted, or stitched together.

By shifting focus from the individuated subject to the urban collective, subjectivity no longer appears as a property but instead as an emergence from the reversibility and intertwining (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) of creative and reciprocal productions of subject and world. Subjectivity can no longer be understood as enclosed by the sovereign boundaries of the individual but must account for the aporetic bordering practices that both posit subjectivity as enclosed by those boundaries and come into operation because the wild practices of collective and intertwined subjectivity disrupt those boundaries.

THE CITY & THE CITY: BORDERS, BREACH, AND WILD PRACTICES OF AESTHETIC SUBJECTS

We have moved from a critical engagement with and extension of Shapiro's account of the aesthetic subject to the suggestion that the analyses he makes of subjects in 'artistic genres' could be made of subjects of extended and indeterminate forms through the material metaphor of urban fabric. Turning towards Miéville's literary account of two imagined, overlapping cities enables us to demonstrate the politics of cities as aesthetic subjects of wild, undecidable, sensorial practices.

In *The City & The City* (2010), China Miéville stages a murder and its investigation as international events taking place across two cities that largely occupy the same territorial space. While this spatial arrangement involves an interweaving of the urban fabrics of both cities, its bordering practices also put sharp limits on the possibilities of intertwining. In terms of a sovereign politics, where each city is identical with itself and externally related to the other, these limits suggest 'an imperceptible shift from the phenomenologically valid account of *reversibility* in intra-corporeal life to the metaphysical principle stipulating that a *reversal* between activity and passivity must *de jure* be possible' (Stawarska, 2002, p. 162). While the citizens of the two cities largely share the same space, the possibilities for their intertwining are *de jure* strictly limited and policed to preserve the boundaries that separate the cities. Thus citizens live in their respective cities as subjects of sovereignty. However, as the following discussion will show, the interwoven urban fabric not only generates a sensorial excess that continually disrupts attempts by the cities to place and therefore govern their residents; in doing so, it performs its own aesthetic subjectivity, mobilizing thinking as a radical material metaphor for wild practices of politics.

The cities of the novel, Besźel and Ul Qoma, are different but similar and possibly related. Besźel is presented as a prototypical Eastern European city in terms of language, landscape, and a declining economy. Ul Qoma appears as a Western Asian city, comparable to Turkish cities, its secularism compared to Atatürk's, for example (Miéville, 2010, p. 41; 161). There are colours, types of

clothing, architecture, gait, and in the eyes of some of the characters racial differences between the citizens of the two cities, many of which differences are also legally stipulated and policed. The interweaving of the cities leaves some zones as 'total' within one city, 'alter' within the other city, and 'crosshatched' where both occupy the space simultaneously. There are disputed spaces, or *dissensi*, which have ambiguous relations to the sovereign spaces of each city.

The ambiguity of the origins of the two cities is crucial to their aporetic logic. Chapter 5 recounts the origin story: 'Perhaps there was one thing back then that later schismed on the ruins, or perhaps our ancestral Besźel had not yet met and standoffishly entwined with its neighbour' (Miéville, 2010, p. 42). A 'precursor' civilisation, revealed through archaeological digs, may or may not be at the origin of a split between the two cities; alternatively, the cities may have grown into and through each other. Miéville keeps both possibilities open throughout the novel, giving the archaeologists the task of thinking through the *cleavage*. Miéville explicitly endorses the contranymic reading of 'cleavage' (2010, p. 323): the cities are *both* cut apart from each other *and* bound together.

The differences between the cities are practiced through perception and particularly through Miéville's concept of 'unseeing'. Because Besźel and Ul Qoma exist in separate sovereign jurisdictions but largely occupy the same space – with some places 'totally' within one sovereign space, some 'crosshatched' and some disputed – the borders that separate the cities cannot be merely territorial. Instead, residents of each city must learn to 'unsee' the residents, the built environment, and events of the other city. Unseeing, then, is not a passive act: it is not ignoring or a failure of awareness. Unseeing is a specific practice of perception, a sense like sight or hearing or smell where the other city is held about (rather than within) the field of perception but *unseen* as other, separate, foreign, and taboo.

Unseeing is a skill: it needs to be taught and sometimes it fails. There are many references to the need to teach children in Besźel and Ul Qoma to unsee and for tourists, special training using simulators is provided to help visitors unsee the other city (Miéville, 2010, pp. 133–134). Unseeing is not merely visual but more fully sensorial, requiring total somatic control to maintain: 'Their voices were muted to me, random noise. That aural fade comes from years of Besź care' (Miéville, 2010, p. 45). When the family of the murdered girl, who comes from America, must make an emergency trip to Besźel, the police pay special attention to try to prevent them from breaching the borders between the cities because the inscription of the practice of unseeing into their habits and bodies will not have occurred: ' … no one thought visitors would have metabolised the deep prediscursive instinct for our borders that Besź and Ul Qomans have … ' (Miéville, 2010, p. 76).

It is the interwoven urban fabric of the two cities that makes unseeing such a demanding skill. Miéville illustrates the fluidity of the complex borders between the cities with the notion of 'protuberances', unexpected extensions of one city into the other. Some of these are everyday occurrences, such as needing to swerve in traffic to avoid cars from the other city or unseeing a 'foreign' police car with its siren on. Some are more extraordinary, such as a festival that Inspector Borlú recalls where the Besź attendees had got very high and engaged in public fornication, which the citizens of Ul Qoma had to 'daintily' and 'assiduously' unsee (Miéville, 2010, p. 143). Other protuberances are deliberate, strategically used to disrupt the cities' borders for political effect.

Boundaries between the cities are crucial to the story and Miéville elaborates the variety of boundaries carefully. As noted above, some zones of each city are 'total' or 'alter', and some are crosshatched. The inscription of borders onto the fabric of cities by 'unseeing' must be produced by the citizens themselves. Rather than unambiguous lines through maps or territories, it is the fear of breaching the borders that produces the cleavages that define the separate spaces. The movement of material elements does not necessarily cross physical boundaries; instead, material elements are

located by the practices of seeing and unseeing. Borlú takes a colleague assisting him with the murder investigation into a zone in Beszél for Ul Qoma migrants, an Ul Qoma-town, where they go to a café: 'The scents of Beszél Ul Qoma-town are a confusion. The instinct is to unsmell them, to think of them as a drift across the boundaries, as disrespectful as rain … But those smells are in Beszél' (Miéville, 2010, p. 54). Thus, unseeing is established as a somatic, embodied form of practice that constitutes the political boundaries between the city and the city via subjective interactions with the sensorium of the urban fabric.

The crossing point where one may legitimately travel between one city and the other is like any other border crossing, yet it is unique inasmuch as it is the only place in the two cities where it is possible to see the other side across a physical barrier (Miéville, 2010, pp. 129–131). The border is located in a space shared by administrations of both cities, Cupola Hill, where an Oversight Committee meets to manage affairs and concerns common to both cities. Passage through this zone is the only way to enter the other city without breaching. Crucially, the adjudication of these common concerns – or *dissensus*, as Miéville describes them – takes place in this interstice. When Borlú needs to present to this bilateral Oversight Committee, he notes that '[i]t was strange not to unsee these people in formal Ul Qoma dress – men in collarless shirts and dark lapel-less jackets, a few women in spiral semi-wraps in colours that would be contraband in Beszél. But then I was not in Beszél' (Miéville, 2010, p. 59). This 'unique' political border as spatial interstice foreshadows other important interstices between the two cities. As we discuss below, it is in the interstitial spaces between the cities – spaces woven into literal and figurative urban fabrics – that the policing of breach can operate.

Policing, in the novel, recalls Jacques Rancière's conception of 'police' as maintaining a given distribution of the sensible, as opposed to 'politics' as a disruption of those distributions (Rancière, 2010, pp. 36–7). Policing the borders means keeping people in their place: in the sovereign space of their respective cities. Each city has its own police force – *policzai* in Beszél, *militsya* in Ul Qoma – and each carefully respects the jurisdiction of the other. Indeed, Borlú breaches when he attempts to apprehend a murderer who is in the other city. These official police forces operate within their respective sovereign spaces.

This policed sovereignty is paradoxically enforced by political actors intent on abolishing the cleavage between the two cities. The Unificationists consider that the two cities should be unified multiculturally, while the Nationalists seek to claim the two cities as a singular whole on behalf of their own identities. Just as each, in their own ways, would eliminate the difference that defines the two cities, so each generates the very practices of forceful policing that maintain the sensibilities that keep the two cities separate: 'A political irony. Those most dedicated to the perforation of the boundary between Beszél and Ul Qoma had to observe it most carefully' (Miéville, 2010, p. 52).

Sovereignty is further enforced by relations with an international 'outside' of the two cities. Conventional understandings of international relations – war and security, foreign investment, the arrival and presence of refugees, tourists from abroad, infrastructures such as ports and airports – generate further attempts to police the cities. The denouement of the novel reveals the links between cultural politics and the subordination of the two cities to the interests of foreign corporations and the governments that protect them. Indeed, the limits of the power of forces policing the two cities are underscored when they attempt to arrest an executive of an 'outside' corporation as he departs by helicopter while telling them they do not dare intervene as it would risk an international incident involving his country (presumably the USA).

On this reading, despite the unconventional spatial relations between the two cities, the political and aesthetic possibilities explored in the novel remain subordinated to a very conventional

understanding of the modern logic of sovereignty. Beszél and Ul Qoma each governs its sovereign space and recognises the power of the other to govern its space, and this sovereign logic is recognised and exploited by 'outside' actors through the cities' insertion into international orders. The holy trinity of the autonomous individual subject, the sovereign state that both gives and limits the rights of the autonomous subject, and the international system which governs the logic of interactions between states, forms the ground on which the figures of the novel can act. However, the nested hierarchy of subject-state-system does not exhaust the possibilities for political space and political subjectivity in the novel, and we now turn to that reading of wilder, ungovernable practices of politics within the urban fabric and by the city itself as an aesthetic subject.

In *The City & The City*, to fail in the practice of unseeing is to 'breach' the sovereignty of the space one is in. This failure, which threatens the central cleavage of the sovereign spaces of the cities, is policed by the mysterious, and feared, authority called Breach: 'I thought it was the shocked declaration by those who had witnessed the crime. But unclear figures emerged where there had been no purposeful motion instants before, only the milling of no ones, the aimless and confused, and those suddenly appeared newcomers with faces so motionless I hardly recognised them as faces were saying the word [Breach]. It was statement of both crime and identity' (Miéville, 2010, p. 237). Thus, amongst the milling of 'no ones', Breach emerges from no *where*: 'The Breach was nothing. It is nothing. This is a commonplace; this is simple stuff. The Breach has no embassies, no army, no sights to see. The Breach has no currency. If you commit it it will envelop you. Breach is a void full of angry police' (Miéville, 2010, p. 248). The crime of breaching the border created through the perceptual practice of 'unseeing,' and the shadowy force that polices these breaches, point towards the interstices of social and political relations: the spaces between the inscriptions of enclosed subjects, where the fragile stability of subject-object (or self-other) distinctions are policed, but where another kind of politics that does not revert to sovereign power might yet emerge.

Breach is not only a verb but also an institution – an aporetic border – watching and policing the boundaries between the cities. It is real and everyone is afraid of it. However, Breach does not police the boundaries on its own. The citizens of the two cities continually make and remake the urban fabric: 'It's not just us keeping them apart. It's everyone in Beszél and everyone in Ul Qoma. Every minute, every day. We're only the last ditch: it's everyone in the cities who does most of the work' (Miéville, 2010, p. 310). A breach is often offered as a failure of self-control, a failure of subjects to manage their autonomic responses to the urban fabric: a 'somatic breach', such as 'a startled jump at a … misfiring car' across the sovereign boundaries that divide the cities, is enough to cause Breach to materialize (Miéville, 2010, p. 52). Breaching means that people, either willingly or in panic, have to recognise the other city. Considered in relation to the notion of reversibility – when the cleaved self must recognise itself as a self through splitting and unifying in one single stroke – the moment of breaching both results from and presents a crisis for the city. Breach, as a police order and police force, attempts to contain the crisis and restore the distribution of the sensible secured by 'unseeing' the other. It is in large part the shared labour of the citizens' unseeing that makes and remakes the cleavage of the city and the city and their own position as subjects of one city or the other. However, it is a labour that is always threatened by forms of material embeddedness in the urban fabric that generate subjective responses that cannot be fully controlled and managed.

Breaching the boundaries between the cities is a crime that produces a disruption in the distribution of the sensible, a type of crime that Inspector Borlú describes as more elemental than the crimes he usually investigates. When Borlú receives a phone call that he suspects is breaching, he refers to it as an 'allergen' (Miéville, 2010, p. 37). Similarly, the disruption breaching causes is

described as traumatic. Because the police in the two cities are not immune to the effects of breaching, policing these borders is in the jurisdiction of Breach. Borlú recounts witnessing a traffic accident as a child and seeing Breach in action, emerging suddenly and 'cauterising' the scene (Miéville, 2010, pp. 65–66).

Miéville's use of medical language – allergen, trauma, cauterising – in relation to the policing of the boundaries highlights that the subjective experience of disrupting the distribution of the sensible is vertiginous or intoxicating. Borlú fights the intoxicating effects of the feeling of having breached by focusing on the stones of buildings that are familiar to him (Miéville, 2010, p. 36). When he is taken into custody by Breach, he finds himself thrust into an interstitial third space: 'My sight seemed to untether as with a lurching Hitchcock shot, some trickery of dolly and depth of field, so the street lengthened and its focus changed. Everything I had been unseeing now jostled into sudden close-up.' When the Breach agent asks Borlú where he is, he answers ' … Neither. I'm in Breach.' The agent responds: "'You're with me here.' We moved through a crosshatched morning crowd. 'In Breach. No one knows if they're seeing you or unseeing you. Don't creep. You're not in neither: you're in both'" (Miéville, 2010, p. 254).

In Borlú's case, the disorientation and intoxication of no longer unseeing, of disrupting the distribution of the sensible, appears as a disruption of his status as an individuated subject. As Borlú is recruited to work with Breach, not unseeing will become an instrument for policing. Understood in terms of the psychological subject, the politics of the space between appears to – appears in order to – reaffirm the sovereign logic of the politics of modernity and the cleavage of the cities. However, as Borlú's perception changes, he begins to see the city and the city as an urban fabric that is superadequate to itself: ' … where the two cities are close up they make for interference patterns, harder to read or predict. They are more than a city and a city; that is elementary urban arithmetic' (Miéville, 2010, p. 218). The purpose of unseeing, of Breach and the fear and obedience it commands, and of the enormous everyday labour of maintaining the separate sovereign spaces of the two cities – in short, the purpose of the sovereign logic of modern politics – is to enclose the superadequacy of the urban, understood as a collective aesthetic subject.

This superadequacy, that is, the urban being more than it is, is in turn the sign of a different politics flowing from these interstices, a politics that is both a limit to and an alternative to sovereignty. Ashil, the agent of Breach investigating Borlú, explains the fragility of sovereign power as he recruits Borlú: 'That's why unseeing and unsensing are so vital. No one can admit it doesn't work. So if you don't admit it, it does. But if you breach, even if it's not your fault, for more than the shortest time … you can't come back from that' (Miéville, 2010, p. 310). The city as an aesthetic subject is not merely individual, self-identical and adequate to itself, as a political logic of sovereignty would have it be. The aporetic logic of the urban lies in the ways the city both attempts to contain and continually expresses disruptions of the senses and of the distributions of the sensible – disruptions you cannot come back from.

Thus in the coda to the novel, as Borlú is signing off, he asserts: 'We are all philosophers here where I am, and we debate among many other things the question of where it is that we live … I live in the interstice yes, but I live in both the city and the city.' Inspector Borlú, a character in a detective novel, develops as a subject: through his own superadequacy, he makes himself into a different subject, a subject that resides in the political space of the interstices. Yet, insofar as he remains an agent of policing, in the form of Breach, he leaves the distribution of the sensible to be continually affirmed through the labours of unseeing required of other residents. The city and the city demonstrate their own momentum, however, their own materialization of place as movement, through the undecided and contentious relations that form and respond to their

cleavage. Finally, the interwoven urban fabric remains operative as an aesthetic subject in its own right, materializing excesses that generate further breaches and mobilize thinking. Thus, despite all efforts of sovereign and subjective enclosure, the political possibilities for wild practices remain open.

POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY IN THE WILD

Much current literature on global cities treats the city in the same way that conventional political science treats the subject – in Shapiro's formulation, as a 'psychological subject' – in terms of the qualities attributed to the city as it seeks to become a node in globalised networks (diverse approaches measure qualities of cities to organise them into hierarchical taxonomies; see e.g., World Bank, 1991; Florida, 2004; Sassen, 2001). The city, in this literature, contains these qualities; to manage its orientations towards global networks, it adopts the policy recommendations of transnational advisors and policy networks alongside political behaviours to create the conditions attractive to international investment. As with the notion of subjectivity informing the 'psychological subject', the global city is a mode of apprehension that the city as an autonomous unit mobilises to know its place in the world.

The notion of the aesthetic city, or the city as an aesthetic subject, helps to disrupt the conceptually, subjectively, and spatially nested hierarchies of 'local' within 'global'. This challenges critically inclined scholars to see, feel, and know the urban/global politics interface differently by attending to neglected sites, subjects, and methods. Taking our cues from a novel, a site only rarely explored in research into global/urban politics (Closs Stephens, 2015), we have followed Shapiro in identifying an urban subjectivity that articulates and mobilises thinking. We ask: what global politics can be seen, felt, and known when we approach the city as an *aesthetic* subject?

While Shapiro's analyses of aesthetic subjects focus on 'artistic genres', however, we read the aesthetic subjectivity in Miéville's novel as a *material metaphor*: *The City & The City* describes not only a fictive juxtaposition of conceptual accounts of the conditions for subjective encounters, but is also, in the same way a 'real' city is, a material practice that mobilises thinking across the gap that separates and joins artistic expressions and lived experience. Thus, with Spivak, we read the idealist and materialist predications of the subject as metonymic and mutually exclusive accounts that are nonetheless mutually dependent, partial, incomplete, and fictive. Miéville's cities are not only Beszél and Ul Qoma, the fictional cities set in the artistic genre of the novel, but also the fabricated cities in which novels circulate, are read, and mobilise thinking.

Reading cities as material metaphors blurs the boundaries between (conceptual) fiction and (practical) fabrication, just as the boundaries between Beszél and Ul Qoma are both blurred and policed by breaching. Miéville defines 'breach' as both crime or disruption, and as police or containment, signalling an important challenge to the limits posed to political possibility by modern subjectivity. The subject interpellated as an individual, in Dean's formulation, suffers an enclosure and is cut off from the collective resources for responding to its crises. What China Miéville provides us is a view of the city as a subject that can provoke disruptions: not a mere setting for encounters but a condensation of productive forces that makes and enlarges the field of possibilities for subjectivity. However, Miéville's cities do not escape the limits of modern subjectivity: the people who dwell in his cities both inscribe and enclose the aesthetic subjectivity of their cities; and when the borders around the subjects are disrupted, they become police.

The manifold crises of contemporary politics – financial crises and crises of accumulation; depletion and crises of social reproduction; climate crises; the emergence of nationalism and populism not as expressions of liberal identities but as crises of liberal order – are all also crises of the modern subject. The condition of the autonomous, self-identical, sovereign subject is both the condition that has given rise to these crises and the subject that must but is not adequate to address them. Its 'breaching' of the boundaries that define the subject call for the policing of that subject, just as the subjective crisis felt by Borlú when he stops 'unseeing' must be contained not only by Breach, but also by bringing him into Breach. Wild practices are always escaping the political boundaries of the modern subject; the state is always redrawing the lines that contain them. For how much longer can the subject be recruited to enforce this container?

The state as a container for modern politics continues to contain, but increasingly, contemporary crises indicate what the subject must unsee in order to be an autonomous, self-identical, sovereign subject: that the aporias that bound the subject also unbound it, opening disputes and disagreements – dissensus – on the question of where it is that we live, and where politics might be. As the habits of unseeing the political possibilities that lie beyond the boundaries wear out, such disputes can become both fictive and fabric, both conceptual and material.

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