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Understanding Public Cities

As built environment professionals, we are part of a range of forces shaping cities: we are involved in building them, maintaining them and managing them -– one urban or architectural project at a time. When dealing with cities and urban processes, there are two particularly important questions to ask: who shapes cities, and who are cities for? In urban studies, these questions are approached in a variety of ways, but it is generally understood that our profession has a role and responsibility towards 'the people', 'the public', and 'the public good' that goes beyond our contractual obligations to an employer or client.

In this chapter we consider 'the public' in cities—who the public is (or are), public spaces and infrastructure, and the role of the public in producing urban space. The chapter explores the critical edge of these questions, and the power dynamics influencing not only the role of the public in cities, but in the constitution of both the public and the city. In order to understand public cities, we have to understand who the public is, and the way 'the public' (or rather, *publics*, plural) relate to and make claims *for* and *of* space in cities, and how these claims relate to broader questions about belonging, control, and justice (also see Chapter 9). Broadly, this section will consider both the nature of the public in cities and the spaces of the city that are 'for' them (us!). Importantly, these are not settled matters; both parts of the term 'public cities' are contested.

> **PUBLICS**
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> Instead of thinking about 'the public' as singular, static, or unified body, the term 'publics' is used to reflect the diversity and contradictions of communities. 'Publics' are multiple, so we have to be specific about who and what we mean by it (for a full discussion, see Bhandari, 2006).

In the next section we talk more about the concept of 'liberalism' and how it relates to how we think about ourselves as individual humans, but *neo*liberalism is worth defining early. In simple terms, 'neoliberalism' is an ideology that applies the logics of 'the market' to non-economic relations, systems, and exchanges (Brown 2015). Although the rhetoric of neoliberalism often emphasises small government—the logic being that services typically provided by the government are better outsourced to the market, or privatised and commercialised entirely—in practice neoliberalism transforms the role of governments, but does not necessarily shrink them (Howlett, Seini et al. 2011; Brown 2015). Neoliberalism has fundamentally changed and diminished the public realm, so it's important to keep it in mind as we consider Public Cities. (See also Chapter 3, Economic Cities).

LIBERALISM

Liberalism is a branch of philosophy and politics that emphasises individual liberties and (negative) human rights Liberalism also emphasises free market economies with a limited role for government regulation, and individual decision-making informed by rationality and self-interest (for a detailed discussion, see Forrester 2019).

Who is 'The Public'?

So, who is 'the public'? 'The public' is one of those widely used phrases—alongside 'citizens' and 'the community'—that is often used without much reflection. Tonkiss (2005: 24) described 'community' as a shifting concept; "[d]ifficult to define, harder to observe and unvirtuous to reject, the idea of community opens itself to conservative or progressive uses even as it confuses the distinction between them". Public is similarly hard to define. Further, 'public space' also resists a simple, universal definition (Vigneswaran, Iveson et al. 2017). A common meaning and common understanding of 'community' and 'the public' is often assumed, but it is important to critically reflect on who gets gathered up in a term like 'the public', who is excluded, and what that says about who cities are for. Who are we talking about when we talk about 'the public' in urban studies? Is the public an already constituted, relatively fixed and stable entity? Or is the public created and recreated as we engage with it? And under what terms might we deem it reasonable to exclude individuals from the category of 'the public', from public life and public cities?

When imagining 'the public' and the role of the people in politics and decision making, 'the demos' is often invoked—the regular people, the citizens of Ancient Greece, who participated in democracy via public forums in public spaces—the *agora* (Sadik-Khan and Solomonow 2017). Public space, then, has long been considered the site in which citizenship is enacted (Vaughan 2016). Indeed, the term 'citizen' derives from *civitas,* Latin for 'city-state'. 'Citizen', as an identity, a system defining and organising belonging, and as a unit or category for political engagement, is etymologically and historically linked to city life (Isin 2008). Of course, romantic accounts of participatory democracy elide the fact that *citizenship* as a category is an exclusionary one; not all are allowed to claim or exercise citizenship in a particular place. For instance in Ancient Greece women and slaves were not considered citizens and were not able to participate in democracy. There is a long tradition in Western thought (it is not universal) to conceptualise public life as a masculine activity, whereas the private and domestic are seen as feminine (Lyons 2007). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to interrogate the histories and spatial-political implications of the public/masculine versus private/feminine divide, or describe the substantial work by many philosophers, scholars and activists to contest this dichotomy; there are just a couple of key points to remember. Firstly, that the public/private dichotomy (gendered or otherwise), organises society, politics, and space in particular ways. For instance, responsibilities and interests in urban governance tend to be divided between the 'public sector', that is, state-run organisations and services, and the 'private sector', which refers to profit-seeking businesses owned by individuals, groups, and/or shareholders. Neoliberalism has troubled this divide to some degree by privatising or outsources infrastructure and services that used to be the responsibility of the public sector. But the division/dichotomy remains a key structure in urban governance and has a long lineage. So, it is worth making it visible as a construct that we can trouble or rethink.

Secondly, this understanding of the public realm reminds us that 'the public' is always already about both *inclusion* and *exclusion;* the category only makes sense if there are those who *do not* belong to 'the community' or 'the public'. Public space has long been constructed as the opposite to 'private' space—imagined as open and accessible to all (unlike private spaces, where access is tightly controlled) and providing functions that private spaces may not. But it is not as simple as the formulation of public spaces as open and private spaces as closed might suggest. When we ask ourselves: "who is the public", we are also asking a shadow question: *who the public isn't.* Butler argued that, "all public assembly is haunted by the police and the

prison. And every public square is defined in part by the population that could not possibly arrive there" (Butler 2016: 20)—ominous, perhaps, but important to think on.

The much-invoked Ancient Greece *agora* reminds us of the links between public space and participation in public life and citizenship. Citizenship is a framework of both inclusion and exclusion and it both confers rights and designates those to whom rights (some, or potentially all) are conditional, withheld, suspended, or denied. For instance, in many places long-term residents and incarcerated people do not have full citizenship rights and cannot vote. People belonging to some social groups—particularly people of colour—are more likely than others to be subject to social control and policing for occupying public spaces, their rights to inhabit those spaces more conditional, or more readily suspended (Low 2006; McDowell and Wonders 2009-2010). Public spaces are entangled with questions of citizenship and belonging, they both *reflect* and *reproduce* particular social and political relationships.

With those overarching points in mind, there are perhaps three broad ways to think about 'the public'. Firstly, we can think of 'the public' as an already existing entity, the sum total of all people living within a particular geographic or political scale. In this formulation, we are assuming that there are some common interests and experiences that make this grouping possible and plausible. Secondly, we can think of 'the public' as nothing more than the collective noun for a population of individuals, wherein the individual is the unit of analysis, of politics, of public life. This notion of 'the public' is linked to a neoliberal understanding of politics and public life, and will be discussed in the next section. Thirdly, we can think of 'the public' as a shifting set of coalitions and allegiances, of shared but varied interests—as something that gets 'gathered up' (or that gathers itself up) by particular processes, as something that can be created discursively (as in, through language, stories, and how we talk about 'the public'), through actions (e.g. through gathering together, through collective actions, through participation in particular processes, through having and finding shared experiences), and as something contingent, with porous boundaries. This is where the notion of 'diverse publics' (Young 2000) or what Sandercock (2003) calls 'mongrel cities' is helpful—the idea that there are plural publics, with overlapping and porous borders, some of which may be 'already existing', some of which may be formed as we seek to engage with them, some of which are constituting and re-constituting themselves in constant and unpredictable ways (also see Chapter 9). These diverse, multiple, and shifting publics are perhaps hard to conceptualise but they are even harder to plan for and govern. Further, in making the category of 'public' porous and shifting, we may even open this category up to the non-human – to animals, plants,

fungi, bacteria, even to non-living matter – what's often referred to as the 'more-than-human' world, which we discuss in the last section.

This latter notion, of diverse, shifting, and multiple publics is, perhaps, a more useful way of thinking about 'the public' in an urban context. Indeed, cities have long been construed as sites of diversity and difference, and of anonymity and invisibility (Sandercock 2003; and Chapter 9). The degree to which any given city actually offers anonymity, and/or the freedom often associated with anonymity, certainly varies, but there is something compelling and resilient in this particular narrative of cities. There are also ongoing debates about the importance of belonging, and the shape of the 'whole' one is seeking belonging to – Chapter 9 explores some of the cultural issues associated with national belonging and nationalism. Plural, diverse, shifting publics may provide opportunities for diverse people to find belonging, rather than feeling 'out of place' in the cities they inhabit. Being part of 'the public' in the city may be partially about being a stranger amongst strangers, and about hoping for encounters—strange and familiar both.

It is essential to interrogate who is meant by any invocation of 'the public' in urban planning, geographical theory, in policy, politics, and media. Who gets included in the category of 'public' suggests who the speaker thinks cities are *for*, and the way they imagine that public to be formed—via a shared geography/jurisdiction, a set of individuals, or as something more contingent and pluralistic—and may also be suggestive of the speaker's political and philosophical influences. Further, it is worth asking if the speaker invoking 'the public' is including themselves in that category, or if they are situating themselves outside of it.

Design and Governance of Public Spaces

As noted earlier in the chapter, defining public space is difficult because both constituting words can be variously interpreted (Carmona, Tiesdell et al. 2010; Orum and Neal 2010). Indeed the difficulty begins with whether it should be called 'public space' or 'public place'. Urban studies scholars distinguish between 'place' and 'space' in theoretical debates (Madanipour 2003; Dovey 2009). In brief, places are defined as those spaces that carry meanings and identity in individuals' minds whereas spaces are merely physical emptiness. However, space and place are often interchangeably used in urban studies (Madanipour, Hull et al. 2001). In this chapter, public space and public place have been used interchangeably while both of them refer to 'place'; public space is, then, defined as a sociable open space, and a destination that is accessible to all members of society free-of-cost. This is, however, an

idealistic definition, and it's an ideal carrying a critique: many so called public spaces are not truly 'public' or for the 'public' as they are not truly free of cost, or accessible to all – we'll pick this thread up again later.

Public space is the result of interactions between physical components (soft or hard landscapes; natural or built environments), human experiences (meanings; conceptions; images) and uses of the space (individual activities or collective events) (Montgomery 1998). Coming up with definitive criteria for good public spaces is very challenging, perhaps impossible, as public spaces vary in type, function, and meaning, and the evaluation of public space is subjective, delineated by values and backgrounds of the evaluator. However, as Friedmann (2000) points out this cannot and should not withhold theorising and envisioning good places, especially not in terms of design. The works of Jane Jacobs (1961), Carr *et al.* (1992), Carmona *et al.*(2010), Talen (2008), and Gehl (2010) attempted to theorise good or responsive public space design.

Suggested criteria for good public space design include walkability, authenticity, accessibility, diversity, playfulness, eco-friendliness, legibility, comfort, inclusivity, vitality, and being well-maintained, and managed. Each of these criteria can be debated, extended, and reconfigured, but in this chapter we focus on public space governance as an element that can make or break public spaces (Carmona 2014). This shift is partly informed by a line in the literature (Carmona et al. 2010; Zamanifard et al. 2016) arguing that all design critiques of public spaces stem from governance and can be broadly be placed into two camps, those who argue that public space is over-managed, and those who argue that it is under-managed. This over-simplifies a complex discourse on public spaces but covers a wide range of design issues including but not limited to critiques of lost spaces, neglected spaces, consumption spaces, privatized spaces and so on.

Further, the link drawn between public space design and governance is informed by the fact that in contemporary cities around the world, many public spaces are shaped and governed by a variety of entities through quite complex arrangements (Madanipour 2010). Public space provision is not solely a responsibility of government. Indeed, almost all new public spaces in the post-war American downtowns have been provided by the private sector. In Australia, the UK, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and many European countries, private enterprises are involved in public space delivery or management. Their involvement may range from partnerships with governments, to having full responsibility for the design, development, and management of the space (such as privately-owned public spaces). But the motivations and agendas of stakeholders in public space (the state, the public, and the private sector) are distinct, and often contradictory.

Furthering this complexity, there are also intra-group conflicts between stakeholders (such as gender or inter-generational conflicts among users of a space, or competition between businesses).

The added complexity in the design and governance of public spaces opens a debate about the diversity of public spaces in contemporary cities. Recent typologies of public spaces (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012) show an increasing level of diversity of public spaces some of which seem contradictory, including corporate public spaces, civic public spaces, consumer public spaces, community public spaces, domestic public spaces, in-between public spaces, quasi-public spaces, and more. Such typologies clearly demonstrate the plurality of publics, as different types of public spaces are created for particular sub-sections of public and their desires for the space.

When considering this diverse, contradictory typology, it is important to consider who is designing and governing these 'public' spaces, and for whose benefit and enjoyment – and of course, who is losing or excluded as a result. In response, some (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012) argue that different types of public spaces only appeal to certain groups, and this is not necessarily a sign of exclusion, but instead of a diverse society with different needs – a reflection of diverse publics. Others (Mitchell 2014) take a more critical perspective, noting the varied distribution of different types of public spaces across our cities, and warn that consumer spaces and corporate spaces are increasing whilst the space provided for community/civic uses shrinks. From this perspective, the patterns of public space provision, design, and governance play a role in widening inequality, as inner city public spaces become more corporate/commodified and over-regulated. Indeed, there are serious questions to be asked about the design and governance of public spaces and the ways in which they reinforce social orders.

Key Debates in Public Cities

Public versus Private Cities (and citizens)

As mentioned above, the notion of 'the public' as nothing more than a set of individuals resonates with neoliberal worldviews. 'Liberalism' emphasises the individual – rights residing in the individual, individual autonomy, individualism as a moral good. Liberalism rendered us individual subjects; neoliberalism exaggerates this individuality and commodifies our relations with each other (Fisher 2009; Brown 2015). Wendy Brown calls this configuration of human

beings, *"homo oeconomicus"* (Brown 2015: 31) and describes neoliberalism as an attack on the very concept of *demos* – an attack on the idea of a public, of a body politic.

More concretely, we see the influence of neoliberalism on Australian cities in the erosion of genuinely public space. King George Square in Brisbane, for instance, underwent redesign in 2009 and a significant portion of the space is now al fresco dining. Public footpaths are, in many areas, crowded with outdoor dining attached to cafes – this space now serves fewer functions, and you can only occupy those spaces if money changes hands. Westfield Shopping Centres brand their outdoor dining/entertainment precincts as 'town squares', and indeed in many suburbs they may be the closest thing there is to a public square, and one of the more physically accessible places for people to gather - yet these are not genuinely 'public' spaces. Similarly, many major pedestrian streets across Australia are commercialised 'public' spaces – Queen Street Mall in Brisbane, Pitt Street Mall in Sydney, Rundle Mall in Adelaide are also highly managed, retail/consumption-oriented spaces, where many kinds of civic activity (like street performances, exhibitions, protests, handing out flyers for community events, etc.) are tightly controlled or prohibited, and where looking like an appropriate or desirable 'consumer' may shape how welcome you are (Sandercock 1997; Voyce 2006; Zamanifard, Alizadeh et al. 2018a; Zamanifard, Alizadeh et al. 2018b). The use of many commercialised 'public' spaces is managed, surveilled, and policed by private entities, and they are, of course, designed for consumption rather than enacting citizenship. Indeed, as Vaughan argued, "When space is rendered unto commerce, individuals are stripped of their public and civic role" (Vaughan 2016:26).

Some would argue that there are benefits to the functions of public space and the public realm being supplied and managed privately, or that privatisation doesn't necessarily preclude the 'publicness' of public space (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012). Benefits might include a greater ability to customise these spaces with particular users in mind, reduced maintenance and management load on over-stretched/under-funded public sectors, more flexibility, greater sanitation, increased accountability for the managers of the space, and tighter security and policing (Carmona 2015; Dovey & Wood 2015; Zhang 2017) – which for some, might increase perceived safety. Some might argue that al fresco dining attracts more people onto the street, thus making streets more lively, interesting, and safe, or that economic benefits outweigh the negative impacts of commodification. Others might suggest that what the public desires from the public realm is changing, and/or that critics of neoliberal urbanisation overstate its influence and harm. Much here depends on your view on the relationship between public spaces/the

public realm and participation in public life, and your own ability to feel a sense of safety and belonging in privatised/semi-private/commodified 'public' spaces (an ability likely to be shaped by factors including class and income, ethnicity, race, Indigeneity/settler status, gender, sexuality, culture, and more). For those who believe the link is tenuous overstated in the modern era, the privatisation/commodification of public spaces is perhaps not particularly troubling. For those who believe the link remains strong, one might be concerned about the implications of these trends for democracy, belonging, and justice in cities.

Public Participation and Engagement

In contemporary cities, one of the most pressing tensions is the relationship between the public – however defined – and the production of space. The role of the public in formal planning processes is contested and varied, influenced by ideology and economic and political priorities (Legacy 2016). As discussed, neoliberalism is highly influential in contemporary urban governance (Legacy, Cook et al. 2018), which privileges private profit and property. Private developers – rather than the State – are the primary parties determining what is built and when. Through public-private partnerships and asset sales, private companies play a larger role in delivering public infrastructure (Siemiatycki 2009; Legacy, Curtis & Scheurer 2017).

Neoliberal emphasis on private property and the free market creates hostility towards regulation ('red' and 'green' tape) and a push to expedite development, often by reducing regulation, assessment time frames, and public consultation (England 2015). This may mean fewer developments are subject to requirements for public consultation, or that those timeframes are narrowed, or that the ability of the public to appeal decisions is curtailed. In neoliberal urban governance 'the market' is a powerful factor in what, when, and where development occurs, and the extent to which it is deemed successful. The role for publics, then, is to participate less in urban governance itself and more in the market – to invest, to purchase, or not. As such, one's capacity to influence how cities are built may be heavily influenced by one's capacity to participate in the market.

Whilst planning literature tends to position public involvement as a good thing – something that strengthens the legitimacy and rigour of urban governance, improves the quality of decisions, upholds democratic principles (Creighton 2005; Healey 2006; Brabham 2009) – beyond the influence of neoliberalism there are reasons why one might seek to limit the involvement of the public in urban governance. Most members of the public lack a technical understanding of planning and urban policy, for instance. Individual members of the public

may also act in their own self-interest, rather than the interests of the broader community or the strategic needs of the city. The term 'NIMBY' is often used to both label and discredit these kinds of concerns ('not in my backyard' flattens out a range of views, which might include self-interested obstructionism or greed, but could equally reflect sincerely held objections to inappropriate, poorly designed, or dangerous developments). Further, public consultation is often expensive, takes time, can be unpredictable, and is difficult to do well. Poor consultation, as well as no consultation at all, can harm relationships between publics and other parties, and can create tensions within communities.

In addition, the content resulting from consultation is not always readily applicable to urban governance. Those assessing developments are not free agents, nor is the process democratic – volume of objections alone is not a reason to reject a development application, nor are many of the reasons people might oppose a development. The public are generally asked to comment on planning issues in and on 'planning' terms – this is not something everyone is able to do. The timing is also difficult – many objections emerge too late, with members of the public complaining that they did not realise the consultation, even the development, were happening until it was too late. Because of all these difficulties some contend public involvement should be maximised at the design stage of planning schemes, with a limited role for the public on individual developments.

Marxist geographer David Harvey provides us with a counterpoint. He argued that cities are already *commons* – that 'the urban' is always already a collective, public project, the product of the labour, lives, movements, and relations of urban inhabitants. Much as marxists argue that the value workers produce should be controlled by workers collectively, rather than seized for the private use of the owners of capital, Harvey (2012: 78) posits that cities are a commons "produced by the collective labor expended on and in the city". So understood, cities and its public spaces are collective projects, and it would be fair to manage them collectively.

8.3 Critical Publics

In this final section we explore some critical perspectives on publics and public spaces, including thinking through the terrain of public cities as sites for political contestation (Tonkiss 2005), and rethinking who we gather up in our use of the term 'public' – especially now, in the Anthropocene.

Belonging, Securitisation, & Struggle

Questions about public spaces are often linked – conceptually, practically, and/or politically – with questions about belonging and safety. Questions about belonging, in turn, are wrapped up with broader questions about identity and place – who belongs where, and when – and who cities and spaces are *for*. These are never politically, historically, socially, economically, or culturally neutral questions.

Consider, for instance, the statement 'Always Was, Always Will be Aboriginal Land'. Chanted at rallies, worn on t-shirts, painted on walls, it recognises that First Nations Peoples have a continuing connection to the land we stand on in (so-called) Australia; they have not ceded sovereignty. Aboriginal relationships to Country endure, and settler-colonialism has not extinguished those systems of belonging, care, and responsibility (Moreton-Robinson 2018). Further, consider Acknowledgements of Country recognising Traditional Owners (often phrased as 'past', 'present', and 'future/emerging'), indicating enduing relationships to Country, and living cultures with futures. These futures are, at least in part, *urban* futures; urban Indigenous populations are growing, and cities remain Country (Blatman-Thomas 2017; Jones 2017). And yet urban Indigenous Peoples continue to experience displacement, both as a direct result of gentrification and due to changes in policing that are often linked to gentrification and urban renewal projects (Fayyad 2017; Jackson 2017; Latimore 2018). Aboriginal Peoples are disproportionately subject to policing in public spaces (e.g. the use of move on orders and public nuisance citations), and encounters with police are more likely to be dangerous. First Peoples – including children – are more likely than non-Indigenous people to die in custody and in police pursuits (Wahlquist, Evershed et al. 2018). What does this tell us about place – both as a kind of belonging and as an entity people belong to? What does this tell us about how the structures of settler-colonialism continue to influence belonging and safety – including who gets to be safe, and to imagine futures – in cities?

'Safety' in and of public spaces is a critical and complex issue. Perceptions and feelings of safety vary - we are not all made safe, nor made to feel safe, by the same things (Németh and Hollander 2010). It's worth here distinguishing between 'safety' and 'security' – Marcuse (2006) defines safety as *actually* being protected from harm, whereas *security* is more about perception and the 'trappings' associated with attempts to 'secure' a space. But security measures may not increase your sense of, or actual, safety – bollards designed to prevent vehicle attacks may heighten your sense that the space you're in is a potential terror target, making you feel less safe (Németh and Hollander 2010). Further, these measures may alienate

members of marginalised ethnic and religious groups who are constructed as 'dangerous' in public discourse (Coaffee and Rogers 2008). Who is and isn't deemed dangerous is rarely objective or neutral; often security check-points or surveillance systems are racially charged and feed into Islamophobia and/or anti-Blackness, while ignoring potential right-wing terrorism (e.g. the rise of the white supremacists groups in the US, Australia, and Europe).

How can we design spaces to actually increase safety, without heightening feelings of insecurity or marginality? Some securitisation measures work to enclose public spaces by reducing accessibility and movement – e.g. erecting barriers, limiting the number of possible entrances/exits. CCTV cameras and other forms of surveillance may seem like a way to make public spaces safer, but again the question is *for whom*. There is some evidence suggesting that CCTV doesn't prevent crime, merely displaces it (Koskela 2000); further, the act of surveillance isn't neutral, nor are all people subject to surveillance equally. Simone Browne's work, for instance, explores how surveillance has enabled violence against and the oppression of Black people (Browne 2015), and continues to be used for social control.

What might all this mean for *agora* – for citizenship, and public life? Mike Davis argued as far back as 1992 that efforts to secure the city would destroy "any truly democratic urban space", turning us inward to privatised, commodified spaces, extinguishing spontaneity and convivial encounters (Davis 1992: 155). Securitisation has drastically increased in the years since Davis' warning; in the post-9/11 world (enabled by 'smart city' technology – see Sadowski 2020), the nebulous 'war on terror' has been used to further fortify and surveil public spaces (Németh and Hollander 2010). Indeed, securitisation may be interpreted as efforts to protect the city "*from* the public rather than *for* it" (Marcuse 2006: p922, emphasis added), and it has been argued that fear of terrorism and general insecurity has been used to erode and partially enclose public spaces, reducing the freedoms, rights, and enjoyments of urban inhabitants (Marcuse 2006; Németh and Hollander 2010; Lehr 2019).

Complicating matters still further, uncontrollable public spaces can *protect* democracy. Streets, squares, parks, and more are sites (and sometimes the stakes) of struggle, perhaps especially for those marginalised by mainstream/whitestream/dominant cultures, or excluded from centres of power. Questions of access, distribution, justice, representation, belonging, and democracy often play out in public spaces; sometimes peacefully, sometimes violently. The transformative/dangerous potential of public spaces is reflected in the structure of cities – most famously in Haussmann's redesign of Paris, where he created wide boulevards in an

(ultimately, failed) effort to prevent people barricading streets in the event of an uprising (Douglas 2007). The public realm in cities is a site of struggle – struggles both *in* and *for* space (Tonkiss 2005; Connolly and Steil 2009), belonging, citizenship, and self-determination. Indeed, struggle may actually *make* public places (Iveson 2017; Vigneswaran, Iveson et al. 2017). As discussed earlier, public spaces are about our capacity to participate in public life – sometimes, this means insurrection.

More-than-human Publics

Thus far we have been very anthropocentric; for our last critical topic, let's move beyond humanism and consider making our public 'more-than-human'. Western philosophy has long been preoccupied with human exceptionalism, and with the idea of humans as individual, bounded subjects who are "separate from the earth" (Moreton-Robinson 2018) – alone amongst beings as exclusively conscious and capable of deliberately exerting their will on the world. But many other ontologies reflect a more-than-human philosophy of being, where humans are part of interwoven, co-constituting, interconnected assemblages of place (land, Country), other living beings, and vibrant matter (Larsen and Johnson 2017; Todd 2016; Todd 2017; Watson 2009). Many Indigenous worldviews have held this or similar perspectives; the 'more-than-human' turn refers to thinking that is 'new' to Western worldviews.

That said, the category of 'human' as recognised in Western thought is not fixed – much as the category of 'citizen' discussed earlier, 'human' has always been produced alongside political, economic, and cultural contexts and goals (Fishel 2017). As previously discussed, all people have not been able to claim this humanity equally. For instance, 'race science' works to deny the humanity of people being colonised or enslaved or otherwise oppressed (it is no coincidence that 'race science' emerged alongside Western colonialism and imperialism) (Mbembe 2003; Fanon 2008). The founding myth of modern Australia – *terra nullius* – represents the colonisers' refusal to recognise the humanity and sovereignty of Aboriginal Peoples (Moreton-Robinson 2018); they saw Aboriginal People, and declared the land empty. 'Human' – just like 'the public' – is not a stable category, and its boundaries are shifted and reconstituted to support particular political goals and ideologies.

More-than-humanism recognises the instability of the category of human, which troubles our imagined 'publics', and represents a provocation for public cities – namely, what would cities look like, how would we govern, produce, and live in cities, where the 'public' was recognised

as *more-than-human?* Let's start small. Stefanie Fishel describes bodies as lively, crowded. She writes:

"The traditional figure of the human body - as a self-contained and self-regulating organism - is at odds with the body made possible by new technologies understandings. Today, organs and genomic information flow across borders, and bacterial and viral communities, both symbiotic and pathogenic, clearly affect our bodies, and through our bodies, politics" (Fishel 2017: 14).

In other words, our bodies are permeable and filled with other bodies, shaped by technology as well as biology. Maybe cyborgs are real – maybe they're already here, and they're us (see Haraway 1991). If your body is technically *bodies*, then perhaps your body is already a more-than-human public? Just as we might think of 'the public' or 'diverse publics' as being a shifting assemblage of different kinds of bodies, working with and against and amongst each other, nourishing and eroding each other, we can think of our own bodies in much the same way.

That's the micro-view on more-than-human publics. The macro-view on more-than-human publics is perhaps a little more familiar and applicable to public cities. There is a tendency, again in Western worldviews, to think of cities as separate from 'nature' – that the concentration of humans and the extent to which the landscape is modified means these places are detached and artificial. But this divide – between humans/nature, cities/environment – is, again, constructed, not universal, and increasingly unstable. The idea that cities are human domains ignores the many, many species living alongside us, troubling and enabling our lives. Cities are environments, ecosystems – assemblages of organic and inorganic matters (Palamar 2010; Pataki 2015). As argued by Osborne, Carlson and Butler (2019: 438),

"Urban ecological communities are varied, but we all live entangled with vertebrates, invertebrates, plants and fungi, and we hum with microbes. In the authors' city, possums, rats and pythons live in suburban ceilings. With wetland habitat eroding, the white ibis scavenges a life from rubbish bins…Moreton Figs strangle other trees from the top down, and warp foundations, footpaths and plumbing from below; an uncontainable urban existence made possible by the pollinating work of tiny fig wasps"

What would it mean to include ibises, magpies, possums, rats, snakes, fig trees, mangroves, bees, dogs, rivers and bull sharks in our conceptualisation of the 'public' city? To think about the city as an ecosystem, and plan, consult, and design accordingly? How do we listen to fig trees and rivers? And what of *place itself?*

Some argue that place itself has agency (Larsen and Johnson 2017) – a kind of *will* we may or may not be able to reliably understand or track. In some Indigenous cosmologies this agency may be linked to spirit/s, and ancestral beings (Graham 1999; Larsen and Johnson 2017). Western scholars have also recognised the possibility of agentic place – sometimes, problematically, appropriating Indigenous philosophies without acknowledgement to do so (Latour 2014; Todd 2016). In doing so, these perspectives challenge and unsettle dominant notions of space and place and our capacity to control them, or produce them unilaterally.

Traditional, Western, and colonial approaches to planning and urban governance hinge on the ability of humans to understand, predict, and dominate places – to impose our will, visions, plans, and desires on space. Space was once viewed merely as kind of vessel or backdrop for our lives. Later, influenced by the work of people like Henri Lefebvre (1991), Doreen Massey (2005), Fran Tonkiss (2005), the prevailing understanding of space and place in (Western) urban theory changed, now framing space and place as social constructs, produced by social, economic, political and cultural relationships. As Porter (2018: 29) argues, "Space is not a neutral container…[it is] produced through the workings of social processes, economic transactions, cultural norms and values…If space is produced through social relations, then it must be soaked with relations of domination and subordination, solidarity and cooperation. Space is never neutral. So we can conceptualise space as a container or backdrop, or we can see space as a product of social relations. A third way would be to see space as an active participant in those relations; space is not an inert neutral backdrop, but nor is it entirely reducible to human construction/relations. Spaces and places have *agency* (Larsen and Johnson 2017). This is not a new idea, but it is gaining ground in the Anthropocene.

In sum, in more-than-human philosophies, the public city is composed of diverse, shifting, more-than-human publics. The city itself, its spaces and places, are energetic and active and influence what is possible and imaginable. Lefebvre probably did not have more-than-humanism in his mind when he wrote the following, but it takes on new resonance if we recognise the agency of place:

"The street is disorder…This disorder is alive" (Lefebvre 2003: 18-19)

Conclusion

"The consistent reworking of public space via practice and theory is the mark of how contested the notion of public is. Public space is thus resolutely open to the degree that

it is clouded by the endless contestations, situations and resituations of what and where is public" (Vaughan 2016: 34)

We have argued that public spaces are produced by, and reflect, macro and micro social, political, and economic relations, and that there is something to *place itself* that is not entirely reducible to those relations. We've argued that neoliberalism is affecting the 'publicness' of public spaces, that 'publics' are shaped by the type of public spaces we can access, that access is shaped by social location, and that public spaces are sites of struggle for social and spatial justice. We've argued that there is an openness and contingency to both 'publics' and 'spaces', through which we can defend the promises and possibilities of public space.

The fact that public space is always in flux suggests that with care, creativity, and collaboration, almost anyone can intervene in public space and thus change it, even if only ephemerally. Tactical urbanists stage street parties on the road, creating temporary public squares. Guerrilla gardeners throw seed bombs onto verges and over fences. An Aboriginal flag appears at the intersection of Boundary Street and Vulture Street in Meanjin/Brisbane (Boundary Street once marked the boundary over which Indigenous People were not permitted to cross after dark), a regularly refreshed reminder that the street is unceded Aboriginal land, and Aboriginal People remain in Kurilpa (West End). Performance artists stage a flash mob in Federation Square (Naarm/Melbourne), where they chase and toss out a person in an apple costume – an action *against* the proposed, further commodification of the Square by Apple, and *for* silliness and conviviality in public spaces. Organisers with Food Not Bombs set up weekly street kitchens to feed the homeless, the hungry, and whoever else comes along. Our point here is that although there are powerful forces configuring urban spaces in ways we might consider neo-colonial, alienating, environmentally harmful, exclusionary, and otherwise unjust, public space is never fixed, never finished. It remains shifting and contingent, and thus retains possibilities for creative appropriation and diversion, and struggles for justice.

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