



# THE NAKED CITY

Traversing Toronto in pandemic times

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*Naked City: Traversing Toronto in pandemic times*  
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From the middle of March to late May, I posted a series of short photo essays on social media. Entitled “Views of the Naked City: Pictures from the Daily Round in a City of Emptying Streets,” they were inspired by my daily walks and bicycle trips in Toronto. They also tried to make a little sense of the flood of news and analysis from around the world about the spread of COVID-19. What follows are slightly redacted, reordered and reframed versions of these short texts.

The multiple crises that have come together in the current pandemic harbour great dangers, including rampant Social Darwinism and a move to authoritarian rule. At the same time, they offer openings for all who are looking for emancipatory ways out of the crises. In this conjuncture, Rosa Luxemburg’s dictum “Socialism or Barbarism” is as pertinent as ever (Luxemburg 1915). Indeed, it does not

take much to reframe it as “Health or Capitalism.” Equally pertinent is the idea that a future worth living can only be built in egalitarian, ecological, and democratic ways, through a combination of popular self-management and socio-ecological planning that might yield a “radical democratization of the economy” (Löwy 2011; 2020).

The premise of the following snapshots is that to understand the dangers and possibilities of the current situation, one needs to attend to the manifold tensions of everyday life. One way of unearthing these daily disjunctures is to follow Marshall Berman’s advice and read “the signs in the street.” Berman (1999) made this point in an exchange with Perry Anderson who had taken Berman to task for his Goethe-inspired

romantic Marxism by articulating some valid critiques but ultimately forgetting that it is no use to insulate social analysis from the messiness of everyday life. In effect, Berman reminds us of the lineage of authors from Tosaka Jun to Dorothy Smith, Frantz Fanon to Henri Lefevre, Antonio Gramsci to Himani Bannerji, from whom we know that the normalized routines and fleeting aspirations of daily life make the latter the crucial starting point (as well as the outer limit) of social theory.

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The snapshots that follow radiate out from south St. James-town, the part of east downtown Toronto where our building is located. East downtown used to be the heart of early colonial Toronto, which tried hard, without ever fully succeeding, to displace and submerge indigenous life (Johnson 2013). From the nineteenth century, the city’s first bourgeois villa districts developed a short distance away from the industrial districts and reviled working-class quarters closer to the lake. As a result of postwar urban renewal and the subsequent years of urban reform in the 1970s and 1980s, east downtown became home to the many public and cooperative housing projects that still hold on for dear life against the waves

of gentrification and political revanchism that have recast the area. The area also houses Toronto's original gay village and an impressive cross-section of households and communities that came to defy the heteronormative standards of mid-century Canada (McCaskell 2016; Haritaworn et al. 2018).

For the right populists (from Mike Harris in the 1990s to Rob and Doug Ford in the 2010s) east downtown belongs to the land of the “pinko elite” that is central Toronto. This reactionary spatial association fits into the real and imagined divide between “downtown” and “the suburbs,” which has profoundly shaped Torontonians’ relationships to each other (Kipfer and Saberi 2014). Yet despite decades of gentrification (and the manifold weaknesses of the downtown left), east downtown is still a microcosm of the Toronto region. Indeed, the daily interactions one can observe on its streets and in its workplaces concentrate many (but of course not all) of the realities and contradictions that permeate colonial-capitalist Canada.

Here are some examples. The relationship between the downtown bank towers and Rosedale (still one of the prime residential areas of the Canadian bourgeoisie) and the largely non-white and proletarian north St. Jamestown and Moss Park demonstrates class and race polarization in all its violence. Gentrified spaces, old and new (from Cabbagetown to the privatized sections of Regent Park and some of the new condo towers) clash sharply with the shelters, social service agencies, tents and encampments – landscapes of poverty and homelessness that also include a disproportionate number of Indigenous people. Finally, the relationship between straight households and the various gender-non-conforming social spaces in the neighbourhood attest to the gendered fractures of social life and the complex relationships these have to class, race and property.

Toronto public health data show that the social relationships that are bundled in east downtown explain at least some of the differential rates by which residents have been exposed to COVID-19. These differential rates become visible on maps wherever race and class distinctions are clearly differentiated spatially (which they are not always). This is the case between the spaces of bourgeois Rosedale and gentrified Cabbagetown, where rates are very low to moderate, versus the social spaces inhabited by “essential workers,”



the unemployed and their families: St. Jamestown and Moss Park, where rates are 2.5 to 8 times higher (City of Toronto).

### **(1) NOT STAYING HOME**

There is much talk about “staying home,” and for good reasons. But during my walks, I notice numerous people who are not home; as result, the streets are not always as empty as expected. Next to workers on constructions sites, I see many who are out for reasons other than getting some fresh air: homeless people lining up for a meal, small groups chatting at a distance while drinking a cup outside a coffee joint, clerks in grocery stores, bakeries, drug and liquor stores, cooks in restaurants and cafés offering take out, truck and van drivers, platform workers delivering food, transit bus drivers, cabbies, workers in long-term care homes, paramedics and firefighters, private security personnel and concierges. Needless to say, many of these people do not look like prime minister Trudeau, premier Ford, mayor Tory, or, indeed, myself.

Most of these people will not “go home” any time soon, for various reasons. They may not have residences to go to. Their reg-



ular drop-in centres may have shut down, or they stay away from shelters, which are inhospitable even in “normal” times. They may not be able to live, work or study at home all day because their single-occupancy rooms are too small, or because their rental apartments are overflowing with roommates or family members. Finally, they may not be able to afford to stay off work, be allowed to work remotely, or take leave from the many industries listed as essential by the province of Ontario.

As many have put it from early on in this crisis, “some are out so that others can stay home,” and vice versa. In a society where these egalitarian impulses are institutionalized, people in official capacities would say so naturally and spontaneously, and make regular public

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service announcements that (1) detail where to get the supports necessary to stay (or get a) home, (2) describe the protocols for all who must leave home to do so safely, and (3) acknowledge that generous public space

is not “what is outside,” as Ilaria Agostini (2020) says; it is not a frill but a necessity to live in dignity, in common and in difference.

Judging by the radio stations, websites and newspapers from various countries I read and listen to every day, institutional announcements are not as generous. Instead, workers, inhabitants and organizers are in a permanent uphill battle to fight for the conditions that may make it possible for all to survive this crisis, medically or financially (WWC; UBCIC; CHC; Fifteen and Fairness; TTC Riders; MRN; Rank and File; Supports for Workers and COVID-19; CCPA). Ignoring such uphill battles, public health pronouncements risk doing what they have done frequently since the inception of public health in the late nineteenth century: mix up vital medical concerns with class-based, gendered and racialized moralizing. They resort to denouncing people’s behaviour while ignoring the constraints within which they live. Today, not everyone flouting public health rules is a yahoo partying on a beach in the Carolinas.





# Empty Returns Temporarily Suspended

We have temporarily suspended our empty return operations effective March 19 to March 31<sup>st</sup>. We apologize for any inconvenience and truly appreciate your understanding.

Thank you,  
The Beer Store

## (2) CUT OFF

The Beer Store has suspended its bottle and can return operations. This seems like an innocuous, even understandable measure. But it is important to remember that bottle return has become a part of many people's daily survival strategies. Given the deep historic presence of multiple low-income working-class communities in the east downtown district, informal survival economies have a long history here (Palmer and Heroux 2016).

The importance of these economies has increased after every economic slump since the 1970s. I have lived in downtown Toronto for more than twenty years now. Particularly since 2008 and the consequent, systemic increase in precarity, informal recycling workers have become a ubiquitous part of the social landscape in our neighbourhood, collecting anything from bottles to all manner of



discarded items from the recycling and garbage bins on our streets. This new policy is no help to these toilers, to put it mildly. Talk about depressing, depressionary conditions.

### **(3) BOARDED UP**

I walked into these boards a week or so after the lockdown was declared in Ontario. I found myself staring at a place where I spent an enormous amount of time (and quite some cash) since 1999, writing various chunks of my work, taking notes, preparing courses, and, since our return from my sabbatical in 2017, reading the papers every morning before breakfast.

People on the left like myself have a healthy scepticism of small business for well-founded reasons related to working and employment conditions (which are often highly precarious and (self-)exploitative) as well as organized politics (where small business organizations and Business Improvement Areas are often to be found on the hard right, from the neighbourhood to City Hall and Ottawa).

While privately owned and run, small businesses constitute in effect a collective infrastructure of social life. In turn, they depend on other such collectively financed and built infrastructures (from sidewalks to water pipes). In working class and oppressed neighbourhoods, cafés, restaurants and stores can come to play a role in networks of self-help and communities of resistance (even as they express differentiations and hierarchies within these communities). In short, they can become part of subaltern, proletarian or Black public spheres (Negt and Kluge 1972; Squires 2002).

In late May, this particular café, which is part of the tension-filled landscape of commercial gentrification, has reopened for takeout service. Not all will. The culling of small business will raise questions not only about many people's survival, income and jobs; it should also raise the question: to whom do neighbourhood cafes and stores belong? Just the owners, or also the workers, neighbours, and other citizens? If the latter is true, what should policies toward small business look like? How can they better reflect their social and collective conditions of existence?

### **(4) HEYYOU: PIZZA!**

These are times of intensified surveillance and self-surveillance. Official instructions multiply. In some parts, police drones yell com-



mands at passers-by. Citizens give advice to others, sometimes well-meaning, sometimes rather not.

Some time ago, Louis Althusser (1970) argued that when officials and state institutions “interpellate” citizens, they reveal how the state helps produce ideology. I am curious to know what Althusser would say about the ideological role of automatic pizza dispensers. We need to figure this out. The likelihood is that there will be more of these dispensers as people distance themselves from others, and as alternatives to shops and restaurants proliferate. Livelihoods and human relations are at stake.

### **(5) WHERE ARE THE DOGS?**

(Self-)confinement is no laughing matter, even less in places with vivid memories of other recent states of emergency. But I could not help wonder on my morning walk: where are the dogs that usually bother the squirrels and appropriate this little park a few times a day? Are they self-isolating? Barking up a balcony? Or just waiting for their bosses to get out of bed later?



The dogs never went away, of course. In fact, after the City closed down dog parks, their owners brought them here in greater numbers than ever. Dog politics are a serious matter, and not only for those interested in animal-human relationships. The dogs embody the desires and anxieties of their owners, who are as alienated as the rest of us dog-less people. Unwittingly, they also play a role in the social dynamics through which urban space is produced. It is common in North American central cities for dogs to help humans form social groups and mark the boundaries of gentrification (Tissot 2011). To illustrate with an example from the 2000s: After I had complained to a group of dog owners when one of the beasts ran away with my kid's football, one of them replied that I should be thankful for the pets. The dogs fulfill a public duty, she said: they keep drunk homeless people off the park benches.

### **(6) DISTANT COWS?**

Neither cows nor dogs are known to be systematic in their social distancing. Not without individuality, some of them do decide to keep to themselves, at least at times. For the most part, however, they tend to congregate, checking each other out, keeping company in close quarters, or warning each other whenever necessary. It is impossible to find dogs or cows spread out at regular intervals in real life.







PRACTICE  
SOCIAL  
DISTANCING



CF

Yet, somehow, various sculptors (or the Toronto banks, developers and governments that paid them) anticipated animal social distancing by years, even decades. This is certainly true for Joe Fafard's magnificent cows, which make up his *Pasture*. It is possible that Fafard succumbed to the imperative of geometric regularity, which is not the worst idea when placing sculptures next to Mies van der Rohe's high modernist towers in the financial district. Or maybe he just projected the forever cold, distant human Toronto onto our fellow beasts. If the latter is the case, we had better snap out of these artistic distancing habits once this pandemic is over.

### (7) DISTANCING, OLD AND NEW

Walking around emptying streets in downtown Toronto, many landscapes "send" a clear message: stay away! Fences and property lines shout: this is not yours! Unbridgeable roads (as wide as highways in many countries) caution: back off, death by car is coming fast. "Bum-proof" park benches say to homeless people: you get to rest here as little as anywhere else. This is why some say that physical urban planning (spatial interventions by the state, firms and business or ratepayer associations) is a "technique of separation" (Debord 1967) or a practice of "compartmentalization" (Fanon 1961).

Not all forms of distancing are enshrined in physical design. Before "social distancing" proliferated like wildfire in response to public health warnings, people (sometimes with their domestic animals) were practicing it every day informally. Common examples from my daily round? Men walking in the middle of the sidewalk, making others move around them; dogs being displayed to support the property line; different social groups claiming their turf to different edges of a park; white people avoiding groups of non-white teenagers by crossing the street...

Whether large-scale or small, formal or informal, distancing is often violent. It has long helped organize unequal social relations based on class, gender, race, ability. It has re-separated or re-segmented social life in places – towns and metropolises, even villages – that are otherwise characterized by various degrees of unpredictable physical proximity (in workplaces, in the street, in public transit, in schools).

So, the following questions are worth asking. What is new about the "social distancing" we practice now? How does it relate



to the many forms of spatial and social distancing that already exist, not just in dispersed suburbs, but in the densest of central cities? If some of the current “social distancing” outlasts the coronavirus, who will be distanced from whom and how? With what consequences?

#### **(8) TREES AND FORESTS: ON “DENSITY”**

The look and feel of downtown Toronto has changed greatly over the last decade. Even in the last three years, many spots have become unrecognizable. Countless condo and office towers have sprouted to turn the city into a forest of towers. This forest is both cause and consequence of a newish orthodoxy in urban planning: intensification, increasing residential and employment densities to solve a gamut of perceived urban ills.

It is true that, all things being equal, high population and job densities are necessary conditions for public life, energy efficiency, and the feasibility of public transit, among other things. Density is not, however, a sufficient condition for these goals. Growing a forest of towers is an expensive and environmentally inefficient way of producing population density. If done through the real estate market, it is a recipe for making housing unaffordable for most. Accelerating gentrification, towers-by-real estate also reinforces suburban sprawl instead of counteracting it.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to replace these social and ecological critiques of profitable intensification with conservative critiques of density, which argue that physical density *per se* is a conduit for infection and that, therefore, spatial decentralization is the best response to disease. Discussed in various newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*, strands of this argument resonate with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century critiques of “over-crowding” (Rosenthal 2020; Bozikovic 2020).

These early critiques helped form modern public health institutions. They developed into veritable hygienic ideologies that considered proletarians, colonized and oppressed peoples as pathogens and “their” habitats (“slums”) as pathogenic (Mayne 2017). They thus turned observations about deplorable working-class housing conditions (slum-lording, a lack of basic sanitation, crowded living arrangements) into general moral panics about dense public life, the presence of women in public and the experience of the crowd, all of which the ruling and middle classes interpreted as a social and political threat by. Most systematically in North America and Australia, these earlier critiques of crowding helped prepare the ground for the period of mass suburbanization that became the norm in the postwar period.

The current critique of “density” as a seemingly self-evident and easily measurable determinant of urban life is similarly uninterested in investigating the many different ways in which density is politically organized and practiced daily by different people in different cities and in different urban spaces, from downtown to the edge cities that have emerged around highway interchanges since the 1960s. It also does not distinguish between apples and oranges: the humiliating experience of being herded into homeless shelters, the working-class experience of overcrowding in rented apartments, and the experience of living alone on the top floor of an eighty-storey condo building. As a result of its penchant for environmental determinism, today’s generic critique of density conveniently forgets a few things.

- (a) As early studies about New York City and China indicate, density is not an independent cause of the pandemic; social conditions and public health capacities are (Imbrie-Moore 2020). Density is also not an inherent obstacle to fighting disease. As the experiences of Hong Kong and Kerala indicate, population densities can be public health assets provided





PIZZA  
**PAPA JOHN'S**

OPEN

**FILMORES**

FILMORES  
Pembroke St

40



there are sufficient resources and political capacities to prevent infection and treat the infected (sometimes even without the kind of mass isolation and confinement imposed in Italy, Spain and France) (de Changy 2020; Delacroix 2020).

- (b) The solution offered by the new critics of density – population dispersal – has been one among several systemic forces that have encroached upon forests and other ecosystems, thus releasing pathogens from their usual habitats and helping them travel far and wide at increasing rates over the last half century (Wallace et al. 2020). As Roger Keil, Creighton Connolly, and Harris Ali (2020) have it, pandemics tend to “start in and spread from the edges of cities.”
- (c) Population density remains an important, albeit clearly insufficient ingredient in strategies for just, democratic and sustainable forms of life (provided it is built, financed and organized differently than has been the case in Toronto).
- (d) To prevent serious public health concerns from turning into sanitary ideologies, one must distinguish between, instead of conflating, concrete medical and sanitary conditions, urban morphology and the physical form of social life on the one hand, and social, economic and political relations on the other, which shape both urban form and public health.

### **(9) BALCONIES: WHICH FUTURE?**

In our building, balconies have acquired new functions. Following examples from places ahead of Toronto’s pandemic curve, we stage a balcony choir every Thursday. Also, every day at 7 p.m., we bang pots for seventy seconds in support of care and other crucial workers (quite a few of whom are neighbours too). In these brief moments, balconies change from an extension of domestic space into a temporary public space, allowing neighbours to exchange news, express good wishes and offer assistance.

But, as reports from Italy, Spain and France have indicated, balconies are being used for a range of purposes, not all benign. They allow people to scold others in the street or report them to authorities (as is also happening in Toronto right now, too, albeit not necessarily from balconies). In turn, they have allowed inhabitants to film violent police interventions to enforce confinement in segregated neighbourhoods.



In a recent review, Ludovic Lamant (2020) sketches key points in the history of the balcony, which has served, for example, as an extension to buttress the defensive capacities of medieval city walls, a medical component in socially exclusive nineteenth-century sanatoria, a democratic addition to mass-produced social housing in the twentieth century, a feature on the Shakespearean stage set, and, last but not least, a staging ground for political speeches from Benito Mussolini to Eva Perón.

Lamant invites us to ask: what historical examples are going to inform the meaning of the balcony now? How are we going to appropriate space in pandemic times (and thereafter)? Are we going to generate new forms of generous and democratic public space? Or are we going to participate in an authoritarian squeeze of public life by engaging in gratuitous forms of self-surveillance? It is on us.

### **(10) ENOUGH?**

Someone has been writing “ENUF” on official development notices in Toronto for many years now. More recently, somebody else started

to add “gumbo” to the same notices, which makes for a mysterious combination. “Enough gumbo” implies, enough of the development mess (which can be compared to the creole dish with its mixed-up ingredients). Or is it suggesting, there will be gumbo once we are done with the towers? I like this second interpretation.

In any event, the call (“ENUF”) has not been heeded so far.

Not by the mix of financiers and developers that have been building towers like crazy for a generation now.

Not by the city politicians and planners who have gone by the motto “the market knows best” with special zeal since the real estate slump in the early 1990s.

Not by the central bankers, finance ministry officials and planners at the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation that did everything after the 2008 crisis to reignite debt-based real-estate ex-



## Development Proposal 10 ST. MARY STREET TORONTO, ONTARIO

NAPI HERBY

An application to amend City of Toronto Zoning By-law No. 437-86 and Zoning By-law 569-2013 to permit a mixed use development with one 42-storey tower (140.5 metres including mechanical equipment) containing 255 residential condominium units on a 10-storey podium (30.6 metres). The podium would contain retail use on the first floor and residential above. There are four levels of below grade parking with 49 vehicular parking spaces. There are 316 bicycle parking spaces proposed. Access to the auto elevators and servicing is proposed from St. Nicolas Street.

### STATUTORY PUBLIC MEETING:

Information will be posted once meeting is scheduled.



FILE# 14 208729 STE 27 OZ

For Information:

[www.toronto.ca/planning/developmentapplications](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/developmentapplications)

City Planner: Jennifer Renaud

416-392-7554 [jrenaud2@toronto.ca](mailto:jrenaud2@toronto.ca)

94MBQ

pansion by buying up toxic mortgages, expanding the money supply and keeping interest rates low.

Not by all those with sufficient cash or credit ratings to buy condos, least of all by those who have benefited most from ever-deepening social inequality to fuel the decisive top segments of the real-estate market.

Not by the corporations, notably banks and tech companies, that have demanded more office space, in some cases relocating back offices from the suburbs to the central city.

Now what? Is it “ENUF” already? I am sure the Toronto activists who have tried to convince tenants to stop paying rent in these times hope so (Parkdale Organize).

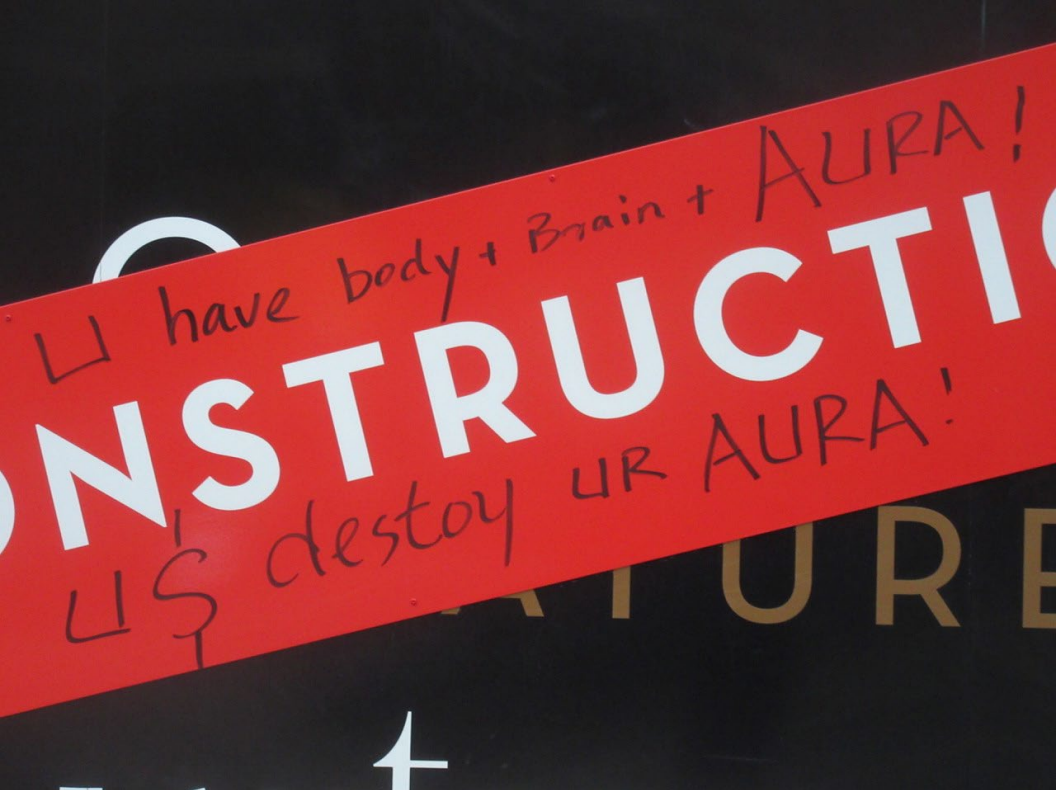
When I took this photo in mid-March, the chief economists of Canada’s six major banks were trying very hard to suggest that the current slump will be just temporary, a brief if very deep slump (in this, they contradicted several of their US American counterparts). At the same time, Queen’s Park decided to keep existing construction sites for residential and office space on the list of essential industries (knowing full well that interrupting construction would slow down tight financing/construction cycles too much, thus pushing many projects over the edge).

I am not going to offer any detailed predictions. But we are in one of the deepest slumps in the history of capitalism (Husson 2020). There will be ruins. How many? We’ll see.

### **(11) BENJAMIN ON BAY STREET or THE AURA, PUNCTURED**

On a recent walk through Yorkville (a 1960’s counter-cultural hotspot long turned into an enclave of wealth and luxury), I ran into this view, all-too-common in Toronto: a couple of decaying houses, boarded up, next to a new tower, the Four Seasons hotel and condo building (see back cover). Looking more closely, I saw that someone had written a warning on the advertisement for the new project (the “50 Scollard,” approved for the site next to the Four Seasons): “the aura” of the forces that build shiny pieces of real estate is doomed.

I assume the writer knows his Walter Benjamin, the revolutionary critic who wrote in Berlin, Paris, Moscow, Marseille and Naples in the 1920s and 1930s before killing himself at the French-Spanish border in 1940 to avoid being handed over to the Nazi henchmen



that were hunting down Jews like him.

Benjamin (1940) insisted that by looking backwards, catching glimpses from the past, we see that the future of capitalism is ruin: ruined lives, unsold commodities, devalued industrial capital, murderous war, and, yes, destroyed built environments. For him, the ruinous nature of capitalism cannot but undermine the “aura” of the commodity, which casts a captivating, dream-like spell over us while the good times last.

Benjamin (1982) also suggested that the tension between the aura of the commodity and its ruinous fate shapes everyday life in the metropole. We experience it as a spatial juxtaposition of the “new” (the latest temple of consumption, the banker’s new Maserati) and the “old” (the discarded goods, the condemned buildings, the people left to beg in the streets). Benjamin was intrigued by the shopping arcades, the nineteenth-century “dreamhouses of capital” that were in full decay by the 1920s, sidelined by the new temples of the commodity: the department stores. The task of the critic was thus to sharpen our senses that the “old,” the arcades of our time,



are not just what is left behind by capitalist development. They also herald the future of capital itself.

The Four Seasons hotel and condo tower opened in 2012, just steps from Toronto's Maserati dealership. One of its claims to infamy was that its penthouse sold at the highest price ever for a condo in Canada: \$28 million (Ladurantaye 2011). In early April 2020, the hotel website said that it "is closed until further notice." Next door, the promise to begin constructing the "50 Scollard" by late 2019 remains just that, a promise.

### **(12) EMERGENCY or NO EMERGENCY?**

Walking through the hospital districts in downtown Toronto, one notices various emergency signs. Some signal the presence of an emergency ward, others say: no emergency room here. Encountering both, I could not help but ask myself, what exactly is the relationship between (1) the states of emergency dozens of states have declared over the last two months (and then often used for unsavoury initiatives unrelated to the pandemic, from giving the police an ever freer rein than usual to cutting off abortion services, overriding environmental regulations and opening collective agreements), and (2) the specific medical and public health crises provoked by the little beast called coronavirus and the social forces that have made it travel so wide and so fast, i.e. the real crises that have been used to *justify* political states of exception.\*

Listening to presidents, (prime) ministers, premiers and some public health officials (as opposed to frontline care workers), it is not always obvious how seriously the pandemic is taken at the top. What is one to make of all the contradictory official information, for instance, about the availability of medical supplies and the uses of masks? What about the continuously adjusted measures that have been announced since March in various jurisdictions about anything

\* I am not alluding here to the early exchange between Agamben, Žižek and a few others about the so-called "state of exception," a debate that gravitated in rather speculative fashion around Agamben's concept in political philosophy. At this level of political philosophy, the sharpest responses to Agamben have come from Panagiotis Sotiris (2020) and Alberto Toscano (2020). Investigations about the actually-existing, comparatively distinct and contradictory dynamics of sanitary states of exception remain to be pursued. See Harry Glasbeek and Eric Tucker (2020) as well as Hassina Mechaï and Flora Hergon (2020).

from testing to confinement and mobility restrictions? And, last but not least, what about all the reports about the coming pandemic that have been ignored by authorities in various parts of the world in the years preceding COVID-19?

More serious questions arise from these examples of unpreparedness. Are they a result of the sheer scale and speed of the viral spread and the bio-medical uncertainty it creates? Probably (to the extent that I can say as a non-specialist). Do they reflect incompetence in some corners? It certainly looks like it. Do they indicate a disturbing lack of capacity in national and local health systems?



Fully affiliated with the University of Toronto

# No Emergency Facilities

Most clearly. Many frontline doctors, nurses, and other care workers have alerted us to the disturbing effects of decades of neoliberalization, which have shrunk the resources available to health systems and undermined their planning capacities.

Without serious health issues so far, I have had the luxury of being able to practically overlook the deconstruction of the Canadian health system. The current situation in hospitals, testing labs, home care, and nursing homes in Canada has shown most egregiously what researchers like Pat and Hugh Armstrong, Tania Das Gupta, and Heather Whiteside have demonstrated for some time

now: that the Canadian health care system (and, most glaringly, the Ontario subsystem), while still under the umbrella of a (partially) public, nationally mandated insurance system, has been turned into a crazy, holey quilt of provincial policies, para-public institutions, for-profit operations, user-fee streams, public-private partnerships

***Something deep has emerged in this neoliberalization of health care: the doctrine of health as an individual responsibility.***

and marketized performance standards. This quilt is barely held together by deeply gendered and racialized class hierarchies of care work. It also magnifies the different ways in

which different population groups are (ill-)treated (or abandoned) by the system (Armstrong 2020; Das Gupta 2009; Whiteside 2015).

Something deep has emerged in this neoliberalization of health care: the doctrine of health as an individual responsibility. As Barbara Stiegler has it, in this view, healthcare is not about professionals dealing with the suffering of the sick. It is about the sick, or, rather, the not-yet sick, preventing their own illnesses, leaving health institutions with the task of reminding us to look after ourselves by behaving appropriately (Stiegler 2020). One hears echoes of this doctrine of self-responsibilization between the lines of public health announcements telling us that washing our hands, staying home and keeping others at bay are important not just because they are in the common interest, but also because, if we don't follow the advice, we are on our own, since our collectively organized preventive measures have been largely insufficient – and this goes for public testing, hospital staffing, medical supplies, housing for the homeless, or safety protocols for essential workers.

In this second, deadly logic, individual prevention is not a complement but an alternative to public health care. Leaders and authorities thus need not worry too much about public health care capacities: there is not one shared emergency; there are as many emergencies as there are individuals. We may consider, then, what doctor William Dab (2020) suggested recently and what Brazilians have been doing all along: before banging pots in support of care workers every day, let's bang pots or use our whistles to censor the rulers in charge.



### **(13) GYM-LESS SHOES, STRANDED**

Apologies for writing about a typical “first-world problem”: shoes going unused because of gym closure. In this household, both big foot (son) and small foot (father) have gone without their gyms, basketball courts and soccer fields. There is one serious side to this problem: excessive home training. As cardiologist Laurent Chevalier warned, don’t overdo it with your alternative exercise regime (Is-sartel 2020). Intense exercise and viruses (including the ones you don’t yet know you carry) are an explosive combination, literally. His comments came on the heels of news that some people were running marathons on their balconies or in their backyards.

### **(14) HEALTHY GORILLAS?**

It is always amusing to see one’s mother tongue on display in public space. This sign *gesund* (healthy) carries the name of a health goods store in a brand new tower on Church Street. It is one of thousands of signs that tell us how important health and fitness are in life:

health advice columns, virtual food supplement stores, workout studios, sports clinics, handmade dog biscuit shops. In the 1970s and 1980s, some health stores had explicit links to politically and socially alternative milieus; today, most are just a small part of a big industry that supports countless “healthy” lifestyles, particularly but not exclusively those of the middle and upper classes. These lifestyles are on prominent display in our pandemic times, so much so that on a sunny evening on Lake Ontario, all the joggers and cyclists (myself included) make physical distancing a rather difficult proposition.

How well is this society that is so concerned about healthiness? If our pandemic is any indication, less than what appeared to be the case. Health industries have grown in our parts at the same time as global production systems were reorganized to turn select Southern regions from China to Mexico into export platforms and sprawling conurbations to feed our appetite for tomatoes and computer chips. Seemingly a sign of post-industrialism, the proliferation of “healthy consumption” in Euro-America has come to depend on the very global supply chains, agri-business systems, and transportation networks that have intensified the frequency by which viral outbreaks escape eco-systems and move like wildfire around the globe (Moody 2020; Wallace et al. 2020).

What about the meaning of everyday healthiness in our towns and streets? It is not always easy to tell the difference between enjoyable physical activity or delicious cooking practices, say, and obsessive-compulsive behaviour. I can say this with certainty observing myself and my professorial social circles, which include a rather





high proportion of people for whom competitive sports and other health-related pursuits are an extension of hyper-competitive working lives. However illusory, obsessive healthiness is a way for some people to acquire the individual resilience, mental edge and bodily self-discipline necessary to engage in the cut-throat competition for jobs, salary increases, career advancement, and professional recognition that has intensified with every economic crisis since the mid-1970s.

As Antonio Gramsci (1971) wrote in the 1930s (when Fordism emerged as a new type of capitalism), epochal changes in economic history presuppose that people can be trained, and submit to be trained, to perform new ways of producing, adopt novel consumption habits, change their reproductive lives and shift their moral outlook on life. Gramsci commented on Frederick Taylor's conception of workers as "trained gorillas" chained to the assembly lines (and the possibly subversive dream-worlds of these same workers). In our world, there is no doubt that "health" (as an industry, consumption style, and image of the good life) has been one way through which some segments of the workforce have (been) trained to fit into and consolidate the "high tech capitalism" that has formed since the 1980s (Haug 2003).

The pursuit of healthiness is thus never only about medical health but also about other social realities. Healthiness understood as economic fitness dovetails with the Social Darwinism of our time, the dog-eat-dog sensibility that also makes it possible to propose that healthcare is above all a matter of personal responsibility. If we push this idea further, we end with the "herd immunity" approach to the pandemic supported by the Johnsons, Bolsonaros, and Trumps, their billionaire friends and far-right networks (Fry 2020). In this case, neoliberal healthiness rejoins fascist body cults and (always racist) eugenic notions of population health. These are deliberately murderous: those unfit to withstand the virus deserve to die so that others can renew the nation and get ready for post-pandemic capitalism. More than ever, we now know that genuine health is exactly the opposite. In this knowledge lies hope.

### **(15) NO LOUSY CADILLACS HERE**

James Baldwin (1961), in an interview with Studs Terkel, said that "one of the many things wrong with this country is this notion that

IBM Machines and Cadillacs *prove* something.” Confronting the spread of mass consumption in the postwar period, Baldwin was adamant that freedom had nothing to do with a “lousy Cadillac.” “Do you think this is what the country is for? Do you really think this is why I came here, this is why I suffered, this is what I would die for? A lousy Cadillac?”

Now, during this pandemic, it is easy to cross streets without a single Cadillac in sight. Even for people who would have had to suffer much less to get to the point of buying a car than African Americans in the 1960s, today’s emptying streets and closed stores make it easier to imagine a different urban experience, one no longer defined by the consumption of commodities and what makes it necessary: the commodification of land and labour-power. Among other things, a different experience would have to be based on a reorganization of needs and aspirations. For Baldwin, it was inconceivable that needs denied by a white supremacist society (human dignity, individuality, love) could be met merely by satisfying consumer demand.

In a recent interview based on a book published last year (*Les besoins artificiels*), Razmig Keucheyan (2020) argued that the current crisis offers us another chance to rethink human needs before it is too late because of the ongoing and accelerating climate crisis. While not forgetting about all the basic needs that go unmet right now, Keucheyan’s main concern is with the additional social needs that have been generated in the history of capitalism, desires for sneakers and sports stars, cell phones and beach vacations, some of which are now impossible to pursue.

In a society no longer saturated by the commodity in all its forms, one would have to ask: which of these socially generated needs should we try to still meet? Which ones should be discouraged? Can the desire for objects and icons be replaced in part by desires for new forms of social life, human relations defined by dignity, conviviality, generosity, and sustainability (glimpses of which we can see in practices of mutual aid during the current crisis) (The People’s Pantry)? We must ask these questions with particular vigour in the global North in order to heed Adam Hanieh’s advice (2020) to challenge the imperial relations that the current pandemic crises reveal and threaten to intensify.

Wherever they are posed, these questions are political. They can

only be answered properly in a collective, strategic and democratic manner that is impossible within capitalism, the short-termism of which allows for planning only in a myopic sense (Mészáros 2008). Integral planning entails processes of decision-making that link producers and consumers of goods and services in various industries and sectors, with multiple temporal horizons, and at various scales in and beyond workplaces and neighbourhoods. Is such base-democratic deliberation possible at the end of our emptying streets, perhaps starting with local debates (currently centred in Oshawa (Gindin 2020)) about producing essential medical supplies instead of, well, Cadillacs and other cars?

### **(16) YEA BOIII !!!**

A few days ago, I bumped into this piece of graffiti while parking a shared bike at the docking station closest to our building. Why the excitement on the part of the writer, I asked myself? Because school was canceled? Because the streets were finally unclogged, making it possible to cycle in the middle of the road? Because they had bought a bunch of Zoom stocks in February? Or, alternatively,



because disaster socialism appeared on the horizon? Then, a few days later, a more robust, and banal explanation came to me: the writer must have been listening to one of Public Enemy's earlier tracks (1988) and just could not contain their enthusiasm about being brought "The Noise." Sometimes a sign in the street is just a sign in the street.

### (17) BIKE CITY

Although I am also a transit hound, during this pandemic I move around the city mostly on foot and by bike, delivering food to my mother, exploring new corners with my son, and replacing my now impossible swimming sessions with bike rides.

It is a great joy taking over streets that are usually occupied by belching beasts. I get a particular kick out of riding those wide avenues that serve as private highways for the north Toronto (petty) bourgeois circles that have mobilized in the past to keep "their" motorized access points to the Central Business District free of bike lanes: Mount Pleasant Road and Jarvis Street. Riding these roads (and the canyon-like Bay Street) without traffic is almost like skiing



down an alpine hill on a sunny morning before the crowd arrives.

Toronto is still reeling from the war on the bike, that is to say, the “war on the car” that was invented by tabloid *Toronto Sun* and members of the Toronto establishment in the late 2000s before being picked up by the far-right mayor Ford. Why that war? To fight modest measures for cyclists, pedestrians and transit riders, and to build a political base for right-wing populism. There is no doubt that this misnamed but still latent war explains why the current mayor refused for so long to do what many cities (including Toronto suburb Brampton (Javed 2020)) had done quite early in the pandemic: turn streets into spaces for cyclists and pedestrians and plan permanent regional bike networks.

By liberating the streets (at least a little) and eliminating a significant proportion of motorized pollution from our lives, the pandemic reminds us: bikes are the future.

They are relatively cheap, as is bike infrastructure. They are multi-functional and supple in movement, allowing for easy distancing when we need it. Riding a bike (or e-bike or tricycle, take your pick) offers many unspectacular but genuine sensory pleasures, as Marc Augé (2008) reminds us. Among these: a moderate, easily variable speed, a human-scale relationship to the landscape, a peculiar way of encountering people (and, in the process, producing a measure of public space).

We sometimes forget about the democratic potential of bikes. Yes, for a few short years in the beginning of modern bike history, cycling was a bourgeois affair (Héran 2014). Yes, in today’s Euro-American cities there is a subculture of aggressive, often white and male cyclists with wads of cash to spend on cycle gear. Resembling car culture in more than one way, this current bike subculture gives us the wrong impression that biking means joining an exclusive club.

Unlike cars, bikes are not luxury products that become dysfunctional once they have found a mass market. We that know from all the places and periods where bikes were the form of mass transportation. Since their capacity to serve as vehicles for mass transportation has few limits, bikes are a perfect complement to transit and walking. In contrast to what some have suggested in the myopic ways typical of this city (Saunders 2020), this is not true only in central cities.



So, when we advocate for a just and sustainable way of bailing ourselves out of the crisis, why don't we ask that bikes be added to a national sustainable mobility strategy centred on transit and inter-city rail transportation? The alternative to such a strategy: a big spike in car transportation to respond to reduced transit capacity and people's (post-)pandemic agoraphobia. The bike component of such a strategy could include things that are banal in some places already, and then add a few more items:

- Making bike riding and bike repair an organic part of the school curriculum from elementary to high school, thus teaching motor and mechanical skills while gradually and unceremoniously turning the childhood bike experience into a common adult activity, not a frill for the few.
- Develop an integrated regional bike network from Toronto to Brampton that links neighbourhood routes to lanes on city streets and bike highways (yes, some of these could be today's highways and arterial roads).
- Provide ongoing public financing for personal bikes (which could range from tax rebates or vouchers to the right to receive a free, basic but good-quality bike every eight to ten years). This would make bikes ubiquitous and shareable.
- A strategy to include bike manufacturing in an industrial pol-



icy to convert polluting industries into sites to where socially useful and environmentally benign products are produced.

### **(18) ALL WE NEED IS LOVE**

In March, someone had scribbled this on the steps outside the 519 Community Centre on Church Street. Within view of the steps, one can see a reminder of chronic homelessness made worse by the pandemic: an impromptu encampment at the door of an abandoned beer store. If love is one thing we need to deal with the effects of the pandemic, clearly there is still a whole lot missing. But: juxtaposing the two images might help us make the case for emergency requisition of unused building.

### **(19) SOLUTIONS, IN THE DISTANCE**

One of my responses to the lockdown: longish bike excursions, sometimes with my son. These have taken us much beyond downtown Toronto to various suburbs built from the late 1800s to the 2000s. Among these, many of the postwar suburbs in North York (where I lived in the 1990s, roughly along Finch from Jane to Victoria Park) and a few spots in York Region, the newer suburbs beyond the Toronto City limits (where I traveled a couple of times a week for many years to spend time with my daughter when she was a teenager).

Spending all this time on two wheels reminded me of two major things about this town. First, Toronto is all about distance. It is a place where it is impossible for most *not* to distance themselves. We know the gamut of problems (from segregation to privatization and pollution) this fact has reinforced. At an experiential level, living here is all about feeling the heavy weight of distance: the relentless open sky, the incredible width of the highways, the interminable arterial roads, the endless walk to the bus stop, the many kilometers to the mall, the school, the daycare, the conservation area. Living here is about sensing social life in spatially disjointed ways, living social relations all stretched out. Knowing how many people have come here from places with a much more dense and intense form of daily life, I have always wondered: how do people get used to distance? Don't they feel as isolated, diminished, even intimidated by the sheer expanse of this place as I (still) do?

The second reminder from my bike trips: the incredible amount of capital that has been sunk into the landscape. Generations of

private and public investment have combined with nature to produce the various archeological layers of our physical environment: the roads, electricity lines, sewage and water pipes, schools, parks, shopping centres, industrial zones and the countless, roughly identical residential subdivisions that house many millions. Situated in a global division of labour and shaped by struggles from below, this investment has made it possible to incorporate most Torontonians, at least in modest ways, into the “imperial mode of life” of the global North (to borrow from Uli Brand and Markus Wissen (2018)). As Toronto itself grew into an imperial city during the twentieth century (Kipfer and Goonewardena 2004), the metropolitan centre of a brutally settled subcontinent with many global connections, our neighbourhoods have become suburbs not just of central Toronto but the country, and indeed the planet.

Interspersed between the landscapes of labour and residential settlements inhabited by working class people are the landscapes occupied by people who live, in global standards, in great comfort (middle-class zones) and luxury (rich enclaves). Given the vast and standardized character of Toronto landscapes, these zones are not easily visible (even though they tend to be much more visibly white demographically than the rest of Toronto). Once one has found



them, however, one cannot help but be impressed by their sheer size. From east downtown, where we live, one can easily spend two hours cycling North without ever leaving moneyed neighbourhoods: Rosedale, Forest Hill, Moore Park, North Toronto, the Bridle Path, Willowdale, sections of Markham, Richmond Hill and King City. Riding along this huge blubber belt cutting through the middle of the Toronto region, all sorts of solutions are in plain sight simply because in this belt, there is even more “space” here than elsewhere in Toronto.

- Are you interested in appropriating a park where one is less likely to run into cops looking to fine or harass people for violating social distancing rules? There are many to choose from here.
- Are you worried about finding places for those who still sleep within sixty centimeters of each other in Toronto’s homeless shelters (a practice sanctioned by the same local public health authority that instructed the rest of us to keep two meters apart)? A few estates can take care of this particular problem.
- Are you looking to house all of Canada’s street-involved people, including everyone now sleeping in tents (and quite a few underhoused folks, too)? No problem, there are many overhoused households in the existing houses of the blubber belt, and plenty of open space to erect tents and permanent structures.
- Do you consider it important to expand urban agriculture in the Toronto area, planting orchards and rows of vegetables? Countless large lots, driveways, yards, lawns, and gardens await here.
- Would you like a much more generous network of green public space for everyone? There is a wealth of green space to build upon in these quarters.
- Are you keen on applying the current planning recipes of “intensification” and “social mixing” in neighbourhoods that are not the intended targets of such experiments? Here is your chance.

None of these solutions pose major physical or technical problems. Of course, there are these little social and political obstacles: the property lines that cut up the landscape. But, where there is a will, there is a way. To put the motto of my (equally distant) university into a different context: *tendanda via* (the way must be tried).





### (20) GOOD MORNING, MAY DAY

I was going to post this picture on this pandemic May Day, when people around the world (though not here) tried to maintain a presence even though the official events were cancelled and informal gatherings faced swift police repression. But then I thought: our neighbouring building is not quite red enough for such an illustrious day. It will however do as a morning greeting from coop city to east downtown Toronto. And it is a daily reminder that getting up early is full of rewards: *Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund* (literally, “the morning hour has gold in its mouth,” or “hand”). This year, the early morning after May Day is a good time to plan the return to collective action.

### (21) AT HOME?

Now that the world is being “opened up” again after months of lockdown, it is time to revisit the call to “stay home.” What is the “home” being invoked here? As generations of feminist research have demonstrated, “home” is one of the most loaded terms in modern society (Domosh and Seager 2006). The no-



tion evokes fuzzy and cozy sentiments such as tranquility, peace, harmony with nature. Eminently “feminine,” these sentiments promise a good life in opposition to the “masculine” spheres of work, public life, indeed, the city itself. The homey landscapes that have dominated Anglo-American cities like Toronto from the exclusive enclaves of the mid-nineteenth century to the bungalows in standardized subdivisions of the twentieth century carry a clear, if dishonest message: rest assured, breathe easily, you have left behind the metropolis with all its sins and hardships of toil, conflict, politics, uncertainty, the crowd.

We know all too well about the conditions that make such homey landscapes possible. The separation between private and public space that becomes entrenched with the rise of private property and the (often colonial) enclosure of the commons. The division of labour between wage labour and unpaid, reproductive labour. A layered gendered division of labour that puts (white) women on the pedestal as guardians of the nation and social stability even as it makes them economically dependent and susceptible to male violence. The waged care work performed by working class and non-white women in both “home” and elsewhere that make domestic life possible for those who can afford it. These exploitative, oppressive and violent conditions have not destroyed the ideal of the home. Paradoxically, they have kept alive the hopes invested in that very ideal. Yet, the various realities underpinning domestic life make it clear that the ideal of “home” as a refuge from drudgery is, at best, “deformed” (as Frigga Haug (1992) puts it).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into the limelight all the contradictions tied to the “home” as social reality, place, ideal. Shortly after authorities issued the “stay home” order, reports started coming in from around the world, from France and Canada to Mexico and India, about a rapid increase in domestic violence (almost exclusively at the hands of men). As police started to selectively enforce self-isolation rules and as some citizens and journalists began to wag their fingers at those breaking public health rules, it became clear that for those living in overcrowded conditions or doing essential work, the call to “stay home” is not comforting (or possible, for that matter). In turn, for those who can continue to do their waged work remotely from their

residential spaces even as they have to homeschool the kids and look after their parents, the pandemic has made it clear once and for all: “home” is not a refuge from drudgery but a workplace in various senses of the term.

By exposing the idyll of the home as a deformed utopia, the coronavirus forces us to pose anew an old question: what is to be done about domestic and personal space?

If the pandemic has shown most starkly that the “home” is not an island but a microcosm that rests on a web of interde-





pendencies, it begs the question: why don't we reorganize these interdependencies so that they become conditions of equality and solidarity instead of sustaining exploitation and intensifying gendered inequalities? I find it difficult to imagine such a reorganization without returning to generations of debate from early Soviet times to contemporary research on social reproduction (Boggio Ewanjé-Epée et al. 2017; Bhattacharya 2017) by way of long years of insight in feminist design and planning (Hayden 1981; Kern 2019) about: building egalitarian and emancipatory ways of socializing household work, destructuring gendered divisions of labour in all spheres of life, and recasting the social and physical relationships between personal, communal and public space.

The pandemic suggests that it might be best to replace the idea of "home" with imaginaries no longer tied to gendered and domesticated life. Here, we can build on the fact that among working classes and oppressed groups, "vernacular architecture"



understood as physical form and social practice may be associated with cultures of survival and mutual aid, with communal solidarity in the face of hostile workplaces, conditions of poverty, and racist streetscapes, as bell hooks (1995) reminds us. In *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others*, (2015) Jin Haritaworn returns to the idea of the “kitchen table” to evoke a social space where experiences are shared, solidarities are built and strategies of resistance are developed. In contrast to the home, the image of the kitchen table connotes not a privatized and dominated pseudo-escape, but an aesthetic of resistance (rooted in this case in queer of colour networks).

## (22) UNLOCKED

As lock-down measures are being loosened, all sorts of things are coming out of the woodwork again. Among them, some strange beasts. Upon first sight of them, my partner rightly pointed out





that the pandemic has turned the flamingos into highly disciplined sheep. True, if odd. Have they fallen in line with public health dictates, thus acting out their desire for a pandemic state (Toscano 2020)? Or have they self-organized to act in subversive ways? Only the summer will tell.

### **(23) DISTANCED, WITH A DIFFERENCE**

Biking through my old hoods in Toronto's postwar suburbs, we noticed that the difference between pre- and post-COVID public life is not striking. Sure, traffic volumes were down a bit. The playgrounds were empty for weeks, as were the strip-mall parking lots. At the schools, there are still no kids in sight. Superficially (without making any claims about less visible aspects of social life), these physical changes felt limited. Pandemic physical distancing has just reinforced an already entrenched culture of distance and separation. For example, the eerie experience of cycling along a road or walking through a subdivision during rush hour without anyone else on the sidewalk has been common in these parts all along.

Of course, these suburbs are not quite the same as the ones



built outside the City of Toronto (and in countless places across the continent). There are many high-rise buildings here. Transit buses are easy to spot on the arterial roads. There are sidewalks in most parts and pedestrians are not quite as rare as they are in the newer suburbs. While the basic patterns of segregated and land-extensive physical planning are the same here as in other parts of the Toronto region built over the last eighty years, regional planning under “Metro” (the regional government created in 1954) added clusters of rental and social housing as well as public transit lines to the edges of the highways, bungalow subdivisions, electricity corridors and industrial districts that otherwise dominate the landscape. These suburbs thus harbor obvious as well as “forgotten” densities (Pitter 2020). And even before they began to change into largely non-white spaces at the end of the postwar era, they did not conform to the image of the middle-class escape with white picket fences.

Living in these parts, I spent considerable time going somewhere else, not just to shop, drop off/pick up my daughter or study and teach elsewhere in the ‘burbs, but also to attend political and intellectual events downtown. Not to be confused with the experience of racialized social segregation shared by many working-class inhabitants of the central suburbs in Toronto, my particular sense of being distant from spaces that are politically and socially central nonetheless speaks to Toronto’s suburban paradox, a long-standing feature of the city’s political culture (Kipfer and Wirsig 1999).

On the one hand, the physical form and social characteristics of the postwar suburbs and their massive demographic globalization since the 1970s has made them comparable to social spaces in other parts of the world, including places in Paris and Bordeaux I know well. As Parastou Saberi (2017) has pointed out in detail, this comparability is due to the fact that they have been treated as threats not just by coercive state apparatuses and the media but also by “progressive” academics, policy makers and politicians. On the other hand, their social diversity and subaltern character have not given rise to political forces strong enough to break through the property-dominated and fiscally conservative political culture that has governed them for decades, which has rejuvenated itself along right populist lines since the 2000s. The political potentials of these parts are thus unexhausted in a particularly stark way.

Countless social and political initiatives remain subterranean, incipient, or emergent. But this can change. Social patterns are not iron-clad laws of nature.

#### (24) THE END?

Street demonstrations feel very different than self-isolation and social distancing. As we know from experience and various sharp reflections, including those of Frantz Fanon (Rigouste 2020) and John Berger (1968), participating in large, collective, self-organized and explicitly political events places very different demands on our bodies, our muscular apparatuses and our sensory perception of the world than moving about in isolation or being secluded in private space.

So, joining a 10,000-person strong demonstration on May 30 seemed to mark the end of a period. Organized by Not Another Black Life, the march called for an end to anti-Black and anti-indigenous police violence. It demanded justice for Regis Korchink-



si-Paquet (who died on May 27 after falling off a balcony while Toronto police were in the apartment). A week after the downtown march, a novel development: demonstrations were held in places all across the Toronto region, from Mississauga to Aurora. All of a sudden, the trepidations many felt about being in proximity of others, even when masked, fell by the wayside. The pandemic-induced agoraphobia seemed to wane. Concerns about the ill-health produced by racist state violence overshadowed the fear of catching the virus.

The Toronto marches took place as countless towns and cities in the US were in flames during an uprising that followed the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25. They contributed to a US-centred transnational moment of mobilization where resistance against anti-Black racism became the prism through which people voiced a multitude of overlapping concerns and frustrations. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues that in the US the uprising is a confluence of many factors: rage about unspeakable police murder, intransigence against President Trump's strategy of tension, and anger about how racism, class inequality and pandemic mismanagement exposed a shocking disproportion of African Americans as well as other working-class Americans to premature death ("A Class Rebellion" 2020). Taylor's observations about the mobilizations linking state violence to the mortal inequalities revealed by COVID-19 apply elsewhere, too, if of course in comparatively distinct ways (Célestine 2020).

Although the bodily experience of mass mobilization seemed to suggest otherwise at first, the pandemic is still here. People are dying. Sanitary states of emergency are used in some places to limit the return to collective action. The economic crisis and its consequences, mass unemployment and a crisis of subsistence for hundreds of millions of people in the world, particularly in the global South (ILO 2020), are still unfolding. In this context, it matters a great deal to ask: how does the pandemic crisis unfold at the level of everyday life in different parts of the world? How do the spatialized tensions of daily life translate into popular capacities to organize and mobilize? What do our daily rounds tell us about how to plan a different world? The link between everyday life and politics is never straightforward. It may be spontaneous but never automatic. Ultimately, it has to be organized.

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## About the Socialist Project

The SP is a Toronto-based organization that supports the rebuilding of the socialist Left in Canada and around the world. Committed to the development of a more free, democratic, humane and sustainable society than the one we live in, the SP opposes capitalism out of necessity and supports the struggles of others out of solidarity. We support struggles aligned with working class emancipation, anti-oppression, democratic self-determination, planetary sustainability, and peace.

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