The City in the Crosshairs
A Conversation with Stephen Graham

Bryan Finoki

Interview – November 1, 2009

The investigations of geographer and writer Stephen Graham show us a city not only caught in the crosshairs of a perpetual war between international military coalitions and their swarming counterparts, but a city that's been reframed, re-imaged, as a strategic site in a larger geoeconomic scheme for engineering the urban machinations of control that are necessary to secure the triumph of neoliberal capitalism across the globe.

Bryan Finoki: To begin, I am wondering how you conceptualize the Global City and its military role in expanding global capital. I am also interested in the opposite notion, of how cities can be inherently resistant to imperialism rather than acting as mere pistons for the expansion of capitalist development.

Stephen Graham: Global cities, as the key nodes in the transnational architectures of neoliberal capitalism, are vitally important militarily. They organize the financialization and production of space (London, for example, basically controls the financial architectures of large swathes of Africa and the Middle East). They orchestrate the extending dominance of neoliberalism. They serve as key hubs in the lacing of the world through transnational control, transport and logistics infrastructures. And they are, of course, preeminent symbolic spaces for transnational capitalism, making them vulnerable as symbolic targets.

But, as you say, global cities, like all cities, are porous and mixed up spaces, and amount to an infinite variety of space-times way beyond those of the financial core, the logistics function, or the power of the state. The diasporic communities and social movements that are most actively contesting neoliberal capitalism all work through, and within, what geographer Peter Taylor has called, the *World City Network*. This is the idea that it is an integrated network of world or global cities that orchestrates the geographies and political economies of neoliberal capitalism. [1]

And, of course, with a network of global cities comes a corresponding expansion of militarism. Much of your work deconstructs the ways and processes that militarism has become increasingly blurred in the heightened security of the Western city. How does this domestic militarization of space mirror that occurring in the bombastic urban sprawl of the underdeveloped world? Aren't both of these geographies exhibiting more and more similar urban complexions that would suggest no place in this century is exempt from being readied for war?

I think so. The global mixing in today's world renders any simple dualism between North and South, or Developed and Developing, very unhelpful. Instead, it's more useful to think of transnational architectures of control, wealth and power, as passing through and inhabiting all of these zones but in a wide variety of ways. Extreme poverty exists in many 'developed cities' while enclaves of supermodern and high-tech wealth pepper the cities on

South East, Southern and Eastern Asia.

Militarized geographies of (attempted) control are fully inscribed into the construction, maintenance and extension of these archipelago geographies. Take, for example, the militarized borders and surveillance systems which organize the relationship between foreign, 'free' trade and export processing zones and the 'outside'. Or the relationship between gated communities, privatized public plazas, 'security' zones or airports, and the 'normal' city 'outside'. In all these cases we see the emergence of new urban borders where control architectures and technologies are used to try and force the flows of the city through 'obligatory passage points' where they can be scrutinized and, if possible, identified.

Even though perhaps these 'obligatory passage points' have always been a part of capital's fabric and are now just fulfilling their role at a time of hyper-urbanization and migration through an embedded pattern of urban bordering, I feel like we have entered the age of the checkpoint, both symbolically with the mechanisms monitoring the global flows of capital but also literally with the proliferation of military checkpoints.

Which sort of leads me to my next question: I'm fascinated by how your work traces a spatial narrative of conflict and the morphology of the city as a kind of fossilization of political violence over time. Could you enlighten us with a brief history of the city in the context of violence?

The histories of the city and of political violence are, of course, inseparably linked. As Lewis Mumford teaches us, security is, of course, one of the very reasons for the very origins of urbanization. The evolution of urban morphology, as you say, is closely connected to the evolution of the geographies and technologies of war and political violence: fortification and the bounding of urban space through defensive and aggressive architecture are especially central to this long and complex story. So, too, is the fortification of cities to the symbolic demonstration of wealth, power and aggression, and as the commercial demarcation of territorialities. The elaborate histories of siege craft, atrocity, the symbolic sacking and erasure of urban space, and cat and mouse interplay of tactics and strategies of attack and tactics and strategies of defence, are all central here. Much of the Old Testament, in fact, is made up of fables of attempted and successful urban annihilation. As Marshall Berman has argued: 'Myths of urban ruin grow at our culture's root.' Important, here, are the symbolic roles of urban sites as icons of victory, domination and political or religious regime change.

All of this is fairly obvious. What fascinates me is that the histories of modern and late capitalist urban development tend to retreat from and obfuscate the continued centrality of cities as strategic sites within war and political violence. The obvious, physical, architectures of fortification have clearly left the city as it becomes 'over-exposed' – in Virilio's terms – to the new optics and technics of transnational and Total War. Remaining fortifications, at that point, are re-inscribed as tourist sites: reminders of a simple relationship between architecture and violence. And – at least until recently – nation-states have clearly worked to construct and maintain their monopolies on political violence in a way that rendered cities as mere targets. This reached its apogee within the Cold War imaginaries of full-scale nuclear Armageddon.

Partly because of these changes, the more stealthy and subtle relationships between modern urbanism and war, when discussed at all, now lurk more in the interstices of urban debate. Who recalls the obsession of CIAM and Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse with building 'towers in the park' not just as generators of a new machinic urbanism, or of the interplay of light and air, but as buildings that were both difficult to hit through aerial bombing and which would raise their inhabitants up above expected aerial gas attacks? Who remembers the role of nuclear paranoia in adding further momentum to the racialized politics of 'White

Flight' in the USA during the 1950s? And who, in their architecture or planning training, are treated to courses on the roles of these disciplines as engines of destruction, annihilation and politicized violence against those people and places deemed to be anti-modern, backward, unclean, or dangerous to the state, or the fetishized image of the emergent 'global' city?

These obfuscations mean that architecture and critical urbanism remain ill-equipped to deal with the way in which war and political violence are re-entering the city in the post-Cold War world.

Is it a general lack of awareness in academia and other fields of urban practice that prevents understanding these very types of repercussions inherent to the practice of the built environment? Or, is it emblematic of a deeper pervasive ignorance among architects and planners that don't care to understand how the intrinsic political nature of their work may serve to hasten the racialization of the landscape, or the negative pathological effects of frenzied securitization? I mean, is it just a blatant refusal on the part of urban practitioners today to have a political conscience?

Architects and urban planners are often still wedded to a heroic and positive self-image where their efforts necessarily work to render the world a better place. Construction and regeneration are the watch words: the inevitable destruction, erasure and political violence involved are obfuscated or taboo. This is linked to a poor understanding of the politics of urban space and their roles within projects of militarism and political violence.

Critical theorists Ryan Bishop and Gregory Clancey recently suggested that modern urban social science in general has shown marked tendencies since the Second World War to directly avoid tropes of catastrophism (especially in the West). They argue that this is because the complete annihilation of urban places conflicted with its underlying, enlightenment-tinged notions of progress, order and modernization. In the post-war, Cold War, period, especially, 'The City', they write, had a 'heroic status in both capitalist and socialist storytelling'. This worked against an analysis of the city as a scene of catastrophic death. 'The city-as-target' remained, therefore, 'a reading long buried under layers of academic Modernism'.

Bishop and Clancey also believe that this 'absence of death within The City also reflected the larger economy of death within the academy: its studied absence from some disciplines [urban social science] and compensatory over-compensation in others [history]'. In disciplinary terms, the result of this was that the 'urban' tended to remain hermetically separated from the 'strategic'. 'Military' issues were carefully demarcated from 'civil' ones. And the overwhelmingly 'local' concerns of modern urban social science were kept rigidly apart from (inter)national ones. This left urban social science to address the local, civil, and domestic rather than the (inter)national, the military or the strategic. Such concerns were the preserve of history, as well as the fast-emerging disciplines of international politics and international relations. In the dominant hubs of English-speaking urban social science – North America and the UK – these two intellectual worlds virtually never crossed, separated as they were by disciplinary boundaries, scalar orientations and theoretical traditions. [2]

Also, it seems the military itself is the quickest to make use of the connections between war and space, or even architecture theory, not only as a means for better strategizing their campaigns of urbicide and creative destruction, but perhaps also as a way to gain further legitimacy for their planning – hijacking the discourse of architectural urban theory to bolster the technical approvals of their surgical destruction of the built environment, no?

While Israeli military theorists have appropriated Deleuze and Guattari (see Eyal Weizman's new book *Hollow Land*), most of the US military material about cities looks more like a high school urban geography class. (Even in Israel, this approach is now out of favour).

The level of debate here is very simplistic and recycles old stereotypes from Orientalist urban books like Spiro Kostof's *City Assembled* (for instance, Islamic cities have no real structure, etcetera). As far as I can see, there is a strong disconnect between the more theoretical treatments of military transformation and the challenges of 'urban operations'.

Is the type of defensive urbanism we see today that attempts to bomb proof our skyscrapers and wall off different enclaves in Baghdad merely a new iteration of an ancient strategy to fortify sovereignty – a postmodern medievalism, if you will – or have we reached a completely new definition of 'military urbanism'? How do you distinguish 'military urbanism' from 'new' military urbanism?

The 'postmodern medievalism' is a fascinating argument, I think. There is certainly a sense among military theorists of scrambling to look back at the proxy urban wars of colonialism – and elsewhere – to learn lessons that might help inform tactics in places like Baghdad.

However, I don't think we really are going 'back to the future' in some simplistic way. Rather, political violence and war are being re-inscribed into the micro-geographies and architectures of cities in ways that, while superficially similar to historic defensive urbanism, inevitably reflect contemporary conditions. Important here, at the very least, are some points of distinction: – The constant real-time transmission of video, images and text via TV and the Internet;

- The increasingly seamless merging between security, corrections, surveillance, military and entertainment industries who work continually to supply, generate, fetishize and profit from urban targeting, war and securitization;
- A proliferating range of private, public and private-public bodies legitimized to act violently on behalf of capital, the state, or 'the international system';
- The mass and repeated simulacral participation of citizens within spaces of digitized war, especially Orientalized video games produced by the military;
- The particular vulnerabilities of contemporary capitalist cities to the disruption or appropriation of the technical systems on which urban life relies. (These are caused by the proliferation, extension and acceleration of all manner of mobilities, the tight space-time coupling of the technical infrastructural flows that sustain 'globalization', and, more prosaically, the fact that modern urbanites have few if any alternatives when the fuel stops, the electricity is down, the water ceases, or the food and communication stops; or the waste is not removed);
- The ways in which borders and bordering technologies are emerging as global assemblages continually linking sensors, databases, defensive and security architectures and the scanning of bodies;
- The centrality of 'urbicidal' violence or neglect to the new geographies of 'primitive accumulation' through which private military corporations and 'reconstruction coalitions' produce, and benefit from 'disaster capitalism' (Naomi Klein's term) or 'accumulation by dispossession' (David Harvey's phrase) – whether in Baghdad or New Orleans; and
- The growing importance of roaming circuits of temporary securitized zones, set up and policed by cosmopolitan roaming armies of specialists, to encompass G8 summits, Olympics, World Cups, and so forth.

Added to this, we have new relationships emerging in the long-standing interplay of social and urban control experiments practiced on the populations of colonized cities and lands, and appropriated back by states and elites to develop architectures of control in the cities

at the 'heart of empire'. Thus, biometric borders emerge around Fallujah before being inscribed into the world's airline systems. The complex legal and architectural geographies of extra-territoriality, permanent exception, and privatized political violence are set out through the global system of establishing and securitizing off-shore trading and manufacturing enclaves before being implanted into the Palestine territories or the War on Terror's 'archipelago of enclaves'. The Israeli practice to 'shoot on sight' is directly imitated, following advice from the IDF, by UK counter-terrorist operations on the London tube after 7 / 7. And the Pentagon's experiments in the tracking of entire urban traffic systems provide an input into the shift to 'smart' or 'algorithmic' CCTV in Western cities.

All these connections, of course, are lubricated by the fact that it is the same corporate bodies that are driving forward both the new strategies of urban warfare in the Middle East and the 'surveillance surge' as part of the Homeland Security's drive in the global North.

And I think that gets at the biggest important distinction between then and now. That is, the sheer capitalist industrial-complex nature of the defence economy that doesn't just fortify the city to protect it from violence and war, but the global-scale arming of nations and geoeconomic restructuring of conflict zones that insure conflict will always exist, in order to profit off of the modern defensive measures that go into regulating these conflict zones. What do you think?

I completely agree: these complexes don't just celebrate and fetishize war and wholesale securitization – they need it. The deepening crossovers between war industries and policing, event management, border control, urban security and entertainment work to permeate and normalize cultures of war and militarism in a way where traditional separations between the 'inside' of nations and the 'outside' increasingly fall away.

***I know you have a new book you are working on (or a couple of new books actually), one of which is entitled Cities Under Siege. Could you tell us about that and how it departs from your previous work in your book* Cities, War, and Terrorism?**

Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism will be a sole-authored book, published through a non-academic press (Verso), rather than, as with *Cities, War, and Terrorism*, an edited, academic text. I hope, therefore, to make it more coherent and accessible to the proverbial 'lay' audience that Verso can reach.

The book aims to expose the complex processes and politics through which Western military doctrine is increasingly preoccupied with the micro-geographies, architectures and cultures of urban sites. In this sense, it is a further attempt in my effort to develop an explicitly urban rendition of critical geopolitical analysis that commenced within *Cities, War, and Terrorism*.

The main body of *Cities Under Siege* will raise a key set of dimensions to the urban 'turn' within Western military doctrine, thinking and practice. It will address the powerful anti-urban imaginative geographies which tend to essentialize cities as Hobbesian sites of decay, hyper-violence and threats to political establishments. The book will also link this to a discussion of how ideologies of 'battlespace' within contemporary military doctrine – whether it be the *Revolution in Military Affairs* (RMA), 'asymmetric warfare', the ideas of 'effects-based operations' and 'fourth generation warfare', or the Pentagon's new obsession with the 'Long War' – which essentially amounts to the rendering of all terrain as a persistently militarized zone without limits of time and space. The other five chapters in the book will explore: the technophiliac dreams of omniscience and total surveillance that are so powerful within US military discourse about cities; the ways in which state militaries like the USA and Israel routinely target essential urban infrastructures; the role of digital play and physical urban simulation within the 'media-industrial-military-entertainment' network; the importance of fantasies of erasing particular places through 'urbicidal

warfare'; and the relationship between war and the increasingly militarized design and semiotics of automobiles.

Wow, that sounds fascinating. What can I say, I can't wait. I'm reminded of the work of Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets who in a recent book,* City of Collision*, describe 'conflict urbanism' as a diagnosis of Jerusalem and the types of flexible spatial configurations that have produced, in their words, 'a city in a permanent state of destruction and reinvention, hostage to political planning, collective fear and physical and mental walls'. But, clearly this speaks more widely about the urban transformations that are happening in regions all over (as it sounds like* Cities Under Siege *also gets at) including the capitalist sanctums of the Northern hemisphere.

How has the military always exercized both a direct and indirect role in the urban design of cities? How can we gage the relationship between urban planners and military strategists today in the transformation of the contemporary Western city?

SG The Israeli experience, in terms of reorganizing the architectures of control in the colonized West Bank, launching permanent and 'pre-emptive' military strikes against Palestinian and other cities, and in the intense securitizing of its own cities, is clearly the paradigmatic case of contemporary military urbanism. So, the constantly morphing geographies of Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, as important studies by people like Eyal Weizman, Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets have demonstrated, are vitally important.

But these cases are much more than mere paradigmatic examples: they are exemplars that are being actively imitated and exported around the world. To a large degree, Israel's economy is now a service-security economy that relies very much on selling its products, weapons and what we might call 'military urbanism services' to all comers. The shooting of the Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes on the London Underground on 22 July 2005 was the result of a direct imitation of Israeli 'shoot to kill' policy against suspected suicide bombers. The USA's use of biometric borders, targeted assassinations, and D9 caterpillar bulldozers in Iraq were all directly brought in from Israel. And US forces are working very closely with the Israeli military in undertaking their own urban warfare and training doctrine.

Regarding the military in exercising a direct or indirect role in the urban design of cities, the role has more often been indirect than direct. But a key trend now is for the US military to become much more actively involved within 'urban operations' in US cities, a trend which undermines the rulings of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which was designed to inhibit military operations within the continental USA. Now, US forces have a strategic command for North America (Northcom). They regularly undertake urban warfare exercises and simulations in real US cities, and they are increasingly blurring with the more militarized ends of the law enforcement agencies, creating a military-civil continuum rather than a binary separation. It is this continuum that directs the shaping of security zones, new checkpoints, and other defensive architectures in US cities, along with major inputs from building regulation changes. This is happening along with important participation from architects, landscape architects, geographers, planners and urban designers on the contemporary challenges of urban securitization. Added to this, though, are major coalitions of commercial actors such as insurance, real estate bodies, and what the ACLU has called the 'Surveillance Industrial Complex'. Also involved are transnational players like the organizers of major sporting events and political meetings who are keen to use each event as roaming experiments in state-of-the-art urban securitization.

In a previous article of yours, 'From Space to Street Corners: Global South Cities and US Military Technophilia', you talk about how Western post-Cold War military analysis has depicted the processes of urbanization in the global South as 'essentialized spaces'

which are meant to undermine the high-technology of US military power. Partially because Western strategists had neglected urban warfare throughout the Cold War in favour of a heavy reliance on the Air Force, which had to essentialize another projection about 'enemy space', where cities weren't battlefields but rather large scale targets – treating the battle space as object, if you will. But, I'm hoping you could further explain how the process of urbanization in the global South is being recharacterized by the West in such a way that has allowed the US military to retool their doctrine for greater technomilitarism and its use in guerrilla warfare. Is it fair to say that the poor cities of the world are being re-imaged by the west specifically to justify a shift in military strategy and to legitimate a 'Long War'?

This is certainly a very important shift. Along with the portrayal of the 'internal colonies' of inner urban cores in US or UK cities, or the Parisian *banlieus*, as Hobbesian spaces housing the dangerous, racialized other, military and security discourses about global South cities depict such places as essentialized, Hobbesian places of anarchy. One influential article by Richard Norton, for example, calls such places 'feral cities' which threaten the global capitalist order because they house massive populations, create social and political unrest, are often not governed in any formal sense, and provide breeding grounds for extreme ideologies. Fear of 'failed cities' thus seems to be even more powerful than fear of 'failed states'.

A key writer in this vein is *New York Times* columnist and self-styled urban warfare commentator Ralph Peters. [3] Peters' military mind recoils in horror at the prospect of US forces habitually fighting in the majority of the world's burgeoning megacities and urbanizing corridors. To him, these are spaces where 'human waste goes undisposed, the air is appalling, and mankind is rotting'. [4] Here cities and urbanization represent decay, anarchy, disorder and the post-Cold War collapse of 'failed' nation-states. 'Boom cities pay for failed states, post-modern dispersed cities pay for failed states, and failed cities turn into killing grounds and reservoirs for humanity's surplus and discards (guess where we will fight).' [5]

Peters highlights the key geostrategic role of urban regions within the post-Cold War period starkly: 'Who cares about Upper Egypt if Cairo is calm? We do not deal with Indonesia – we deal with Jakarta. In our [then] recent evacuation of Sierra Leone Freetown was all that mattered.' [6] Peters also candidly characterizes the role of the US military within the emerging neoliberal 'empire' with the USA as the central military enforcer (although he obviously doesn't use these words, coined by Hardt and Negri). 'Our future military expeditions will increasingly defend our foreign investments,' he writes, 'rather than defending [the home nation] against foreign invasions. And we will fight to subdue anarchy and violent "isms" because disorder is bad for business. All of this activity will focus on cities.'

Again, in synchrony with his colleagues, Peters sees the deliberate exploitation of urban terrain by opponents of US hegemony to be a key likely feature of future war. Here, high-tech military dominance is assumed to directly fuel the urbanization of resistance. 'The long term trend in open-area combat is toward overhead dominance by U.S. forces,' he observes. [7] 'Battlefield awareness may prove so complete, and "precision" weapons so widely-available and effective, that enemy ground-based combat systems will not be able to survive in the deserts, plains, and fields that have seen so many of history's main battles.' As a result, he argues that the USA's 'enemies will be forced into cities and other complex terrain, such as industrial developments and inter-city sprawl'. [8]

To Peters, and many other US military commentators, then, it is as though global urbanization is a dastardly plan to thwart the US military from gaining the full benefit of the complex, expensive and high-tech weapons that the military-industrial complex has spent

so many decades piecing together. Annoyingly, cities, as physical objects, simply get in the way of the US military's technophiliac fantasies of trans-global, real-time omnipotence. The fact that 'urbanized terrain' is the product of complex economic, demographic, social and cultural shifts that involve the transformation of whole societies seems to have escaped their gaze.

The supposed geographies of 'feral' global-South cities certainly loom large in the imaginative geographies sustaining Western military doctrine for urban areas. The physical and electronic simulations being produced by Western militaries to train their forces are increasingly including 'garbage dumps, shanty towns, industrial districts, airports' and subterranean infrastructures.

The key thing about Western military operations in global-South cities is that they force military groundedness in militaries that are much more comfortable trying to dictate things from the air using superior sensing and firepower. In Baghdad, high-tech Western surveillance and targeting have not allowed US forces to triumph over determined insurgents utilizing very basic and old-fashioned weapons and guerrilla tactics. Instead, US forces have had to go out on patrol through city streets. This has brought them into very close proximity with insurgents, who have been able to deploy ambushes, improvised explosive devices and rocket-propelled grenades to devastating effect.

A major response from the US military-industrial complex is to try and reorganize the high-tech and technophiliac weapons and surveillance systems so expensively built up since the last days of the Cold War so that they directly address the needs to 'situational awareness' within the complex, 3D geographies of global-South cities. Programmes with telling titles such as 'Combat Zones That See' and 'Visibuilding' promise to re-establish the dream of omniscient, distanciated and machinic vision for US forces in cities, allowing them to once again withdraw physically from the killing power of their machines. Many dreams of robotised and automated high-tech warfare, permanently projecting perfect power into global south cities, are emerging here. The objective being to try and delegate the decision to kill to computer software embedded within networked weapons and sensors which permanently loiter within or above urban space automatically dispatching those deemed the 'enemy'.

Take, for example, the thoughts of Gordon Johnson, the 'Unmanned Effects' team leader for the US Army's 'Project Alpha' – an organization developing ground robots which respond automatically to gunfire in a city. If such a system can get within one metre, he says, '[it kills] the person who's firing. So, essentially, what we're saying is that anyone who would shoot at our forces would die. Before he can drop that weapon and run, he's probably already dead. Well now, these cowards in Baghdad would have to play with blood and guts every time they shoot at one of our folks. The costs of poker went up significantly … The enemy, are they going to give up blood and guts to kill machines? I'm guessing not.'

An even more fetishistic technophiliac fantasy of perfect power emanates from *Defense Watch* magazine, in an article that appeared in 2004 in response to DARPA's announcement that they were developing large-scale computerized video systems to continuously track car movements in entire cities. 'Several large fans are stationed outside the city limits of an urban target that our [sic] guys need to take,' they begin: 'Upon appropriate signal, what appears like a dust cloud emanates from each fan. The cloud is blown into town where it quickly dissipates. After a few minutes of processing by laptop-size processors, a squadron of small, disposable aircraft ascends over the city. The little drones dive into selected areas determined by the initial analysis of data transmitted by the fan-propelled swarm. Where they disperse their nano-payloads.' The scenario continues: 'After this, the processors get even more busy, within minutes the mobile tactical center

have a detailed visual and audio picture of every street and building in the entire city. Every hostile [person] has been identified and located. From this point on, nobody in the city moves without the full and complete knowledge of the mobile tactical center. As blind spots are discovered, they can quickly be covered by additional dispersal of more nano-devices. Unmanned air and ground vehicles can now be vectored directly to selected targets to take them out, one by one. Those enemy combatants clever enough to evade actually being taken out by the unmanned units can then be captured or killed by human elements who are guided directly to their locations, with full and complete knowledge of their individual fortifications and defenses … When the dust settles on competitive bidding for BAA 03-15 [the code number for the 'Combat Zones That See' programme], and after the first prototypes are delivered several years from now, our guys are in for a mind-boggling treat at the expense of the bad guys.'

Needless to say, the military urbanism of today is clearly less about walls and traditional fortifications (even though we have hardly stopped building them), but really about an entire logic of a production of space and an artificial intelligent system for organizing and policing that space; one designed for control; urban space as a completely new medium that is conducive to contemporary warfare. But, just as much, it seems this new spatial dimension of the War on Terror has also turned the city into a medium for insurgency – what does this suggest about the perceived enemy who is now no longer outside the gates, but also hiding within?

As with so much of urban life, the key now is the seamless merging of systems of electronic tracking, tagging, surveillance and targeting into the architectonic and geographical structures of cities and systems of cities. The production of space within the War on Terror thus mobilizes an intensified deployment of these sensors and systems – through global biometric passports, global port management systems, global e-commerce systems, global airline profiling systems and global navigation and targeting systems – within and through the securitizing fabric of urban places. This is very much a Deleuzian and rhizomatic process which helps to sustain the breaking down of the traditional binary of 'inside / outside' for nation-states and instead brings urban and sociotechnical architectures of security into a range of globe-spanning and telescoping assemblages which continually perform urban life.

In addition to the global span of these surveillance technologies, there is also a rampant boom in border fence construction today following, ironically enough, the fall of the Berlin Wall. Not that these wall projects aren't pushing the technological implications of peripheral national security, but I was curious of your assessment of the future of nationalism given this patterning of geopolitical border relations?

Certainly architectures of control – architectonic and digital combined – are being mobilized with unprecedented scale in defence of national territoriality. But I think many of these projects are as much symbolic as practical. They are physical demonstrations that nation-states can control global flows of people, goods and capital when, in many cases, this is simply not the case. So the future of nationalism will rely fundamentally on the degree to which it can move away from the idea of an imagined and homogenous community and, instead, come to terms with radical heterogeneity, especially in global cities. If it does not do this, we will see accelerating tensions between ideas sustaining urban governance and those sustaining national governance. For one thing, European nations and Japan, especially, will have no choice but to radically extend their immigration levels if they want to avoid the economic meltdown that will come with geographic ageing.

Getting back to an earlier question, I read that the earliest forms of cities were built on forms of conflict and barricading against the natural elements. That is to say, at their root, cities are defined by a defensive kind of urban DNA, I mean – shelter, for all intents

and purposes – could be construed as a primitive form of military urbanism. But, clearly we have come a long way towards full-scale gated communities now; what are the psychopathological implications of this morphology? Having moved from improvising mere shelter from the elements to complete enclave barriers against more abstract notions of fear, I guess my question is: How is the culture of an 'Us' and a 'Them', or the 'Other' not only embodied in the current trend of security urbanism, but extensions of an ongoing pathological development?

There is a major contradiction here. One the one hand, the Bush doctrine has simplistically relied on the constant invocation of a putative 'us' and 'we' marshalled against a threatening, monster-like, racialized and demonic 'them' who offer an existential threat to 'our' civilization and all its hallmarks ('freedom', 'democracy', and so forth). Here we see long-standing Orientalist tropes being recycled.

On the other hand, it is clear that, in many ways, the cosy, folkish language of 'homeland security' fits very poorly with the transitional cultural, social, ethic and economic realities of US metropolitan regions. So there is a major tension between the construction of an imaginative geography of nationhood as 'us' and the reality of a US metropolitan region. I think this is caused by the fact that it is largely the white exurban USA that forms the real heartland of the republicans: the central cities are as alien, demonized and 'Othered' to them as are Fallujah and Baghdad. So their War on Terror can be thought of as a war against cities both in their own nation and in the colonized war zones. At home this has involved a 'cracking down on Diaspora', in Andrew Shryock's words.

Once again, then, Western nations and transnational blocs – and the securitized cities now seen once again to sit hierarchically within their dominant territorial patronage – are being normatively imagined as bounded, organized spaces with closely controlled, and filtered, relationships with the supposed terrors ready to destroy them at any instant from the 'outside' world. In the USA, for example, national immigration, border control, transportation, and social policy strategies have been remodelled since 9 / 11 in what Hyndman calls an: 'Attempt to reconstitute the [USA] as a bounded area that can be fortified against outsiders and other global influences. In this imagining of nation, the US ceases to be a constellation of local, national, international, and global relations, experiences, and meanings that coalesce in places like New York City and Washington DC; rather, it is increasingly defined by a 'security perimeter' and the strict surveillance of borders.' [9]

To architect Deborah Natsios, meanwhile, the 'homeland' discourse 'invokes both moral order' and specifically normalizes suburban rather than central-metropolitan urban conditions. The very term 'homeland security', in fact, serves to rework the imaginative geographies of contemporary US urbanism in important ways. It shifts the emphasis away from the complex and mobile diasporic social formations that sustain large metropolitan areas through complex transnational connections, towards a much clearer mapping that implies more identifiable and essentialized geographies of entitlement and threat. This occurs at many scales – from bodies in neighbourhoods, through cities and nations to the transnational – and delineates a separation that works to inscribe definitions of those citizens who are deemed to warrant value and the full protection of citizenship, and those that have been deemed threatening as real or potential sources of 'terrorism': in essence, the targets for the blossoming national security state.

Amy Kaplan argues that the very word 'homeland' itself suggests some 'inexorable connection to a place deeply rooted in the past'. It necessarily problematizes the complex and multiple diasporas that actually constitute the social fabric of contemporary US urbanism. Such language, she suggests, offers a 'folksy rural quality, which combines a German romantic notion of the folk with the heartland of America to resurrect the rural

myth of American identity'. At the same time, Kaplan argues that it precludes 'an urban vision of America as multiple turfs with contested points of view and conflicting grounds upon which to stand'. [10]

Such a discourse is particularly problematic in 'global' cities like New York, constituted as they are by massive and unknowably complex constellations of diasporic social groups tied intimately into the international (and interurban) divisions of labour that sustain neoliberal capitalism. 'In what sense,' asks Kaplan, 'would New Yorkers refer to their city as the homeland? Home, yes, but homeland? Not likely.' Ironically, even the grim casualty lists of 9 / 11 revealed the impossibility of separating some purportedly pure, 'inside', or 'homeland city', from the wider international flows and connections that now constitute global cities like New York – even with massive state surveillance and violence. At least 44 nationalities were represented on that list. Many of these were 'illegal' residents in New York City. It follows that, 'if it existed, any comfortable distinction between domestic and international, here and there, us and them, ceased to have meaning after that day'. As Tim Watson writes: 'Global labor migration patterns have … brought the world to lower Manhattan to service the corporate office blocks: the dishwashers, messengers, coffee-cart vendors, and office cleaners were Mexican, Bangladeshi, Jamaican and Palestinian. One of the tragedies of September 11th 2001 was that it took such an extraordinary event to reveal the everyday reality of life at the heart of the global city.' [11]

Posthumously, however, mainstream US media has overwhelmingly represented the dead from 9 / 11 as though they were a relatively homogeneous body of patriotic US nationals. The cosmopolitanism of the dead has, increasingly, been obscured amid the shrill, nationalist discourses and imaginative geographies of war. The complex ethnic geographies of a pre-eminently 'global city' – as revealed in this grizzly snap-shot – have thus faded from view since Hyndman and Watson wrote those words. The deep social and cultural connections between US cities and the cities in the Middle East that quickly emerged as the prime targets for US military and surveillance power after 9 / 11, have, similarly, been rendered largely invisible. In short, New York's transnational urbanism, revealed so starkly by the bodies of the dead after 9 / 11, seems to have submerged beneath the overwhelming and revivified power of nationally-oriented state, military and media discourses.

This interview was conducted on 6 August 2007 for Subtopia: A Field Guide to Military Urbanism, and published at: subtopia.blogspot.com. A second interview followed a month later and can be found at subtopia.blogspot.com.

Bryan Finoki is the author of the blog *Subtopia: A Field Guide to Military Urbanism*. He lectures regularly and writes for newspapers and journals. He currently teaches at Woodbury University's School of Architecture in San Diego, California.

Footnotes

1. See GaWC: Globalization and World Cities. Online at www.lboro.ac.uk.
2. See Ryan Bishop and Gregory Clancey, 'The City as Target, or Perpetuation and Death', in: R. Bishop, J. Phillips and W.W. Yeo (eds.), *Postcolonial Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 63-86.
3. See Ralph Peters, 'Our Soldiers, Their Cities', *Parameters*, spring 1996, 1–7; and Ralph Peters, 'The Future of Armored Warfare', *Parameters*, autumn 1997, 1–9.
4. Peters, 'Our Soldiers', op. cit. (note 3), 2.
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Peters, 'The Future of Armored Warfare', op. cit. (note 3), 5.
7. Peters, 'Our Soldiers', op. cit. (note 3), 6.
8. Peters, 'The Future of Armored Warfare', op. cit. (note 3), 4.
9. See Jennifer Hyndman, 'Beyond Either / Or: A Feminist Analysis of September 11th', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* (February 2006).
10. See Amy Kaplan, 'Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space', *Radical History Review*, no. 85 (2003), 82–93.
11. See Tim Watson, 'Introduction: Critical Infrastructures after 9 / 11', *Postcolonial Studies*, no. 6, 109–111.

Tags

Capitalism, Control, Public Space, Urban Space

This text was downloaded on November 7, 2026 from
Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain
www.onlineopen.org/the-city-in-the-crosshairs