Security Symptoms

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Abstract

Gentrification is a security project. Though this claim is not new, existing scholarship on contemporary urban (in)security in the Global North, especially in the context of gentrification, has often struggled with a particular problem: how to account for the decidedly ambivalent character of securitization. Familiar frameworks like ‘revanchism’ and ‘fear of crime’ have proven insufficient alone to explain the seemingly paradoxical investment in insecurity that animates the security paradigm. In this article, I consider how psychoanalytic theory might be mobilized for a libidinal geography of urban (in)security, an approach that would focus less on the phantasmagoric referents against which society supposedly needs protection and more on the libidinal investments through which these referents are (re)produced and administered in order to cohere, sustain, and naturalize a social and spatial order rooted in dispossession. Drawing on Lacanian articulations of fantasy, drive, *jouissance*, and symptom, and applying these concepts to a consideration of contemporary anti-gang policing in the United States, I demonstrate how ambivalence and ontological incoherence function not as evidence of security’s limits but rather as liberal social order’s very condition of possibility.

Introduction

Gentrification is a security project. To insist on such a claim is to insist on a critical reading of both gentrification and security — the former as signifying not simply ‘redevelopment’ but always class- and race-based displacement,¹ and the latter as not ‘safety’ but rather a particular form of liberty invented with Western liberalism: “the liberty of secure possession; the liberty, that is, of private property”.² It is also, then, to insist on placing exclusion at the center of the analysis. This article is of course by no means the first to do so. And yet, much of the existing scholarship on contemporary urban (in)security in the Global North has struggled with a particular problem: how to account for the decidedly *ambivalent* character of securitization. This ambivalence is evident not simply in the perpetual failure of securitization to actually achieve a state of security, but perhaps more tellingly in the extent to which the security paradigm seems utterly invested in fabricating and sustaining the very threat objects it purports to target.

This article makes a theoretical contribution to scholarship on contemporary urban (in)security and exclusion in the Global North by outlining one way of understanding the significance of ambivalence to the security paradigm and by situating that ambivalence as integral to security as a place-making — and place-taking — project. Drawing on, and drawing together, a variety of secondary literatures originating in Lacanian psychoanalysis, geography, criminology, and other fields, I trace one psychosocial path through the aforementioned impasse that has vexed a number of other approaches to the study of urban security politics in the context of gentrification, particularly those that have relied on the frameworks of ‘revanchism’ or ‘fear of crime’. As I will demonstrate, these frameworks — the former due to an overemphasis on punitive vengeance and the latter due to a similar overfocus on fear — have both proven insufficient to account for the paradoxical investment in insecurity that I argue animates the security paradigm. Instead, by way of a psychoanalytical engagement with anti-gang policing in the United States, I consider the possibilities that might emerge were urban cultural geographers and others to explore the “libidinal economy”,³ or more precisely the “libidinal *geography*”,⁴ of urban (in)security politics.

Simply put, this article seeks to demonstrate how security’s always-ambivalent relationship to the shifting figurations of urban insecurity — explored here specifically through the example of what I will call, following Žižek’s formulation of the “conceptual Jew”,⁵ the “conceptual gang member” — is neither an aberration nor an oversight of the security paradigm but simply *how security operates* in the urban everyday. As Charlotte Heath-Kelly has noted in the context of global geopolitics, “security never seems to make any progress.”⁶ By turning as Heath-Kelly does to psychoanalytic theory, we can better understand how the (re)production of a social — and, I will add, *spatial* — order rooted in dispossession requires a politics of (in)security without end.

The article proceeds through four subsequent sections. First, I briefly examine two influential frameworks, namely those of “revanchism” and “fear of crime”, upon which geographers and others have frequently relied to make sense of the politics of urban (in)security. Neither of these, I argue, has proven sufficiency capable of accounting for the ambivalence of security. Therefore, I turn instead to an alternative approach that is particularly sensitive to such ambivalence: what Jesse Proudfoot, building on the work of Derek Hook, has termed “libidinal

geography”.⁷ Before outlining this approach in the context of urban (in)security, however, I elaborate some of the key psychoanalytic ideas upon which I will be relying to do so. The third section of the paper, then, serves as a primer to this psychoanalytic approach.

In the following section, “The Gang Member as ‘Whatever Object’”, I mobilize this framework of libidinal geography to critically examine one of the security paradigm’s favorite objects of insecurity in the contemporary neoliberal city: the ‘gang member’. First, I highlight a significant yet curiously still under-acknowledged observation made by critical criminologists, an observation readily apparent in police discourse itself: there exists no consistent understanding of what a gang, and by extension a ‘gang member’, even is. By looking through the lens of libidinal geography, however, I claim that we can explain this incoherence without resorting to an analytic of oversight or illusion; instead, I illustrate how the ontological void of the ‘gang member’ as such is instrumental to urban securitization in gentrifying spaces, at least in the U.S. This is demonstrated through a consideration of the use of civil gang injunctions, a type of civil legal order that extends anti-gang policing and nuisance abatement beyond the realm of criminal sanction. The fact that these injunctions are often implemented in areas where crime is already decreasing is just one hint at a function better characterized as spatial administration than crime-fighting. Ultimately, my argument is that the figure of the ‘gang member’ functions within the urban security paradigm in the Global North as a *necessarily* empty signifier around which contingent relations of subjectivity, power, and space — that is, social order — are produced.

This symptomatic reading of the security paradigm has, I argue, important implications for how we analyze urban securitization, especially the relation between anti-gang policing and gentrification. The article concludes, then, by briefly considering how this psychoanalytically informed approach to (in)security might be taken forward by cultural geographers and others to rethink gentrification and urban exclusion more broadly.

Toward a Libidinal Geography of Urban (In)Security

Urban space has long been equated with violence, disorder, and fear,⁸ an association in the West with roots extending back at least to the medieval era.⁹ In fact, as Mark Neocleous has shown, it was in the context of early urbanization in Western Europe that ‘security’ began to cohere as a

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3 distinct political project for organizing all of social space. The slow collapse of the feudal order and
4 the growth of towns brought about an ever more anxious elite, increasingly dismayed at the
5 apparent proliferation of disorderly social behaviors and what Hobbes called a “dissolute condition
6 of masterlesse men” with no “coercive Power to tye their hands”.¹⁰ New methods of control were
7 needed, and so “it is at this moment,” argues Neocleous, “that the process of *internal pacification*
8 begins, a process fabricating a ‘peace and security’ within the social order to match the ‘peace and
9 security’ imposed on colonial subjects”.¹¹ ‘Security’ thus emerged as what Marx would come to
10 call the “supreme social concept of civil society”,¹² a paradigm for organizing (and naturalizing) an
11 ascendant social order based on dispossession and exclusion.
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15 In this sense, the politics of urban life in Western modernity has always entailed a politics
16 of security. Nonetheless, scholars have often struggled to make sense not only of what exactly
17 constitutes (in)security in the urban context (and particularly what we mean by “urban
18 violence”¹³), but also how to understand the discourses and practices of securitization through
19 which exclusion and dispossession function as processes entwined with urbanity itself. While my
20 purpose here is not to provide a robust survey of these efforts, I do want to briefly examine two
21 influential academic approaches to these questions, namely the frameworks of ‘revanchism’ and
22 ‘fear of crime’, and consider how each has been limited in its capacity to account for what I argue
23 is the quintessential modality of urban security politics: security’s ambivalent relationship to
24 insecurity.
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28 The first of these approaches, ‘revanchism’, was famously introduced into urban studies by
29 Neil Smith as a way of accounting for what he saw, in the context of late 20th century New York
30 City, as a “vicious reaction against minorities, the working class, homeless people, the
31 unemployed, women, gays and lesbians, immigrants,” and others on the part of a terrified and
32 anxious urban middle class who imagined these groups to be responsible for the “theft of the
33 city”.¹⁴ Derived from the French *revanchisme*, or “revenge”, Smith’s adoption of the term explicitly
34 echoed a previous incarnation of such reactionary antiurbanism in 19th century France, thus
35 situating contemporary punitiveness in the neoliberal city within a much longer tradition of class
36 warfare. The concept has since been widely adopted in geography and other fields as a framework
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for understanding the continued prevalence of highly punitive social policies and everyday urban practices, from zero tolerance policing to anti-homeless policy to gentrification.¹⁵

More recently, however, a number of scholars have reconsidered revanchism's emphasis on conscious, vengeful intent in light of what some have deemed to be 'softer', more managerial or even supportive manifestations of contemporary urban governance.¹⁶ Responding to this work, Proudfoot calls for a reading of the relationship between the punitive and the managerial as not simply complex, ambiguous, or coexistent, but rather *dialectical*; drawing, as I will, on a psychoanalytic understanding of ambivalence, he argues that they "are actually two aspects of the same process — that is, the punitive and the supportive are both expressions of an ambivalent relationship with the urban poor, articulated through social policy".¹⁷

Proudfoot's intervention points toward a significant limitation of the revanchist framework: not only does its emphasis on vengeance make it potentially difficult to square with liberalism's ostensibly 'softer' side,¹⁸ it risks obscuring the dialectical relationships between fear and desire, love and hate, attraction and repulsion, that structure every encounter with the Other. We should seek neither to reconcile nor rank these apparently opposing impulses, but rather to understand them *together*, for it is in the subject's encounter with the Other's very exteriority, more even than in her encounter with the Other *per se*, that the subject's own interiority is produced.¹⁹ This hints at a second limitation as well: conceived of as a reaction, revanchism lends itself to an understanding of securitization as a process mobilized by already-coherent subjects and directed against already-coherent threats. Whereas Smith explained that the revanchist city "is more about the rediscovery of enemies within",²⁰ I am calling here instead for an understanding of security as a spatial process through which both particular subjects and their enemies are not discovered but rather *made*, together.

This latter limitation is also particularly evident in another prominent framework used by urban scholars in the Global North, that of 'fear of crime'. Originally conceived in the 1960s in the United States, the concept of 'fear of crime' has since inspired a body of literature, largely rooted in criminology but widely influential in other fields, that is both extensive and remarkably inconsistent. In fact, as Stephen Farrall and colleagues have noted, for decades scholars seemed curiously willing to proceed without even bothering to ask what exactly "fear of crime" *is*.²¹ The

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3 efforts of Farrall and his colleagues to do so led them to conclude that “far from being a unitary
4 construct, the ‘fear’ ‘of crime’ turned out to be rather more than ‘fear’ alone and not as
5 immediately related to crime specifically as one might otherwise imagine”.²² Part of the problem is
6 methodological: the overreliance on survey data in much of this literature lends itself to a
7 widespread tendency to take for granted the supposed cohesion, duration, and context-blindness
8 of fear,²³ not to mention the capacity of people to accurately (and honestly²⁴) distinguish, name,
9 and communicate their fears and the threat objects supposedly causing them.²⁵

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11 Others have pointed to an equally problematic and persistent incoherence in the literature
12 between analyses operating at “the level of the individual — asking how scared we are or
13 exploring the disjunction between an individual’s risk and an individual’s fear — or at the level of
14 the social, that is, as contributions to public discourses about fear of crime”.²⁶ These critics are in
15 part responding to a different tendency to focus too exclusively on the so-called “expressive”²⁷
16 character of the ‘fear of crime’ — that is, its discursive function within broader political and racial
17 projects,²⁸ or on the social demographic scale of fearful individuals, in ways that lose sight of the
18 individual subject altogether. They have called instead for an approach to the ‘fear of crime’ that
19 recognizes that “subjects are not rational unitary beings with full self-knowledge, but psychosocial
20 subjects with a split consciousness, constantly unconsciously defending themselves against
21 anxiety”.²⁹ It is in this direction that I am also pointing here.

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23 This is not to say that enmity and fear are not relevant to urban security politics; they most
24 certainly are. However, I am arguing that in order to understand their relevance, we must attend
25 explicitly to the paradoxical *investment* of subjects in their Others and not merely to their aversion
26 toward these Others. In other words, we must attend to the dialectic of threat and the *need* for
27 threat.³⁰ This article is an attempt to do just that in order to encourage a more critically incisive
28 engagement with the politics of urban (in)security in geographic scholarship. In pushing against
29 the ‘revanchism’ and ‘fear of crime’ approaches discussed above, which too often treat enmity and
30 fear as originating within a subject or invested squarely in an object,³¹ I argue that security
31 functions through the continual circulation of these affects to produce not just insecurity but social
32 and spatial order more broadly. Identity itself, after all, is not a precondition but an effect of
33 drawing and crossing boundaries between self and Other,³² and it is my overarching aim here to

encourage a practical understanding of ‘security’ as the name for the process by which the borderscapes of subjectivity and power are fabricated, arranged, and administered.

The path I am charting thus proceeds in the dimension of *libidinal* economy — what Hook describes as “a force-field of affects; a set of regular patterns and distributions of libido underwritten by a symbolic frame; which entails relations of passionate attachment and exclusion; that affirms types of group identification and holds certain social formations in place”.³³ It is a “*necessarily trans-individual*” approach, one attuned to the “presence of a type of social-discursive intelligibility *within* what is felt”.³⁴ In this sense it resonates with other approaches exploring how the apparatuses of security operate through affect, especially Sara Ahmed’s work on affective economies³⁵ and that of Ben Anderson and Peter Adey on affective atmospheres.³⁶ As in these approaches, the object of analysis here is neither individual psyches nor emotions *per se* but rather the discursive and affective formations through which individuals and groups cohere at multiple scales. It is also similarly attentive to how these formations and circuits operate through and produce space, a dimension that Proudfoot has recently sought to underscore through his expanded framing of “*libidinal geography*”.³⁷

In the following section, I will clarify what a specifically psychoanalytic approach provides and outline some of the key concepts that I will be using to think through the libidinal geography of urban (in)security. By situating security as a mode of fantasy, I seek to reframe its relation to insecurity as productively ambivalent. Insecurity, I will argue, is neither a self-evidently dangerous condition calling out for securitization nor an “unthought by-product” of security practices,³⁸ but rather an essential component of security as a generative mechanism through which social order itself is administered.

A Psychoanalytic Approach

Psychoanalytic theory provides a way to bridge the discursive and the affective, the thought and the felt, the social and the personal. It is not, as some may worry, a framework limited to a concern with the internal psyche of the individual. In fact, the unconscious, as Lacan claimed, is “outside”;³⁹ it is “inscribed in the same symbolic networks as those that help ground social reality”.⁴⁰ In this sense, the Lacanian perspective is distinctly intersubjective, or more precisely

topological: it “allows us [to] understand how subjectivity, society and space take place through the twists and turns of external intimacy and ‘intimate exteriority’”, what Lacan called *extimité* (translated as “extimacy”).⁴¹ This framework thus offers something that revanchism and ‘fear of crime’ do not: it accounts for how vengeance, fear, and other feelings operate *outside* individuals, through space, and in ways that recursively produce those individuals as subjects *intimately* connected to the threat objects in which these feelings are invested. We will return to the spatial implications of this perspective in the final section of this article. As a first step in that direction, however, this section outlines a psychoanalytic understanding of fantasy, a framing within which I will situate ‘security’ in order to enable a more direct focus on the role of ambivalence within this paradigm.

From the Lacanian angle, the path begins with lack. The insertion of each individual into the symbolic order (the infant’s second birth as a subject in the realm of language and culture) is conceived to constitute a kind of “split”, of unity with one’s mother but also then between ego and unconscious, conscious and unconscious, our sense of self in the symbolic order and our sense that some foundational part of our experience remains lost outside of representation.⁴² This splitting leaves us with an unquenchable and anxious desire to return to this pre-symbolic unity, to regain access to a primordial surplus of satisfaction (*jouissance*) that has not just been lost but in fact may never have existed at all. The impossibility of this return prompts our investment in fantasy. We turn to the Other, but the Other too is lacking; indeed, nothing in the symbolic can save us, and so we draw from another register: in the scene of fantasy we transform *ontological* lack into an *empirical* lack through the production of particular “quasi-imaginary” objects “which, when obtained, would supposedly quench desire and unify subjectivity”.⁴³

Lacan called these objectifications of lack *objets petit a*, “lost” objects whose attainment is always promised but eternally deferred.⁴⁴ We may relate to these uncanny objects with either delight or disgust.⁴⁵ In the case of the former, we imagine an object whose absence leaves us lacking; in the latter, we see a threatening object whose presence pollutes or prevents our enjoyment. In either case, it is perpetual deferral which constitutes the *objet petit a* as what Žižek terms the “object cause of desire”:⁴⁶ fantasy functions specifically through the *necessarily fruitless*

pursuit of this object, and it is this process that acts as the “support” of desire insofar as it is through this performative investment in fantasy that the subject experiences herself as *desiring*.⁴⁷

Fantasy, then, while totally unable to ever actually fulfil our desire, offers us instead the *objet petit a* as a kind of lure which displaces our lack by embodying, in its very emptiness, the wholeness we crave.⁴⁸ This points us toward a crucial distinction in Lacanian theory between desire and drive, a distinction that is central to grasping the fantasy of security.⁴⁹ While both desire and drive stem from our ontological lack as subjects,

desire targets a lost object to cover up our lack — an object that is never found; whereas drive... targets the experience of loss itself as the object. In shifting from object to object, desire moves directly towards each but fixates on none; while in encircling objects, drive misses them all and fixates instead on the libidinal circuit.⁵⁰

The objet petit a is thus what sets desire in motion, luring us from one void to another through the repetitive staging of promise and deferral. Drive points toward these objects as well, but its true aim is to trace a circuit *around* them. In doing so, drive generates enjoyment (again, *jouissance*) precisely through the compulsive re-enactment of our lack: “[E]very enjoyment is structured around a lack... a paradoxical lack of enjoyment”.⁵¹ Two points are worth underscoring here: first, it is specifically through *failure* — not gratification — that fantasy provides enjoyment for the subject; and second, the impossibility of gratification means that *jouissance* is experienced not as pleasure *per se* but as an excessive and unsettling kind of enjoyment that spills over into pain. We are at once compelled to seek this impossible gratification and doomed to fail, and so along the way we find a “paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction”⁵² through these guilty pleasures, these “stolen fragments of *jouissance*” with which we are compensated for our continued participation in the structures of power.⁵³

Fantasy thus involves a kind of libidinal, even ideological,⁵⁴ contract. I will return to this later in the next section, and extend this analysis through a consideration of its spatial implications in the final one, but first I turn to an example of the fantasy of security in action. Hook guides us there:

This facet of enjoyment — that it oscillates between surplus and absence, a “too much” and a “not enough” — once again highlights the intersubjective aspect of the concept. Moreover, if it is the case, as Vighi (2010) argues, that attributions of enjoyment invariably spring from the experience of lack, then it is unsurprising that this lack should be allocated a cause, and, more importantly yet, a *suspect* who is responsible for this lack. *Jouissance*, that is to say, entails an elementary narrative component. The most rudimentary experience of *jouissance* implies already the role — the fantasy — of a culprit, someone who enjoys more than I, or who is poised to steal the little enjoyment that I do possess.⁵⁵

The Gang Member as ‘Whatever Object’

The ‘gang member’ has long been a potent figure within urban (in)security narratives in the United States, and interest in gangs and gang members has increased dramatically among researchers, legislators, and police over the last three decades.⁵⁶ However, in between these proliferating lines of research and law, and alongside a constantly developing array of anti-gang policing practices, we find a curious problem: there is no coherent, settled understanding of what a ‘gang’, and by extension, a ‘gang member’, even is.⁵⁷

A number of critical criminologists have already called attention to this fact, often implicating gang researchers themselves as contributing to, and legitimizing, the incoherence of the ‘gang member’ by readily incorporating dubious police data into analyses that haphazardly reproduce a familiar misreading of (sub)cultural practice and racial difference as violent criminality.⁵⁸ Katz and Jackson-Jacobs, for instance, have argued that this simultaneous inability — or unwillingness — on the part of criminologists to engage meaningfully with the lived realities of gang life has made gang research in the U.S. “essentially an argument over the description of a ghost”.⁵⁹

One way to think about this spectral quality of the ‘gang member’ would be through a lens of oversight or illusion — in other words, as the unintentional product of a flawed but perfectible epistemology. Instead, I want to make a case for taking the ontological incoherence of the ‘gang member’ seriously as a necessary and productive part of how urban security functions in the everyday. Employing the framework of libidinal geography that I introduced above, I suggest we read the ‘gang member’ as an *objet petit a*, an overdetermined but empty site of threat/desire (or more accurately, *threatening desire*) around which the fantasy of security circulates but necessarily never lands.

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3 Consider the civil gang injunction. First invented in California in the late 1980s and since
4 replicated in a number of other U.S. states, injunctions are issued against particular gangs and
5 apply to specific geographic areas (“safety zones”), often naming an initial group of individuals to
6 be enjoined but functioning against anyone later identified, on the basis of police discretion alone,
7 as a member of the specified gang(s). Those thus enjoined are then legally barred from occupying
8 the specified zones and are subject to a number of other restrictions on what would otherwise be
9 legal behavior, such as assembling in groups of two or more, lingering too long in public space, or
10 wearing particular clothing.⁶⁰

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12 One of the distinct features of the gang injunction is its complete reliance on police to
13 determine who will be subject to its sanctions; one can be added to the gang databases that act as
14 ledgers of the enjoined without ever being convicted or even accused of actually breaking a law,
15 and the decisive application of the ‘gang member’ label is almost exclusively based on a subjective
16 reading by police of an individual’s style of dress, tattoos, vernacular, hairstyle, social associations,
17 location, and possibly their self-identification as gang-affiliated.⁶¹ It will likely come as no surprise
18 that such criteria have been roundly critiqued as not only frequently wildly inaccurate⁶² but also
19 discriminatory,⁶³ as these criteria are often conspicuously more indicative of race than of actual
20 gang membership, much less a propensity for violence.

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22 Indeed, the relation of the gang injunction to criminal violence — presumably its *raison*
23 *d’être* — is also not as straightforward as it may seem. First of all, injunction ‘safety zones’ are
24 often not located where we would expect them to be if violent crime prevention was indeed their
25 primary goal. When Los Angeles’ first gang injunction was implemented in 1987 in Cadillac-
26 Corning, for instance, the area had neither the most murders nor assaults in the city,⁶⁴ and the
27 more recent injunction implemented in the rapidly-gentrifying Echo Park in 2014 arrived as the
28 neighborhood was experiencing its lowest rates of violent crime on record.⁶⁵ In fact, the very idea
29 that gangs *cause* crime, Katz and Jackson-Jacobs argue, is “highly suspect”, even as it is
30 systematically taken for granted by criminologists and the wider public.⁶⁶ As multiple researchers,
31 myself included, have thus argued elsewhere, we should analyze civil gang injunctions as tools not
32 primarily of crime-fighting but rather of social and spatial (re)ordering, racial exclusion, and
33 gentrification.⁶⁷

This begs the question: what makes the 'gang member' such a potent threat object in places like Echo Park, where the presumptive signature of this figure, public violent crime, is so nearly absent, and where the ability of police to coherently describe what they are supposedly fighting is so seemingly inept? Can we interpret the paradoxical investment of the neighborhood's (white, liberal) gentrifiers in anti-gang securitization as merely a product of class-based vengeance?⁶⁸ Of fear of crime? I argue that we cannot, that neither of these frameworks is sufficiently sensitive to the affective economy within which enmity and fear are just two elements of many. In order to engage directly with the ambivalence that characterizes this affective economy, we need to account for the role of *jouissance*. Specifically, we need to account not (just) for the threat of the Other, but for the threat of the Other's *desire*.

Slavoj Žižek has proposed thinking about this kind of threat in terms of a perceived or potential "theft of enjoyment", the idea that the Other is poised to "steal our enjoyment... or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment" that stands in the way of our own ability to access the *jouissance* we seek.⁶⁹ Remember that the *objet petit a* is a kind of site where we imagine a surplus of enjoyment has been seized by the Other, giving the Other their very otherness in the form of "some unfathomable *je ne sais quoi*, something 'in them more than themselves' that makes them 'not quite human'",⁷⁰ *petit a(utre)* — a little other. It is this surplus — this excess — (paradoxically embodied in a body that is always actually not *that* different from our own) that really threatens us, Žižek suggests: "the smell of 'their' food, 'their' noisy songs and dances, 'their' strange manners, 'their' attitude to work".⁷¹ Recall that the criteria by which police apply the 'gang member' label operate in precisely this same register: it is the Other's style of dress, their bodily aesthetic, argot, or non-hegemonic way of associating in public that earns them a place in the gang database. Again, we could naively interpret the mobilization of such criteria in anti-gang policing as a reflection of personal prejudice, or of bureaucratic fallibility, a consequence of dullness in the police blade nonetheless perfectible through reform. Instead, I am insisting on a more direct reading: such criteria are intense signals of the Other's (presumed) desire, all the more threatening, and thus politically dynamic, *because* of their incoherence, and their mundaneness.

From this angle, the insecurity represented by the 'gang member' is not the danger of bodily harm but rather that of an encounter with the inaccessible excess of the Other's desire, an

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3 encounter that threatens to shame the subject with an enticing glimpse into a way of life to which
4 she does not have access and thus to undermine the very cohesion of the social order to which she
5 uncomfortably clings instead. The figure of the ‘gang member’, I am arguing, is functional within
6 the security paradigm as a kind of surface formation — a ‘whatever object’ — that provides the
7 social order with a living, breathing personification of disorder in reference to which it “exploits
8 the lack it installs in the subject as a way of reproducing itself”.⁷²
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14 This approach thus offers urban researchers an alternative way of interpreting what may
15 otherwise appear to be two significant paradoxes: first, it can help explain the expansion of anti-
16 gang securitization in places with little actual violent crime; and second, it may offer a clue as to
17 why liberal gentrifiers, who may otherwise disavow expressly punitive policing practices, often
18 continue to actively or tacitly support anti-gang securitization measures that exacerbate racial
19 exclusion.⁷³ Žižek’s discussion of what he calls the “conceptual Jew” is instructive here. A phantom
20 created by anti-Semitic discourse, the “conceptual Jew” does not actually exist in reality but is
21 nonetheless threatening *because* of its nonexistence:
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31 The phantasmatic "conceptual Jew" is not a paternal figure of symbolic authority, a
32 "castrated" bearer-medium of public authority, but something decidedly different, a kind
33 of uncanny double of the public authority that perverts its proper logic: he has to act in the
34 shadow, invisible to the public eye, irradiating a phantomlike, spectral omnipotence. On
35 account of this unfathomable, elusive status of the kernel of his identity, the Jew is — in
36 contrast to the "castrated" father — perceived as *uncastratable*: the more his actual,
37 social, public existence is cut short, the more threatening becomes his elusive
38 phantasmatic ex-sistence.⁷⁴
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42 My argument is that the figure of the ‘gang member’ — we might now more specifically say the
43 “conceptual gang member” — functions similarly in the security paradigm. As I first argued in the
44 opening lines of this article, ‘security’ imagines not a state of reality *per se* but rather a particular
45 social reality rooted in private property relations (we can call this Western liberalism). I am
46 suggesting that the ‘gang member’, precisely through its ontological incoherence, empirically
47 “gives body to that which escapes ([this] symbolically structured) reality”,⁷⁵ and in doing so serves
48 as a libidinal support for that reality’s claims to cohesion and self-evidence. In this way, anti-gang
49 securitization echoes what the psychoanalyst Patricia Gherovici has described as the “underlying
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argument of all forms of racism: 'if only the "others" weren't here, everything would be perfect, and society would become harmonious again'".⁷⁶ Crucially, the point here is not that security actually desires the erasure of these Others; rather, security, like racism, is animated as a political project precisely through the repetitive articulation of this argument, *not* its fulfillment.⁷⁷ Security aspires, in other words, not to eradicate or rehabilitate such threat objects but rather to administer them, to perpetually restage and reposition the specter of insecurity just beyond reach, but close enough to excite. Figures such as the 'gang member', then, must not be understood as (liberal) social order's mortal enemies but rather as the conditions of its very possibility.

Security Symptoms

The perceived existence of *jouissance* thus implies a social relationship, one that exists before the other upon whom this *jouissance* will be projected. So, what even the most elementary experience of *jouissance* necessitates is a type of hating object-relation, a conflicted mode of intersubjectivity, which is always already there, prior to the racial/cultural/social other who will be assigned a position in this negative interpersonal dialectic. The construction of otherness is thus not merely an effect of social construction. It involves also a libidinal component, a prior attribution of stolen enjoyment, a readymade form of resentment awaiting a blameworthy subject upon whom this crime can be pinned.⁷⁸

'Security' gives this subject a name. In the urban Global North, and especially in the United States, the 'gang member' is one such name. Of course it is not really one name but many, a portmanteau blending the names of Others we may imagine refusing to meet our gaze, slipping away into territories we cannot access to enjoy sensations we cannot share. Enmity and fear do not suffice to describe our relation to figures such as this;⁷⁹ rather, our attachment is ambivalent, flowing along an anxious circuit between attraction and revulsion, in the process giving shape to our cities and ourselves.⁸⁰

A final psychoanalytic concept offers itself here: the *symptom*. Freud conceived of the symptom as a kind of "compromise-formation" emerging out of an antagonism between unconscious, repressed ideas striving for satisfaction and the conscious ego's impulse to repress them.⁸¹ Both impulses achieve a partial satisfaction in this compromise, wherein some kernel of repressed truth 'returns' to the subject in the form of what Lacan was initially keen to describe as

a kind of ciphered message,⁸² disrupting the consistency of the symbolic reality to which the ego clings. The insistence of this repressed, overdetermined kernel of truth obliges the ego of some psychic investment; it will not be ignored. For Freud, this investment took on an essentially defensive form: the symptom was a mechanism by which the subject sought to maintain consistency and stability within the symbolic order. Lacan, however, eventually began to conceive of the symptom as something more than a defense, and as something other than a coded message. His shift from linguistics to topology brought with it an understanding of the symptom as an expressive mechanism for organizing *jouissance*. Adopting the image of the Borromean knot and rewriting the concept as *sinthome*, he came to describe the symptom as a creative way of cinching together the symbolic, real, and imaginary registers by which the subject is not just sustained but enabled.⁸³

My central claim is that this is precisely how security works. And by focusing explicitly on the function of ambivalence within the urban security paradigm, as I have sought to do in these pages, I suggest that geographers and others might productively reconsider the relationship between the secure(d) urban subject — the gentrifier, for example — and its Others. Approaching this relationship from a Lacanian perspective, we see that such subjects exist only *through*, not in spite of, the objects of threat and insecurity around which liberal social order coheres; there is no subject without the symptom.⁸⁴ A libidinal *geography* of urban (in)security, furthermore, underscores how these topological relations of extimacy entail more than just the production of subjectivity: space, too, is produced through the organization of *jouissance*. The fantasy of (in)security is not a mental drama unfolding behind the eyes of the gentrifier; rather, it takes place, literally, through the circulation of affect and desire in the practices and assemblages⁸⁵ that produce exclusion, displacement, and cities themselves: prosaic encounters, economic transactions, pizza pubs and record stores, police violence, and a million more. To speak of security as symptom, then, is to say not only that it is a place-making — and, as we see with gentrification, place-taking — paradigm, but that it is one of what Kingsbury and Pile call the “world’s unconscious worlds”.⁸⁶

A symptomatic analysis of security politics would therefore entail focusing less on the phantasmagoric referents against which society supposedly needs protection and more on the

libidinal investments through which these referents are (re)produced and administered in order to cohere, sustain, and naturalize a contingent social order. It would embrace what Anna Secor identifies as the basic insight of topology, “that some spatial problems depend not on the exact shapes of the objects involved but on the ways that they are put together, on their continuities, and cuts”.⁸⁷ Geographers are well-suited to such an approach, as it would account for the role of ambivalence directly, not as an interruption of spatial politics but as integral to how such a politics works. In the context of urban (in)security studies, this would permit scholars to take the incoherence of threat objects such as the ‘gang member’ seriously as an “expression of the impossibility of completion that haunts every system”,⁸⁸ an impossibility that serves as the very condition of the possible in liberal modernity. Indeed, this is precisely why security calls out for our direct attention: as Lacan might put it, the specters of insecurity that haunt our cities do not exist — but they sure as hell *insist*.⁸⁹

¹ L. Lees, T. Slater and E. Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. xxii; C. Cahill, ‘Negotiating Grit and Glamour: Young Women of Color and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side’, *City & Society*, 19(2), 2007, pp. 202-231.

² M. Neocleous, ‘Against Security’, *Radical Philosophy*, 100, 2000, pp. 7-15, p. 9.

³ D. Hook, ‘Fanon and Libidinal Economy’, in A. Gülerce (ed.), *Re(con)figuring Psychoanalysis: Critical Juxtapositions of the Philosophical, the Sociohistorical and the Political* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 164-182.

⁴ J. Proudfoot, ‘The Libidinal Economy of Revanchism: Illicit Drugs, Harm Reduction, and the Problem of Enjoyment’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 43, 2019, pp. 214-234, p. 219, italics in original.

⁵ S. Žižek, “‘I Hear You with My Eyes’; or, The Invisible Master”, in R. Salecl and S. Žižek (eds.), *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 90-126, p. 108.

⁶ C. Heath-Kelly, ‘Forgetting ISIS: Enmity, Drive and Repetition in Security Discourse’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 6(1), 2018, pp. 85-99, p. 85.

⁷ Proudfoot, ‘The Libidinal Economy of Revanchism’.

⁸ T. Müller, ‘The Empire of Scrounge Meets the Warm City: Danger, Civility, Cooperation and Community Among Strangers in the Urban Public World’, *Critical Criminology*, 20(4), 2012, pp. 447-461.

⁹ S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2014).

¹⁰ Quoted in M. Neocleous, “‘A Brighter and Nicer New Life’: Security as Pacification”, *Social & Legal Studies*, 20(2), 2011, pp. 191-208, p. 200. Of course it was not only masterless *men* that ruffled the pleated doublets of the elite, but disorderly *women* as well (See Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*).

¹¹ Neocleous, “‘A Brighter and Nicer New Life’”, p. 200. Italics in original.

¹² K. Marx, ‘On the Jewish Question’, in K. Marx, *Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1843/1992), pp. 211-241, p. 230.

¹³ A.Pavoni and S.Tulumello, 'What is Urban Violence?', *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(1), 2020, pp. 49-76.

¹⁴ N.Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 207.

¹⁵ For example, T.Slater, 'North American Gentrification? Revanchist and Emancipatory Perspectives Explored', *Environment and Planning A*, 36(7), 2004, pp. 1191-1213; L.Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); K.Beckett and S.Herbert, *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ For example, G.DeVerteuil, 'Post-Revanchist Cities?', *Urban Geography*, 40(7), 2019, pp. 1055-1061; S.Murphy, '"Compassionate" Strategies of Managing Homelessness: Post-Revanchist Geographies in San Francisco', *Antipode*, 41(2), 2009, pp. 305-325. While none of these researchers herald the end of hyper-punitive, revanchist policy *per se*, their work does draw a distinction between the punitive and the managerial.

¹⁷ Proudfoot, 'The Libidinal Economy of Revanchism', p. 218.

¹⁸ Stefano Bloch and I have recently considered this elsewhere, offering the term "implicit revanchism" as a way of emphasizing how this dialectic of punitiveness and inclusion is neither innocuous nor new to the security politics of (white) liberalism (S.Bloch and D.Meyer, 'Implicit Revanchism: Gang Injunctions and the Security Politics of White Liberalism', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(6), 2019, pp. 1100-1118).

¹⁹ A.Secor, '"I Love Death": War in Syria and the Anxiety of the Other', in I.Kapoor (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and the Global* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), pp. 97-115, p. 98.

²⁰ Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, p. 208.

²¹ S.Farrall, J.Jackson and E.Gray, *Social Order and the Fear of Crime in Contemporary Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 236.

²² Farrall, Jackson and Gray, *Social Order*, p. 236. See also S.Tulumello, 'From "Spaces of Fear" to "Fearscape": Mapping for Reframing Theories About the Spatialization of Fear in Urban Space', *Space and Culture*, 18(3), 2015, pp. 257-272.

²³ E.A.Fattah and V.Sacco, *Crime and Victimization of the Elderly* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1989); R.Pain, 'Place, Social Relations and the Fear of Crime: A Review', *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(3), 2000, pp. 365-387; D.P.Mears and E.A.Stewart, 'Interracial Contact and Fear of Crime', *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(1), 2010, pp. 34-41.

²⁴ Ditton and Farrall argue bluntly that "what we now rather blandly refer to as fear of crime began life as the 'fear of blacks'" (J.Ditton and S.Farrall, *The Fear of Crime* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2000), p. xv).

²⁵ S.Farrall, J.Bannister, J.Ditton and E.Gilchrist, 'Questioning the Measurement of the 'Fear of Crime': Findings from a Major Methodological Study', *British Journal of Criminology*, 37(4), 1997, pp. 658-679; J.Jackson, 'Experience and Expression: Social and Cultural Significance in the Fear of Crime', *British Journal of Criminology*, 44(6), 2004, pp. 946-966; R.M.Sutton and S.Farrall, 'Untangling the Web: Deceptive Responding in Fear of Crime Research', in S.Farrall and M.Lee (eds.), *Fear of Crime: Critical Voices in an Age of Anxiety* (Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2009), pp. 108-124.

²⁶ D.Gadd and T.Jefferson, *Psychosocial Criminology* (London: SAGE, 2007).

²⁷ Jackson, 'Experience and Expression'.

²⁸ See T.Sassen, *Crime Talk: How Citizens Construct a Social Problem* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995); Ditton and Farrall, *The Fear of Crime*; M.Lee, *Inventing Fear of Crime: Criminology and the Politics of Anxiety* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2007).

²⁹ Gadd and Jefferson, *Psychosocial Criminology*, p. 61. See also S.Maruna, A.Matravers and A.King, 'Disowning Our Shadow: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Understanding Punitive Public Attitudes', *Deviant Behavior*, 25(3), 2004, pp. 277-299.

³⁰ See D.Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); C.Lane (ed.), *The Psychoanalysis of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); S.Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', *Social Text*, 22(2), 2004, pp. 117-139; S.Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

³¹ Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', p. 127.

- 32 S.Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- 33 Hook, 'Fanon and Libidinal Economy', p. 165.
- 34 Op. cit., p. 165, 167. Italics in original.
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- 45 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 180; Stavarakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 50.
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- 47 Žižek, "'I Hear You with My Eyes'", p. 91.
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- ⁶⁵ Bloch and Meyer, 'Implicit Revanchism', p. 4.
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- ⁶⁹ S.Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 203.
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- ⁷¹ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p. 203. See also P.Gherovici, 'Let's Beat Up the Poor!', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 13(3), 2013, pp. 1-28.
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- ⁷⁵ Op. cit., p. 113.
- ⁷⁶ Gherovici, 'Let's Beat Up the Poor!', p. 23.
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- ⁷⁸ Hook, 'What is "Enjoyment as a Political Factor"?'', p. 612.
- ⁷⁹ Of course, the 'gang member' is one of many possible 'whatever objects', which might include terrorists (see Heath-Kelly, 'Forgetting ISIS'), refugees, and others.
- ⁸⁰ This ambivalence is rarely addressed directly in the gentrification literature. A notable exception is the work of Leslie Kern (see L.Kern, 'Selling the 'Scary City': Gendering Freedom, Fear and Condominium Development in the Neoliberal City', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 11(3), 2010, pp. 209-230).
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- ⁸⁹ I am paraphrasing S.Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 177.