

desire and the abject

in the City Becoming-Other

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— ABSTRACT

When The Age renamed the corner of Russell and Bourke streets the Golden Elbow it brought the city into close proximity with an altogether different city. Neither Chang Mai, Hong Kong nor Melbourne, the Golden Elbow was defined by what it could be. Neither one thing (Melbourne) nor another (somewhere else) the Golden Elbow is a space of the city-becoming-other. Through narrative work and news media maps of no-go zones, machines mobilise fear and thus value, from the desire flowing through this abject zone. Capitalism sucks value from these encounters through the production of fear as affect. The city-becoming-other is both enormously productive, and destructive of bodies caught up in the mix. This paper explores the flow of desire and the abject of a city becoming other through a street drug marketplace. The encounter with the abject brings use closer to the beauty and fear of ontological mixity.

— INTRODUCTION

In early 2000 a Bourke Street retailer from either Darrell Lea's chocolate shop or Minotaur's popular culture bookshop decided to work the city into a body when they renamed the corner of Bourke and Russell streets the Golden Elbow. The city entered into full body status, corporeal and transformed into a racist target. Residues of Burma and Thailand could be sensed in the track marks that trailed around the traffic lights and into the amusement arcades. What an exemplar of a city-becoming-body. The Golden Elbow is a sign of fear, it is both an imaginary space and a real space. It is, as Massumi would describe it, real-material-but-incorporeal. This is ontological mixity at its most everyday and most disturbing. The objective

Retailers quit city as heroin moves in

By Sally Finlay

Apr 15 2000 01:40:33

Two prominent retailers are preparing to quit Melbourne's Bourke Street and others are considering leaving amid concern that the worsening heroin trade has made the area unsafe.

Traders say customers are being driven away by shoplifting, stock damage, people overdosing and vomiting, disputes between drug dealers, and large groups blocking the footpaths.

They have dubbed the area around Bourke and Russell streets as the Golden Elbow, a reference to the notorious Asian drug-growing region known as the Golden Triangle.

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/20000415/A5418-2000Apr14.html>

in this paper is to propose some alternative ways to make sense of city spaces where signs of injecting drug use bring us into contact with different dimensions of the city.

There is a deep concern with safety in modern cities, most usually safety from strangers who use drugs. A number of social and cultural theorists including Bauman¹ and Beck have critiqued this focus on safety through a critique of the ubiquitous risk of our risk society. Bauman in particular recognises that the anxiety of modern city life has an ontological dimension:

The sources of insecurity are hidden from view and do not appear on the maps the newsagents stock, so you can neither locate them precisely nor try and plug them. However, the causes of the unsafety, those strange substances you put in your mouth, or the strange humans who enter, uninvited, the familiar streets you walk, are all too visible. ... Except for the writers of scholarly books and a few politicians (as a rule politicians not currently in power), you hear little about 'existential insecurity' or ontological uncertainty'. Instead you hear a lot and from everywhere about the threats to the safety of streets, homes and bodies, and what you hear about them seems to chime well with your daily experience, with the things you see with your own eyes.¹

Bauman creates a social wound, the dissolution of a structured, civil society. His redemptive project of re-imagining a caring society and an inclusive city needs originary, perhaps even ontological wounds. Bauman cites Bourdieu, arguing that the wound is a deregulated post

industrial society of *precarité*: where insecurity extends from economic concerns to the incapacity to make plans for the future.²

Bauman's current quest to write a romantic past founded on a caring social democracy is a resolute gesture of defiance in the face of pervasive neo-liberal disciplinary forces. Maybe Bauman is also re-articulating a long *durée* story. The *precarité* that is at the heart of Bauman's contemporary anxiety really may just be the tail end of a modernity built on vain attempts to capture the present. His anxiety about the modern city community is a recapitulation of an older suspicion of signs. As he expands on the nature of the modern city subject, his project is a fear of a life of sign reading, or perhaps, by extension, the insufficiency of a semiotic self.

... the cities in which most of us live nowadays are 'large, dense and permanent clusters of heterogeneous human beings in circulation', places in which one is bound to mill in an 'ever-changing large crowd of varied strangers moving among one another' we tend to 'become surfaces to each other—for the simple reason that this is the only thing a person can notice in the urban space of lots of strangers'. What we see 'on the surface' is the sole available measure by which to evaluate a stranger. What we see may promise pleasure, but it may also portend danger; when it is but surfaces that meet (and always in 'passing'), there is little chance of negotiating and finding out which is which. And the art of living in a crowd of strangers prevents such a chance from materialising—stopping the encounter short of soaking beneath the surface is its most common strategem.³

The over-dependence on surface and the risks inherent in sign reading are key elements of Bauman's totalising account of fear in the modern city. This encounter with signs contrasts with the encounter between Virginia Woolf and a male scholar on an Oxbridge riverside as discussed by Theresa de Laetis in her reflections on poststructuralist semiotics⁴. De Laetis uses the encounter to examine the interstices of marxism, psychoanalysis and semiotics. In this detailed tracing through Eco and Peirce, de Laetis finds a space between the orthodox workings of rationalist semiotics for a story of how the effects of signs can modify a person's tendency towards action, their disposition, their habit. This less than conscious tendency shows the subject as an instance of textuality, somewhere between semiosis and practical action, both cognitive and non-cognitive. The effects of sign encounters—Peirce's emotional, energetic and logical interpretants—create habit change through these encounters with the world. This is not simply an individual semiosis: 'Their significate effects must pass through each of us, each body and each consciousness before that may produce an effect or an action upon the world'. Micropolitical practices using unwritten texts constitute the most potent encounters and might produce habit-change and even 'significate effects'.⁵

If only Bauman had read de Lauretis. He may have a less pessimistic vision of encounters in the modern city. He may also have appreciated the complexity of encounters and the need to move beyond surface-depth frameworks in order to understand city experience.

In her exploration, De Lauretis revisits Peirce's objects and reminds us that the object, as an ontological set of properties, provides the social, cultural and ideational context for understanding the effects of signs. A new subject is derived from this reformulation, a subject of complex habits resulting from semiotic interaction with 'inner' and 'outer' worlds⁶. De Lauretis suggests that there is a mutuality between the subject and the social landscape. Social reality is as much constituted by subjects' habits, as habits are constituted through semiosis. As we know, walking the city can make the city, as much as the walker.

Our account of the city, with its origins in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi focuses on the real-material-but-incorporeal, where the incorporeal is to the body as energy is to matter,⁷ and where energy and matter are mutually convertible modes of the same reality. In this formulation the anxieties about sign reading so prevalent in accounts that eschew the dissolved semiotic self are subordinated to other, more productive dimensions of the city-becoming-other.

In this paper we explore some encounters with the signs of the street drug market. We do this in order to bring to light how encounters can produce fear of drug users and fear of the city. What we hope to make apparent also is an alternative formulation of the productivity of these encounters. In the past, encounters with signs of the abject have been taken as metaphors for the order-disorder binaries. Our account will propose a re-think about the abject and how it relates to modern consumptive city spaces.

— THE DRUG USING BODY IN THE CITY

The most familiar way to understand injecting drug use is through the mythical story of will-less subjects on a journey of suffering and redemption. Drug use is pathological pleasure seeking arising from a loss of will. An alternative account of drug use can be found in the work of Gilles Deleuze alone and with Felix Guattari. Deleuze suggests that drug use *per se* is not necessarily pathological. Drugs like meditation are one way to encounter the world. It is the continued quest for drugs as a mechanism to become-other that is problematic.

A key to understanding Deleuze's contribution to thinking about drug use is to appreciate the ontological position from which he writes. For Deleuze, the world is made up of matter-energy. All objects (organic and non-organic) are composed of the same material. We are formed through processes or 'machines' that 'individualise' us into our familiar forms. Individual bodies connect with each other to form 'assemblages' of desire.⁸ These assemblages can be between humans, organic and non-organic objects. There are no sovereign individuals with a discrete consciousness or subjectivity. For Deleuze, we are collective. Desire is not an

attribute of the individual, rather it is a flow of energy through an assemblage. Drug use, for Deleuze is a means through which individuals alter their speed of perception, not unlike meditation, so that they can see the world in its de-individualised state. When intoxicated, the boundaries of the world collapse and meld into each other. The familiar world disappears and the world becomes 'other'. When we 'become-other' we plug into the matter-energy of the world and see it for what it is. This experience is beautiful, dangerous and horrific.⁹

Drug-using city spaces may not be pathological sites, but rather phase shifts in the city. These are not shifts in time, but in dimension. The drug-using body-becoming-city-becoming-body unfolds through drug use. The city-becoming-other is witnessed through the bodies of this liminal transformation. It is the heart of the city. It is also, by virtue of the force applied by the machines mobilised to eradicate these phase-shifting windows to the becoming city, a source of violence, fear and abjection.

From this standpoint encountering drug use is a little like watching people change the coordinates of the city. In Deleuzian terms, we begin to see the city become-other and encounter the limits of the sensible world. These limits are made visible through an encounter with the street drug user's body. The limits of the sensible world are exposed when the body of the drug user becomes part of the furniture of the city (a body-becoming-city), and when the city becomes bits of the drug user's body (a city-becoming-body). It is the strangeness that arrives in the encounter of the body-becoming-city-becoming-body relation that is the most frightening. This is an encounter with the limits of sensibility in what Deleuze would call *sense*. In the next section we will encounter some signs of street drug use and explore how they can mark the limits of sensibility.

— STREET FURNITURE

When the body is becoming-other, a zone of indiscernability ensues. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest:

Animal, plant, and molecular becomings correspond to cosmic or cosmogenetic forces: to the point that the body disappears into the plain colour or becomes part of the wall or, conversely, the plain colour buckles and whirls around in the body's zone of indiscernability.¹⁰

The body-becoming is fear-instilling. A fear of sense arises when the dissolution of surfaces illuminates the limits of surface and as a consequence the limits of sensibility. Heroin users create a crack or rupture in the spatio-temporal ordering of city space, through the dissolution of boundaries between built form and organic membrane. Heroin users make sense, through forging new connections between human and non-human bodies. In this type of becoming, the body of the heroin user melds with the walls and surfaces of the city. Bodies meld and the distinctions between body and city are blurred.

What creates fear for many is the possibility that the body of the heroin dealer becomes like street furniture, part of the life of the city, one of its permanent features (Body becoming street furniture). This image from *The Age* accompanied a feature piece on how street heroin dealing had become a part of inner city life. It was perhaps a most shocking insight. When heroin dealers plant themselves in different parts of the city and stay, they grow into the walls. Local business often responds to these unwelcome visitors by requesting police action. South-East Asian street heroin dealers in Melbourne make easy targets for police action. The Asian face becomes synonymous with the face of a drug dealer and racist overtones in the fear of the heroin body-becoming-city get actualised through police zero tolerance operations. Violent law enforcement machines punish and scarify drug-using bodies in their efforts to displace these bodies from the city. In an immune reaction, the city turns against these bodies to rid itself of its foreign objects.

Andrew Masterson, *The Age* journalist and now novelist provided the copy for the story accompanying this image.¹¹ A year previously, in 1998 he famously renamed the place as 'smack street' in a descriptive feature piece.¹² His 1998 article caused great displeasure among the local retailers. Subsequent letters to the editor from locals refuted his claims that heroin ruled the street and that the locals had to change the very way they walked down the street—their bodily hexis—to avoid being challenged by eager heroin dealers; '... stopping the encounter short of soaking beneath the surface is its most common strategem' (see Bauman above). The limit of these local sensibilities, the denial of the body as street furniture, is apparent in the letters. The only way in which the 'drug culture' is acceptable in these letters is as one among 'an enormous diversity of other cultures' or as 'a major health issue'. And of course, the anonymity of 'culture' and 'issue' effectively disembodify the encounter, remove the body as street furniture from the street.¹³

At the time of writing of his 1998 piece, Masterson was completing his own hard-boiled crime novel. His 'walk' down Smith Street in this piece had all the hallmarks of his fictive work; gritty, emotional and in some senses realer than real. Most importantly his article, by re-naming Smith Street as 'Smack Street', and making the body as street furniture visible, mobilised a community campaign against, well, mostly everything.

In response to *The Age* articles the Smith Street Traders Association began a campaign to re-dress the street's now tarnished image. On 3 May 1998 a letter to the editor from the Smith Street Traders Association was published as an opinion piece in *The Age*. Around a month later on 11 June the same letter was published again (with some minor changes) as an opinion piece in *The Age* except this time attributed to a different author. The opinion pieces were accompanied by a number of other letters to the editor ranging from 'part of the life of the street' narratives to plain outrage at the street furniture. Interestingly again, even the most



outraged of commentators includes an acknowledgement that injecting drug use is a 'health issue' rather than a crime issue.¹⁴ A characteristic heteroglossia emerges when in the same letter the Traders Association calls for more police action. In increasing degrees of complexity theorists would describe this differently: the narrative analysts would examine the dialogism, foucauldians such as Mariana Valverde¹⁵ would call this a piling up of rationalities, Deleuze would call this a heterogeneous series. All up it is a mess. It would be simplistic to say that the traders, in an attempt to understand the issue, are simply making no sense of the street furniture: they want to talk about the street furniture themselves, in order to deal with it, but at the same time they want other people not to talk about it. They, like the letter writers above, are comfortable talking about the street furniture in abstract terms—as a problem and a plague—but they simply cannot entertain talk about the street mapped in affectual and corporeal terms, as Masterson has done.

Body becoming street furniture (Source: *The Age*, 14 March 1999)

JLF must take some responsibility for this. He was part of the Yarra Drug and Health Forum, a community group that added to the Smith Street Traders Association's woes by constantly beating them over the head with the 'drugs are a health issue not a crime issue' mantra. In attempting to reduce the ferocity of the traders 'immune reaction' to the foreign bodies in the city and demands that violent law enforcement machines punish and scarify drug-using bodies, we may have further compounded the limits of their sensibility by offering them the very abstraction they needed to disembody the encounter and refuse any

habit-change. If only we had seen that the problem was the mobilising of affect through the body of the street, through encounters with bodies as street furniture, and not a problem of definition or the codification of an 'issue'.

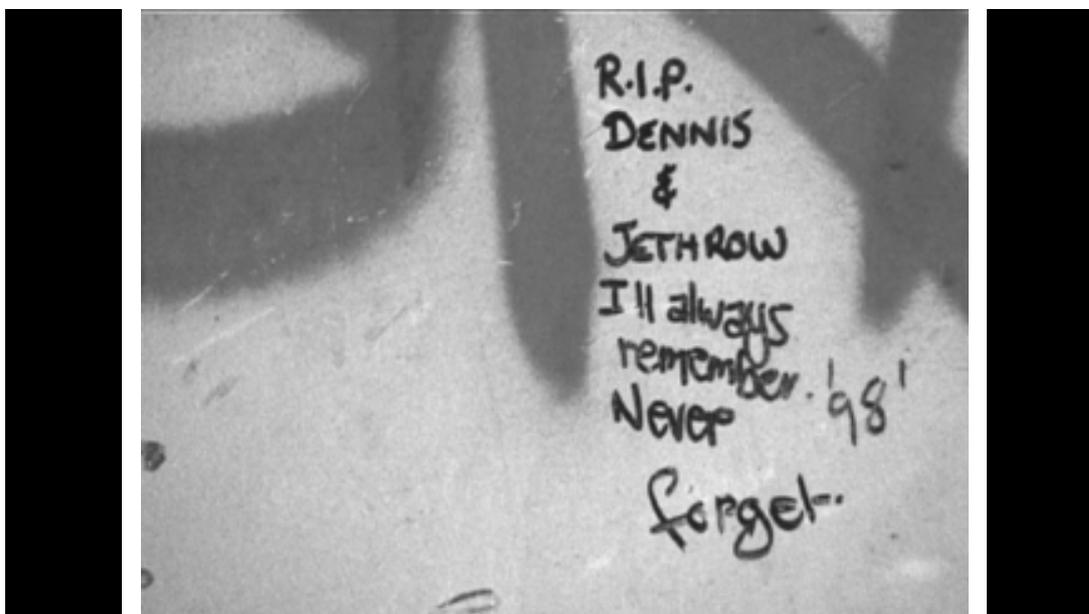
— OBITUARIES

The city cradles the bodies of its dead and we often can encounter the dead in ruptures of ordered space-time. In the isolated alcoves in the centre of Melbourne's CBD are collections of scribbled obituaries to those who have died from heroin overdose (Obituary wall). These alcoves are the shrines and memorials to those loved ones that die in the midst of the city's pleasures. Their bodies are gone, however the dead bodies become inscribed in walls and make sense in the dirty little nooks. The dead bring the surfaces of the city to life.

During fieldwork in Melbourne's street heroin market, JLF came into contact with one of these obituary walls and followed the loving lines of devoted partners. He had an encounter with an imaginary Dennis and Jethrow (Obituary wall). He encountered the lovers who wrote messages explaining why they weren't around for the funeral because friends had not contacted them in time. One obituary, scribbled on a sheet of cardboard was left at an overdose site in the loading bay for a Chinese restaurant. Splattered with mud, the cursive blue biro message said *'Wish I could have been there when you died. Your baby son misses you. He's too young to know, I'll make sure he never forgets you. Love ...'*. This message puts us in touch with the absent lover. An encounter. An alcove measuring 4m × 2m × 3m, filled with used syringes, spoons, used swabs and stinking urine and shit is no place to die and certainly no place to remember the dead. Now it is a place not just to remember the dead, it is a place where the dead become very much alive. The body of the dearly departed has become a part of the city, well, for as long as the obituary remains.

A knot can form in your stomach when you see these images. Knots, boiling points, moments such as these are moments when events inhere in surfaces to produce sense. This rupture in the surfaces between wall, body and time is an encounter. It tells us not just that someone died here. It also tells us that for someone who loved the departed, this place lives on. Somehow when we experience this we also become part of a body of the city. We connect with a dead body and the dead's loved ones through a scrawl on a wall.

This space is memorable as it moves us, it connects us with the dead. We orient ourselves in relation to the movement of affect through encounters in city space. In his discussion of city space Massumi notes the relations between space, landmarks and non-cognitive perception¹⁶. He uses the device of non-conscious tendencies or tropism (tendency plus habit) to talk about a supplement to cognitive maps, or how we orient ourselves in city streets in a



less-than-conscious way. This self-referential orientation relies on landmarks that provide minimal visual cues, but act like magnetic attractors in space—these he calls patches of motion. They ‘polarise movements’ relation to itself in a way that allows us habitually to flow with preferential heading’.¹⁷ He uses motion in its fullest meaning, referring to a mobility across states. The ‘landmarks and their associated patches of qualitative relations can be pasted together to form a map.’¹⁸ It is to one such affect map that we again turn.

Obituary wall
(Source: J. Fitzgerald,
c. 2000)

On the corner of Bourke and Russell streets, opposite the Golden Elbow and adjacent to the lolly shop is a landmark. It is a bus stop where hundreds of my steps have accumulated over the years. As a fourteen year old, I used to wait, guitar in hand, at this bus stop after wandering about the city for an hour or so following my six o’clock music lesson. At around eight o’clock each Friday night, while waiting for the bus to carry me back to the suburbs I used to check the rising pulse of the city, and then sadly take the forty-five minute bus ride home to mum’s salmon casserole.

I remember another set of footprints I left in this exact same spot during ethnographic fieldwork in the winter of 2000. I remember squatting on the ground next to the body of a semi-comatose man. It is about eight in the morning, he had scored some heroin with his girlfriend and then collapsed not long after injecting it in the nearby laneway. In clinical terms, I attended to his overdose. I maintained clear airways and kept his breathing stable until the ambulance turned up, which, thankfully it did. For me, the pavement still carries the smell of his vomit, the temperature of his body, the ever so long time between his breaths,

his blue lips and the sound of his girlfriend bashing against the shop windows in frustration. I cannot walk past these steps without feeling the synesthesia of the encounter that makes this spot memorable. Overdose encounters, whether they produce death or trauma mobilise affects for everyone. These affects can last for years, they can become sedimented in asphalt, glass and spray paint. They do more than mark the city, they are landmarks in Massumi's sense. They make possible the composition of affect maps and the re-orientation of pedestrian encounters through functioning as attractors in city space. They are indeed powerful, not as signs or metaphors of disorder, but as encounters with the limits of the sensible.

— THE ORTHODOX ABJECT

A critical feature of the encounter is that it departs from a signifying practice for a meaning making subject. The Deleuzian encounter uses a different kind of semiotics. Much of the discussion of the abject relies on a semiotics derived from a Freudian or Lacanian tradition. Likewise distinctions in spatial practices are often made between representational practices and signifying practices. Lefebvre suggests that spatial practices need to be understood in three ways: the perceived, the conceived and the lived.¹⁹ Burgin suggests that these distinctions tend to fold together and the ontological separation of these moments of spatial practice tend not to be so separable. Burgin, a psychoanalytic spatial theorist also notes that the abject creates a mixity of forms, and the extinction of identity itself²⁰. The abject brings into focus the 'fragility and permeability, the porosity of the layers between one body and another'.²¹

These moments of mixity are powerful and uncontrollable. De Certeau suggested that it was impossible to control or administer the 'memorable' dimension of the relation between spatial and signifying practices²². For Burgin, the 'memorable' approaches the return of the repressed through the Freudian 'uncanny'. This extinction of identity in the return can become somatised. In psychoanalytic terms, the experience of the uncanny are metaphorised then corporealised in terms like a lump in the throat, or butterflies in the stomach. The body incarnates the relation between the spatial and the signifying. This psychoanalytic somatization or 'appersonization'²³ can be expressed in Deleuzian terms as the becoming body. The difference with the becoming-body and the porous psychoanalytic body is that the Deleuzian subject is of the same matter-energy as the city. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the subject is ontologically distinct from the world and has a psychocorporeal boundary separating it from the matter of the world.

Encounters with the city-becoming-body-becoming-other can be understood in terms of the abject, albeit a slightly different abject. This distinction is not by matters of degree. The Deleuzian body is ontologically distinct from the psychoanalytic subject. The

epistemological ground for the Deleuzian body is also quite different. This reading of the city-becoming-body-becoming-city is a substantive departure from the psychoanalytic discourse on abjection and we will proffer the opportunities afforded by positing the abject in terms of the Deleuzian body.

Massumi notes the problems with locating the production of the subject form in a discourse of psychoanalytic abjection²⁴. Traditional abjection rests on the notion of the projection of individual fantasies and desires onto collective processes, where the boundaries between self and other, although porous, are structurally intact. The self is substantively a bounded space and boundaries, conceived of as founding, make the limitative constitutive. For Massumi, the constitutive function of the boundary is at odds with contemporary renderings of late capitalism. The promise of a cultural boundary transcendent through time is incommensurate with a late capitalism that incorporates boundary in its process.

— THE ABJECT AND CAPITAL

Negri proposes that global capitalism underwent substantial changes in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵ These changes centred on firstly, the *fluidification* of labour force and capital; secondly, the rapid *displacement* of capital and thirdly, an *intensification* of life through the subsumption of many social functions to productive capital.

Massumi completes his discussion of the abject by proposing an indeterminacy in modern relations between identity and the production of the subject-form in capitalist production. The actualised capitalist subject is the hinge, the point of intersection between the commodity relation and the wage relation. The individual subject has a 'yearning' between these two unattainable relations. This incalculable becoming-for-itself is in relation between simulation and fabulation. Fabulation, the de-identification and becoming generic of the modern subject is abjection.²⁶ Connecting to the matter of the world by becoming a model of the world is abjection. There is no anxiety in this movement only total fear as the individual becomes *of* the world.

This model of abjection is a substantial move away from psychoanalytic abjection. Abjection is total fear as it involves connecting with the world and encountering a limit to the sensible. This limit is entirely productive, it is both the engine of capitalism and the limit of capitalism: 'Becoming is virtuality detached from the universality of capitalised specification and returned to the body as a local site of global deviation'.²¹ The abjection in the Deleuzian body is both beautiful and fear-instilling.

The derelict zones of drug use are the engines of late capitalism, not because they are abject, but because they are moments of difference where desire seeks to escape bodily limitation. Fear is the affect that announces the becoming body. The movement of

matter-energy into affect fuels the excitement of city space. No wonder stories about city no-go zones are newsworthy. The force of capital is such that derelict spaces are both incorporated, annihilated and proliferated. Derelict zones aren't fixed to spatio-temporal coordinates because they will appear somewhere else in the city grid by virtue of the activities of the apparatuses of capture. So long as late capitalism produces boundaries and captures space there will always be derelict zones and a city-becoming-body-becoming-city.

Massumi suggests that we should cherish these derelict spaces as part of a resistance to the molar machines that capture life²⁷. The strategy is neither to attempt to stop people from injecting drugs nor to encourage injecting drug use. Drug use is perhaps not the basis of fear. The task is not to try and stop the immune responses of the city, as they are a central feature of modern capitalism. Rather the key objective is to minimise the force of violence applied to bodies involved in the encounter.

— WHAT AN ENCOUNTER CAN DO

How easily people engage with the pleasures of the city, knowing that they too are plugging into the city's lifeblood in an effort to draw out some energy, to become-other. This highlights the arbitrariness of the assemblage in which people participate. How clearly the chaos of the city, of capitalism, of the mix of productive and non-productive bodies can overcome the city walker. The chaos gets captured by machines and formed into bodies and affects. Media machines don't just mediate this capture. The capture brings together any number of self-reproducing systems of business, governmental and paragonmental bodies that thrive on the threat of death.²⁸

Through maps of no-go zones (Figure 3), media machines mobilise fear, and thus value, from the mix. Mass media circulation of violence-legitimizing affect heightens drug-war paranoia. Death, AIDS and military-like interventions by police become necessary to ward off the threat of death.²⁹ This capture and transformation is tantamount to the subsumption of society to capital, when circulation and production become blurred, and when becomings and deterritorializations create surplus value.³⁰ Crime, especially crime against the community such as street drug crime, stands as a limit case for the threshold between command and normative control systems. Encounters are re-captured and capitalism sucks value from these encounters through the production of fear as affect. State function through command and control relies on the encounter for its legitimation and for the alignment of boundaries between these two deployments of power. An encounter can do many things, and all encounters involve and produce bodies in assemblages. Whilst capitalism thrives on derelict zones and those moments of becoming in assemblages, there is no guarantee what will emerge from an assemblage.

— ENCOUNTERS WITHOUT STORIES

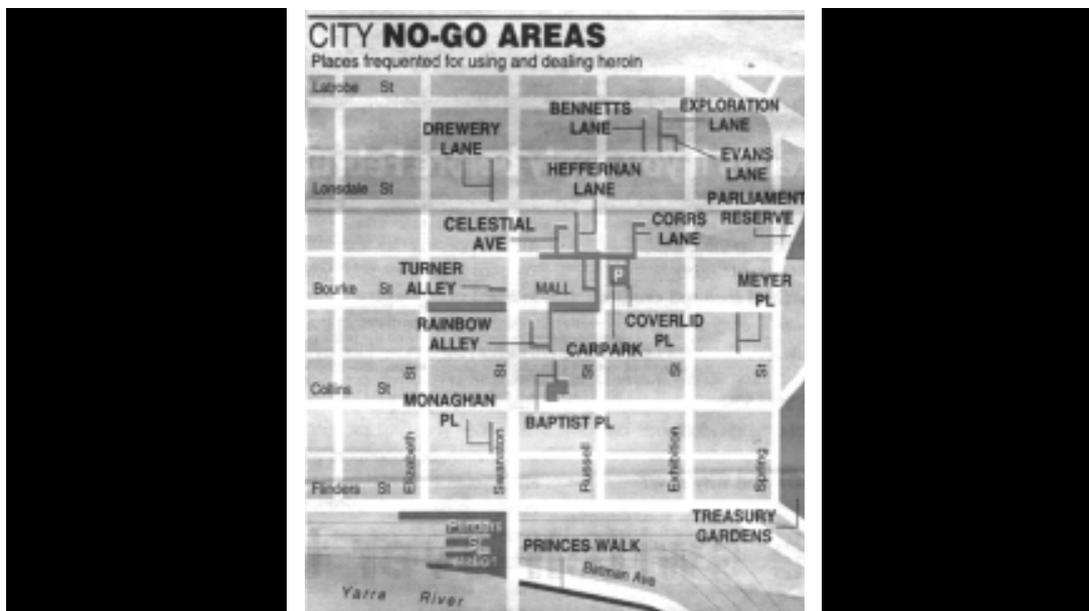
We started with two city stories: the story of the Golden Elbow at the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets and secondly, the story of Zigmunt Bauman's social wound, his anxiety about a world dominated by signs. In this last section we will bring together our alternative accounts of drug use, abjection and encounters with signs to posit an alternative to Bauman's sociological account.

The Golden Elbow elegantly brings into proximity different cities and different bodies. Through bringing so many elements of the story of drugs in Melbourne into a single sign, the Golden Elbow creates a rupture in the usual drug narrative of suffering and redemption. The reference to the orthodox cinematic narrative from the *Man with the Golden Arm* is clear. However the city of 2000 is not the movie with part of the same name. This retail corner of Melbourne is not one thing (a romantic retail precinct) or another (part of the golden triangle). As a sign the 'Golden Elbow' overcodes this precinct through incorporating several stories and several cities into a body part. The media story tries to tell a hard news story. However, the low-brow mockery inherent in the mimesis of the cinema story facilitates the emergence of a nonsense narrative.³¹ As much as the news item tries to portray a realist social reality, the Golden Elbow creates a new story where the Man with the Golden Arm meets Armageddon. At the same time that the Golden Elbow story allows media to extract value from fear mobilised by racist machines, the Golden Elbow also produces an encounter. The nonsensical story about the city is productive in its violence and in its capacity to produce an Other city.

The Other city is navigable through the affect maps we produce. The map of no go zones (City no go zones) goes part way in assembling this map. The red no-go zones and the Golden Elbow, are landmarks through which we can start to assemble our affect maps. On 20 April 2000, in a follow up article to the Golden Elbow news item, feature writer Gary Tippett stretches the Golden Elbow even further in his *Age* feature piece entitled 'Working the Golden Elbow'. There is now a scabby section to Russell Street and he navigates the terrain for us in the opening paragraph:

IF THIS is the Golden Elbow, we must be a little way down the inside of the forearm, about where you need to start slipping in the needle when the veins up higher have scarred over. In other words that scabby section of Russell Street, maybe 50 metres from the corner of Bourke.³²

The nonsense story grows through the production of new landmarks and the production of a more complete map. Tippett takes the original story and starts composing the map for us,



City no go zones
(Source: *Herald Sun*,
19 February 1999)

filling out the rest of the city-as-body-becoming. The risk for the city planners is that the non-cognitive maps that are produced by the likes of Tippett evade conscious intervention and can produce dramatic effects. It is all too clear to Tippett and another *Age* staff writer Peter Ellingsen how drug users navigate the city without spatio-temporal coordinates:

BUT FOR its part in the shifting heroin subculture of Melbourne's CBD, Whitehart Lane would be just another of hundreds of alleys and ways that fracture Robert Hoddle's predictable geometric grid. Maybe 40 metres short of Elizabeth, off Little Bourke, it is a narrow, truncated Y going nowhere, a little intersection unnoticed on your way to somewhere else or to be avoided for the faint, bitter stink of urine from its hidden doorways. To these two young blokes though, it seems to be a treasure. They take in its peculiar assets and grin like winning bidders at an auction.³³

Landmarks such as Whiteheart Lane are memorable for the prizes they deliver. In this case a sheltered loading bay becomes prime real estate for the drug users that *The Age* writers observe. Ellingsen and Tippett are working hard to create a map for us that exists outside cognition.

Not all sign encounters can mobilise fear in the same way. The success of the encounter with the Golden Elbow is that it both evades capture from overarching, symmetrical and residual narratives and connects up with the everyday ontological mixity of bodily habits. This is where Bauman only gets half the story right. It may well be that anxiety and fear are

best thought of as interpretants or affects that circulate with desire through the bodies assembled in city spaces. Sign encounters require a ground of social experience. Drug signs are just lightning rods for the affect mobilised through dissolving and asymmetrical narratives about the city. It is not the superficial surfaces that need concern Bauman, it is the ground, the residual habits that shape the effects of signs. Signs that reproduce narratives can reassure and can make you feel at home. Alternatively, signs that escape narrative structuring can produce fear through making visible the limits of the sensible world.

The ontological mixity brought about through these encounters with the street drug market is what mobilises machines that then try to capture and inevitably overcode city space. Bauman's anxiety is really a concern with capturing the subject as an instance of textuality, a dissolved semiotic subject who is of the world. Bauman suggests the suture for the world's wound is care. It is doubtful whether a humanist remedy is sufficient for the ontological task he has exposed. It is not that care is insufficient, it is that care needs to be mobilised at an ontological level and this is a tough ask using Bauman's ontology.

As a response to resident and trader demands local government in 2003–2004 put extra resources into the rejuvenation of the Golden Elbow. Amusement parlours previously 'tolerant' to the activities of young Asian drug users are getting moved on and the local government has adopted a re-development plan for the precinct. This part of the city will be shiny and new in the not too distant future. The fear of the strangeness that arrives in the encounter with the body-becoming-city-becoming-body relation is averted again—for now.

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