Could the concepts of »metropolitanism« and »thick space« aid our understanding of historical and contemporary urban change? Essays by scholars from both sides of the Atlantic provide interdisciplinary approaches to the complex dynamics of large-scale urbanization. The book opens with conceptual questions regarding the development of metropoles and metropolitan studies. The following sections provide analyses of the social, environmental, and cultural dimensions of metropolitan spaces from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective, such as the role of planning and urban parks, the impact of ethnic diversity and segregation, the place of cinematic visions or the centrality of infrastructures and architecture.

Dorothee Brantz is director of the Center for Metropolitan Studies (CMS) and head of the international graduate research programme »The World in the City: Metropolitanism and Globalization from the 19th Century to the Present«. Sasha Disko and Georg Wagner-Kyora are urban historians who are affiliated with the CMS.

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Thick Space: Approaches to Metropolitanism

DOROTHEE BRANTZ, SASHA DISKO, AND GEORG WAGNER-KYORA

I. A “Metropolitan Turn”?  

It is hard these days to ignore the growing buzz about metropoles. Urban marketing agencies from Berlin to Shanghai, and countless others in between, proclaim cities as spaces where diversity is celebrated, global mindedness is a prerequisite, and where opportunity and innovation supposedly reign supreme.¹ Designated as “metropolitan,” these cities are no longer regarded as clearly identifiable geographical places, but rather as boundless spaces positioned in ever more complex networks of urban relations. Such networks link cities not only to their hinterlands but also to sites all over the globe, both virtual and real. As might be expected, marketing campaigns invoke the terms “metropolis” and “metropolitan” to convey positive images of urban living.² Such marketing campaigns, however, generate idealized images that aim to promote the city as a profitable product to urban consumers—investors, managers, tourists, and, to some extent, its inhabitants. Thus, these images, for the most part, have little to do with the actuality of everyday urban life. Most notably, the inherent frictions


² See, for example, the “Be Berlin” campaign at “be Berlin – Die Hauptstadtkampagne,” 2011, www.sei-berlin.de.
generated by the diversity of urban life styles and inequalities in life standards are played down, if not purposefully ignored in the glossy brochures produced by such marketing agencies.

On the flipside of the buzz, academics have also been adding their voices to discourses surrounding the metropolis and metropolitanism. In recent years, several research centers devoted explicitly to metropolitan studies have emerged in different parts of the world. These centers conduct interdisciplinary research on all aspects of metropolitan existence. In contrast to urban marketing campaigns, their work focuses primarily on the contradictions and conflicts arising out of such multilayered and diversified urban constellations. Moreover, their studies tend to operate on a number of temporal and geographical levels, bringing together historical, contemporary, and future-oriented perspectives that grapple with metropolitan questions from the local to the global scale. Pursuing much broader and more nuanced research agendas, these centers for metropolitan studies provide a necessary counter-tenor to the celebratory tone generated by urban marketing campaigns. Situated somewhere in between academic institutes and marketing agencies, urban think tanks produce specific know-how often in the form of strategy-oriented planning for metropolitan policymakers and their corporate equivalents.

Curiously, though, despite the widespread use of “metropolis” and “metropolitan,” these concepts continue to defy easy definition. Take, for example, Georg Simmel’s pioneering work from 1903, translated into English as The Metropolis and Mental Life, which has become of the foundational texts of metropolitan studies on both sides of the Atlantic. In the original German version, Simmel actually never employed the term “metropolis,” instead he simply referred to the Großstadt, or big city. Perhaps this questionable rendering of

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3 Examples for such research centers and programs in the United States are the Metropolitan Studies Program at New York University, the Program in Global Metropolitan Studies at the University of California at Berkeley; in Canada, the City Institute at York University in Toronto; in Germany, the Center for Metropolitan Studies and the Georg Simmel Zentrum für Metropolenforschung in Berlin; and in Brazil, the Center for Metropolitan Studies in São Paulo.

4 This interdisciplinarity covers a broad spectrum of disciplines ranging from applied fields such as architecture and urban planning to the social sciences (geography, sociology, anthropology) and the humanities (history, cultural studies, literature).

Großstadt as “metropolis” in English translations is symptomatic of the lack of clarity regarding the modern concept of “metropolis,” a problem that the authors in the first part of this volume address. In looking for other texts that could provide a conceptual basis of what constitutes a “metropolis,” the lacuna between critical analyses of the concept and the non-reflexive use of the word “metropolis” looms ever larger. Some urban scholars, who recognize this difficulty, have even stopped using the term. Such refusals, however, do nothing to stem the flood of the use of the term. The word “metropolis” continues to be both evocative and broadly invoked, both in urban marketing strategies and popular parlance as well as in academic discourse. Reflecting on the growing dominance of the word “metropolis,” Susanne Stemmler and Ignacio Farías ask in their contribution to our collection if “we are witnessing a metropolitan turn in our understanding of the city and the urban and what this could mean.”

A “metropolis”—at least within the German academic context—is often understood as a space that allegedly produces, sui generis, a sort of “surplus value,” especially when viewed in comparison to other types of cities. At the same time, the term “metropolis” is also persistently employed in ways that suggest that it is interchangeable with “city” or “urban;” as if all three words carried the same meaning. Or put differently, the characteristic qualities of urbanism—“density,” “population size,” and “heterogeneity,” to cite Louis Wirth’s classic criteria—could all, without much hesitation, be the defining aspects applied to each of the three terms. The question, however, remains that if a metropolis is both a city and urban, is it indeed something more? And, if so, how and why?

The essays collected in this volume seek to address these questions and many more. As the field of metropolitan studies developed in the exchange between

6 See for example Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, Cities: Reimagining the Urban (Cambridge: 2002).
7 See their essay in this volume, 51.
disciplines and has been a privileged site for advancing interdisciplinary approaches, the essays gathered in this volume reflect the heterogeneous composition of metropolitan studies, including scholars anchored in the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and urban planning. Each of the authors, some more explicitly than others, offer their individual insights into debates about the conceptual salience and value of the terms “metropolis” and “metropolitan.” They ask questions such as: What have these terms meant in different disciplinary and cross-disciplinary contexts and how have their usages changed over time? Which other concepts have been used and can be used to understand metropolitan phenomena and in what ways do they depart from conventional analyses of urban space and urban society? Moreover, how did these ideas differ according to the historical and geographical contexts in which they emerged? Margit Mayer’s essay on transatlantic approaches to the concept of “metropolitan space” presents a good example of this type of probing by exploring how and why the term “metropolitan” is utilized quite differently in German and North American discourses.

Thus, providing critical reflections on the concept of the “metropolis” is the central intention of this volume, which can be read as a debate between the authors about the heuristic value of the concept. While, ultimately, it will be up to the reader to decide whether or not it makes sense to consider a metropolis as a distinct urban manifestation, taken together and read against each other, we hope that the essays will open up new venues for thinking about the concept of the “metropolis” and its myriad relations to urban phenomena. Through their exploration of the conceptual parameters, environmental embeddedness, and socio-cultural manifestations of urban spaces designated as “metropoles,” we believe these essays here offer insights into many of the fields of inquiry that make up metropolitan studies today. In turning now to the still evolving concepts of “metropolitanism” and “thick space,” we hope to provide the reader a better understanding of our reasoning behind this volume and to support the calls for an analytically driven use of the term “metropolis.”

II. TOWARD “METROPOLITANISM”?  

The lack of precision in the use of “metropolis” and “metropolitan” is clearly compounded by its tangled and complicated relationship to other terms such as
“urban” and “city.”

“Cosmopolitanism,” another term that attained a prominent status in recent decades, is often implicitly associated with the metropolis and used synonymously with “metropolitanism.”

David Harvey recently remarked that: “[Cosmopolitanism] has acquired so many nuances and meanings as to make it impossible to identify any central current of thinking and theorizing, apart from a generalized opposition to the supposed parochialisms that derive from extreme alliances to nation, race, ethnicity, and religious identity.” This resistance toward the parochialisms of nation, race, ethnicity, or any other purportedly irredeemable category sounds very close to characteristics attributed to the inhabitants of the modern metropolis. Particularly pernicious, however, is that behind such cosmopolitan or metropolitan penchants for diversity lies the assumption that both would be either immune to or simply beyond communitarian politics, which again undermines the very real conflicts at the core of urban societies.

Recently, a group of urban scholars introduced the term “metropolitanism” as a way of expanding existing approaches to understanding the category of the urban. In their introduction to Toward a New Metropolitanism (2006), Günter Lenz, Friedrich Ulfers, and Antje Dallmann propose “metropolitanism” as a new concept for analyzing urban agency in relation to the material, cultural, social, and political processes that constitute daily practices in a metropolis. They no longer conceive of metropoles as unified entities but rather as distinct spaces to live out “urban cultures of difference.” However, they regard this culture of difference as a primarily contemporary phenomenon and as an expression of a

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10 In fact, our own attempts at conceptual stringency were undermined by the lack of consensus around these terms. For example, both “metropoles” and “metropolises” are accepted plurals for the term “metropolis.” Although a case can be made for using only the one or the other, we have decided to allow both accepted plurals to stand in this volume. In this introduction, we have consistently used “metropoles” as we see it as more adequately describing the characteristic relationality of the “metropolis.”

11 See, for example, Günter H. Lenz, Friedrich Ulfers, and Antje Dallmann, eds., Toward a New Metropolitanism: Reconstituting Public Culture, Urban Citizenship, and the Multicultural Imaginary in New York and Berlin (Heidelberg: 2006).

12 David Harvey, Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom (New York: 2009), 78. A general critique of the term “cosmopolitan” can be found in Chantal Mouffe, On the Political (London: 2005).

13 Lenz et al., Toward a New Metropolitanism.

14 Ibid., 19. See also Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton: 1990).
postmodern, post-Fordist urbanism driven by cosmopolitan ideals, global market relations, and multicultural imaginaries. While they acknowledge the historical nature of these developments, they tend to draw a sharp divide between the history of the modern metropolis and the “new metropolitanism” of present-day world cities. Central to their concept of such a “new metropolitanism” is a concern for the reconstitution of urban spaces, both private and public, as locales of multiethnic and multicultural political participation in an era when the nation-state and notions of national citizenship are increasingly postulated as being challenged by global economic and social transformations.15

If, however, the still-evolving concept of “metropolitanism” is extended and viewed not so much as a postmodern phenomenon but rather as a modern affect, then it must be shot through with the manifold contradictions inherent in the condition of modernity. Thus, by invoking a more historically driven perspective of the concept of metropolitanism, we can hopefully avoid falling into the trap of a postmodern rhetoric of a progressive trajectory of emancipation through ever-greater levels of hybridity and cosmopolitan difference/indifference. Metropolitanism—following the definition proposed by Lenz, Ulfers, and Dallmann—can well be the expression of both the atmosphere of proximate anonymity and “el- ective affinities,” as well as of the enmeshed infrastructural and social webs clustered in urban areas that are so constitutive of their topography and sociogra phy.16 In our view, however, metropolitanism must also emphasize the constitutive centrality of the production and reproduction of contradictions and inequalities when analyzing historical continuities and moments of rupture within metropolitan formations. Thus conceived, metropolitanism can serve as a way of analyzing the historical and the present-day metropolis both as the locus of dreams and desires for associational freedom and as a site where the exploitative unfreedom of the wage-labor market and the exclusion of the private property market structure determine the social and spatial organization of the metropolis. In other words, metropolitanism simultaneously produces spaces of liberation through indifference and spaces of oppression through metropolitan differentiation.

Anthropologist Robert Rotenberg, in his 2001 essay “Metropolitanism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Metropoles,” provides a historically grounded definition of “metropolitanism” in terms of the production of urban space and society in nineteenth-century London,
Paris, and Vienna.\textsuperscript{17} His definition of metropolitanism is close to our own concerns: “Metropolitanism was dependent on capital from a colonial economy and transformed urban space by pushing back the jural boundaries while at the same time creating new social boundaries within it.”\textsuperscript{18} Pointing out that “the present efforts at reshaping urban social organization and urban institutions through transnational processes are not new,” Rotenberg makes a strong case that nineteenth-century metropolitanism was a predominantly white, bourgeois, as well as male project.\textsuperscript{19} Following Henri Lefebvre’s tripartite analysis of the production of space, he thus frames metropolitanism as the expression of bourgeois claim-making over “representational spaces.”\textsuperscript{20} Citing factors such as colonialism, schooling, and the literacy and consumer revolutions that fueled the nineteenth-century remaking of London, Paris, and Vienna, Rotenberg argues that metropolitanism “reshaped the city to fit the imagined possibilities of the bourgeoisie.”\textsuperscript{21} His framework, however, plays down conflict. As the middle class remakes the metropole in its image, the rest of the inhabitants are portrayed as passive “co-residents and provincials [who] could merely look and desire.”\textsuperscript{22} While we have a great deal of sympathy for Rotenberg’s framing of metropolitanism, we deviate from his perspective in the emphasis we place on conflict and struggle as co-constitutive of metropolitanism, historically and in the present day. Both sides—the freedoms and the coercions—are integral to our conception of metropolitanism, as are the contradictions, conflicts, and struggles that underlay and continue to underlie them.

III. “\textbf{THICK SPACE}”? \textsuperscript{23}

Perhaps in thinking through metropolitanism as “thick space,” as we have titled this volume, we can achieve more insight into the production and reproduction of the inherent contradictions of metropolitanism, as well as into possible ana-

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\item[18] Ibid., 7.
\item[19] Ibid., 7–9.
\item[22] Ibid., 11.
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lytic approaches for framing socio-spatial complexities. In invoking the concept of “thick space,” it is first necessary to set “thickness” in relation to the concept of “density,” which, of course, has a long history in the disciplines associated with urban studies, and which holds a privileged place in analyses of the relationship between social and spatial components. In his detailed discursive analysis, Nikolai Roskamm has recently shown how the use of “density” was subject to ideological vagaries within urban studies in Germany at specific moments during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What Roskamm argues is that “density,” despite its construction as a “potentially calculable metaphor,” is not a substantive concept. Instead, it is relational and contextual, meaning that it, like all categories of social description, carries implicit and explicit connotations depending on the context in which it is invoked. By employing “thickness” instead of “density,” we hope to flag the problematic causal and normative uses of “density” within urban studies, while still acknowledging its conceptual centrality to analyses of the metropolis. Jan Kemper, in his contribution to this volume, reminds us that it is the responsibility of the analyst to reflexively investigate how meaning is constituted.

Thus, rather than employing the concept of “density,” we would like to propose analyzing metropolitanism as “thick space.” Clifford Geertz’s concepts of “thick and thin description” as ethnographic praxis can be seen as points of departure for our analytic approach. His assertion that “thick description” has the potential to open up an interpretive level that can first “grasp” and then “render” a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, is certainly applicable to the study of variegated social spaces such as the metropolis. While Geertz’s insights present one way to frame metropolitanism as “thick space,” spatial analyses, many of them grounded in a critical geography approach, have become increasingly central for researchers from a variety of disciplines in providing a critical conceptualization of urban processes. Highlighting the importance of spatial dynamics and their social nature allows not only for greater interdisciplinary exchange, it also opens up inquiries into how social processes were and are written into urban space, which, in turn, broaden

24 Ibid., 9–12.
25 Ibid., 9–12.
and deepen our perspectives for comprehending social change over time. Moreover, we are interested in analyzing metropolitan space in all of its facets. For example, Stefan Höhne in his essay on urban underground systems included here, points out that infrastructures are central actors in the “assemblage” of what becomes designated as “metropolitan.” In a similar vein, in her essay, Son-ja Dümpelmann demonstrates that historical debates about the significance of urban green spaces underscore the complexity of metropolitan spatial relations. Going even further, Harold Platt reveals how the “organic city” was a constitutive element in twentieth-century discourses about architecture and urban planning on both sides of the Atlantic. Hence, what these essays all show is that the “thick spaces” of metropolitanism consist of urban assemblages that might give rise to other types of conflicts and contradictions, namely between the human and non-human aspects of urban living.

To further clarify our use of “thick space,” we must also spell out that, much like Geertz, we are not arguing for the privileging of “thick” over “thin” in terms of the appropriate approach or level to analyzing metropolitanism. Instead, we insist on a critical theory perspective that posits metropolitan space as a relational category that is both material and abstract. The importance of approaching metropolitanism from both a thick and a thin perspective becomes apparent in Jane Jacobs’ description of the irreducibility of cities, claiming that they “happen to be problems in organized complexity.” If the concept of metropolitanism is to be of use to urban scholars, it must be able to handle a socio-spatial dynamic that appears to be impossible to grasp in all its facets. Thus, it cannot repudiate the abstract and the analytical that would represent the thin space of the metropolis, as Alexa Färber argues in her essay on hookahs and the construction of urban ethnicity in present-day Berlin.

The term “thick space,” as it was initially invoked in 2001 by literary scholar Terry Harpold in analyzing the graphical user interfaces of computer games, denotes “actual embodied encounters” which are “persistently impermeable, resistant,” unlike “thin space.” In this sense, metropolitanism as “thick space” encompasses the frenetic yet rhythmic temporalities and the palimpsestic spatial consistencies as well as the “actual embodied encounters” that make up the actuality of everyday life in the metropolis. Feminist geographer Doreen Mass-

27 Geertz, “Thick Description,” 29.
ey’s works on “place” bear analogies to our conception of metropolitanism as “thick space.” For example, she posits, that “if it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places. Moreover, such multiple identities can either be a source of richness or a source of conflict, or both.” Metropolitan space is simultaneously interwoven and overlaid with linked networks that refuse to be defined exclusively as social or material or cultural or any other category. And it constitutes a ductile yet structured and structuring meshwork of difference and unequal power relations. For example, Despina Stratigakos in this volume uses various “thick descriptions” of architectural plans and photographs to demonstrate how women in imperial Berlin forged a “powerful female collective” and carved out “spaces of their own,” while at the same time being denied formal citizenship rights, foregrounding the “contested creation of the modern metropolis.” Aspects such as these could fall to the wayside if metropolitanism were conceived of solely from a presentist perspective that insisted on discreet categories rather than looking for the historical circumstances of their intertwinement.

Building on the idea of the texture of intertwinement, a defining characteristic of a historically framed concept of metropolitanism as “thick space” would be its tensility. This tensility is always almost on the verge of being overwrought by daily frictions and fractions, but is something that evinces strength through its flexibility. It could be asked, thus, how do metropolitan spaces obtain this type of tensility, and under what kind of stress and at what points does this flexible strength start breaking down? Can it be and how it is repaired? Symbolic spaces—an aspect that Laura Frahm addresses in her essay on the transformative filmic spatiality of the metropolis and that Wolfgang Kaschuba refers to in his reading of the photographer Willy Römer’s oeuvre of Berlin street life in the first decades of the twentieth century—could represent a key site for the maintenance and restoration of the tensile quality of metropolitanism as “thick space.” The “imaginary” of a city should not be seen as the opposite of the “real city,” as anthropologist Ralf Lindner points out in his contribution to Toward a New Metropolitanism, rather “one could say the imaginary ‘deepens’ reality, gives substance to reality in a specific way. […] The lived nourishes, authentifies [sic] certain mythologies and these in return, give consistence to the lived.”

31 See Stratigakos in this volume, 306.
32 Ralf Lindner, “The Imaginary of the City,” in Toward a New Metropolitanism, Lenz et al., eds., 210–11.
On the one hand, the metropolis as a symbolic space could thus resemble an allegorical tapestry spun from quasi-magical threads seemingly capable of infinite repatterning. Containing a surfeit of meanings in an elaborate and sometimes exuberant mélange of the sacred and the profane, the mixture of conservative and radical elements sometimes bubbles over to reconfigure the tapestry anew—though never completely. On the other hand, if metropolitanism as “thick space” also represents intertwined bundles of interrelated processes that create a thick complexity, and which in turn feed off of a city’s heterogeneity and diversity, then perhaps it becomes more evident that one of the most important distinguishing characteristics of the metropolis and metropolitan areas, including their symbolic spaces, is precisely the existence of real social unevenness, the propensity for all sorts of forms of social tension and the manifold mechanisms developed to contain social conflict and maintain social order. For example, Kristina Graaff’s interdisciplinary reading of the contemporary African-American genre of “street literature,” explores the production of a “street-prison symbiosis” as both a symbolic and material space within the metropolis, demonstrating the interdependent relationship between the state space of the prison and the quasi-anarchic space of the street. She argues that urban racial segregation in the US has a long history that can be traced back to the slave trade as a form of global forced migration, and that these patterns are produced and reproduced in the cultural imaginary and inscribed in the lived spaces of the metropolis.

Thus, what needs to be stressed again in this context is that the “thick space” of metropoles never emerged independently or outside of the global relations in which they evolved. In earlier teleological accounts of the development of human society, conceived from a Western and/or Transatlantic/Eurocentric perspective, the ideological rhetoric of civilization—the erection of modern cities being one of its hallmarks—was used to construct hierarchies between places and people. Alongside Farías and Stemmler’s essay already mentioned above, Richard Rodger’s contribution to this volume points to how, through framing itself as a metropole, London positioned itself relationally towards the rest of England, Great Britain and the world. All over Europe in the nineteenth century, through constructing such an asymmetrical relations through imperial violence and civilizational ideology, imperial nation states initiated a new phase in the process of uneven spatial development that was also embedded in the understanding of what constitutes a metropolis, a point historian Tim Opitz also makes.
in his essay here on imperial late-comer Germany and its first backwater, then rising star capital city Berlin.33

This core-periphery perspective dominated modernization theory as well as subsequent searches for “civil society,” and it is perpetuated in many different analytic frameworks, including a good deal of the “European Cities” literature.34 What is more, such geopolitical narrow-mindedness is also reflected in the different inflections in value given to the terms used to describe massive urban conglomerations today: metropolis, global city, megacity. In this construct, a notion of quality is placed above sheer quantity, qualifying only certain types of cities as “metropoles,” which in turn marks their exemplary and foundational status in a hierarchy of cities on a global scale. As addressed in the opening section of this introduction, in the argot of many a city-marketing guru, “metropolis” is the shorthand for a unique, singular, authentic, to-be-envied city that others strive to emulate but never can. The very fact that city-marketing agencies are so keen to employ the term “metropolis” not only to confer a city with a certain flair but also to increase its heft in the global competition between cities should make


quite legible how underlying and historically grounded chauvinisms and hierarchies continue to haunt the term.

Highlighting the ineluctable connection between the word “metropolis” and the spacio-political construct of the colony and its metropole, however, does not necessitate doing away with the term “metropolis.” Instead, we believe that only a perspective that openly recognizes the hierarchical inequalities so constitutive of the concept can hope to provide an adequate analysis of its historical dimensions and its current salience. Accordingly, and this follows our understanding of metropolitanism as thick space, what is arguably more relevant than the supposed singularity of any one metropolis are the connections that exist between them and beyond them, in the ways that they create order through time, space, and difference, and in how they produce this specific metropolitan networking around the globe.  

Thus, at the same time that we invoke the concept of “metropolitanism” as a networked relationship between metropolitan spaces, we also emphatically reject the idea of globalization as producing homogenization in the sense of a smoothing over of social and spatial inequality. Indeed, numerous urban scholars have demonstrated how geographical unevenness is endemic to modern societies from the classical period of industrialization to the ongoing and multidimensional impacts of neoliberal restructuring on spatial arrangements since the 1970s.  

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example, as Neil Brenner argues elsewhere, “precisely as interconnections among dispersed spaces around the globe are thickened, geographical differences are becoming more rather than less profound, at once in everyday life and in the operation of social, political, and economic power.” Offering a variety of analytic approaches to understanding these interconnections alongside the internal dynamics is central to our intention in this volume. Through taking seriously the materialized discourse of the metropolis—both in terms of historical and current processes and the conflicts and contradictions produced in such processes—this volume seeks to open up new perspectives on the contested concept of the metropolis from an interdisciplinary perspective. Indeed, given the relentless march of the urban through history, especially over the past two centuries and in light of the immensity of its significance today, the circumstances of metropolitan developments demand and deserve sustained and critical scholarly attention.

IV. The Essays

The first part of this volume addresses the history of the concept, and theories and methods for approaching “the metropolis” from a number of vantage points that, at times, reads as a debate between the authors. Our collection opens with an essay by Heinz Reif, who offers a concise introduction of how the concept of “metropolis” has been used by urban scholars, especially by historians, over time and which characteristics distinguish it from other types of cities. Focusing particularly on the positive attributes that have been associated with metropolitan growth, Reif maintains that the magnetism certain metropoles exude stems from a “surplus” of cultural and economic diversity as well as productivity, which generated and generates countless real and imagined opportunities, but which also gave rise to deep-seated inequalities and repeated strife during the twentieth century.

Questioning what they call a “metropolitan turn” in urban studies, Ignacio Farías and Susanne Stemmler present a critical reflection on the inflationary usage of the term “metropolis” and what this means in terms of the relationship between its historical development and its current usage, both in academic discourses as well as by city-marketing agencies. In light of the fact that the histor-

ical development of the term indicates its inexorable connection to asymmetrical relationships and colonial hierarchies, they argue for its deconstruction and insist that only a reflexive understanding can further our analysis while maintaining a critical potential.

Exploring this problem from a different register, Jan Kemper provides the reader with a structural outline for evaluating how cities have been and are studied within the discipline of urban sociology. Kemper argues that analyzing how sociological discourses, from Simmel to “New Urban Sociology,” are framed—whether as “an independent explanatory variable or a dependent variable,” as “freedom or cohesion”—can help us to understand how “meaning is constituted around the metropolis” and can enable us to reflect more broadly on social realities and social change.

Richard Rodger’s essay first traces the origins and then meticulously charts long-term trends in the usage of the terms “metropolis” and “metropolitan” in various English-speaking catalogues. Through analyzing the fluctuations in the frequency of references, he is thus able to provide clues to how conjunctures in the English-language usage of these terms were tied to political decisions and social transformations, and can often be traced to concrete developments, often administrative, within London as well as in London’s shifting relationship to other cities and regions over the past six centuries.

Concluding this section of the volume is Margit Mayer’s essay that examines the varying uses of the terms “metropolis” and “metropolitan” in German and North American academic and public debates. Through a more critical understanding of the nuances of these concepts, she hopes to retain them as analytically useful categories for urban research and for political debates about the contemporary problems and potentials of today’s metropolitan regions.

The second section of this volume turns to the interplay of human and non-human factors in the historical creation of metropolitan spaces, which has been the purview of urban environmental historians. However, in recent years, the

materiality of urban environments and their impact on social processes has also gained prominence in cultural studies and urban history more generally. The concept of “urban assemblages,” in particular, has challenged traditional notions of how urban transformations occur. Thomas Bender, in his contribution to the current volume, explores the explanatory value of such assemblages. Examining the analytical potential of Actor-Network Theory, particularly in terms of studying the impacts of infrastructures on the layout of metropolitan life, he makes a plea for the centrality of urban history, the need to reconceptualize urban space and to rethink the categories of actors and agency.

Stefan Höhne’s essay very concretely reflects upon the agency of such assemblages by looking at the history of urban infrastructures and their impact on the formation of metropolitan practices and identities. Providing a historiographical and theoretical overview of the use of “infrastructures” in urban studies, Höhne argues for a closer examination of the, in his words, “machinic aspects” of urban materiality. He maintains that in order to understand the complexities of urban systems, we need to pay attention to the power configurations that arise through the interconnectedness of natural, political, and sociocultural orders and disruptions.

Harold Platt then takes us on a tour de force through the history of urban planning in the twentieth century. He demonstrates that conceptions of the “organic city” have been at the core of urban-planning concerns on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the twentieth century even though the meaning of “organic” has shifted considerably. He insists that we must include an “ecological perspective” if we hope to understand the different ways of seeing urban places and spaces.

In the final contribution to this section, Sonja Dümpelmann focuses on the reciprocal relationship between urban green spaces and metropolitan growth during the past two centuries. Uncovering the palimpsest of transatlantic metropolitan ecosystems, Dümpelmann examines a broad range of gardens and parks to show how such green areas mirrored more general metropolitan contestations over the use of public and private spaces, social and material conditions, as well as contemporary and historical attitudes toward the commemoration of national identity.

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The third section of this book covers well-trodden terrain in the discipline of metropolitan studies by exploring social and symbolic manifestations of urban spaces. In investigating aspects of the social space of the metropolis, several of the authors point to the specificity of metropolitan space as being one that allows for the recognition and the accommodation of difference, an argument that follows the definition of “metropolitanism” as proposed by Lenz, Ulfers, and Dallmann. In questioning metropolitan processes through a broader understanding of their cultural materiality, however, this revisiting of the grounds of the cultural and symbolic production of the metropolis also presents challenges and at times surpasses older analyses and analytic approaches, and, having benefited from the interdisciplinarity of metropolitan studies, points to new avenues for undertaking metropolitan research.

In the first essay in this section, Wolfgang Kaschuba reflects on the construction of Berlin as a metropolis around the turn of the twentieth century through the lens of Willy Römer’s photographs and the writings of Römer’s contemporaries such as Franz Hessel and Martin Andersen Nexö. Through such tableaus of “urban scenes and sights,” we can “read the streets” and recognize “types and dramatizations” of the metropolis, much of its dynamic being drawn from its rapid growth through immigration and migration and the visibility of both social inequality and conflict.

In her essay, on the filmic production of the thick spatiality of the metropolis, Laura Frahm explores early cinematic “city symphonies” and their more recent successors, such as Koyaanisqatsi (1982) and Los Angeles Plays Itself (2003). She argues that cinematic symphonic cities are “not only crucial in visualizing and amplifying the spatial thickness of the metropolis, they also actively participate in the process of multiplying its symbolic layers.” Thus, the symphonic city is “based on a transformative spatiality,” one that always “always resonates a trace of movement,” and that, while transforming its spatiality, simultaneously reveals a “metropolis in transformation.”

Reading the architectural history of late-imperial Berlin against the grain, Despina Stratigakos reevaluates the construction—physical, social, and imaginary—of the metropolis through the lens of gender. Analyzing guidebooks and buildings designed by women, but also applying “thick description” to a series of photographs and snapshots, she traces women’s interventions into the built environment of Berlin. Through employing a specific architectural language that met their agenda of staking a place for women within the modern metropolis (of course, women of a certain class and race—bourgeois and white respectively), Stratigakos argues that these women created “spaces of their own” within impe-
rial Berlin and asserted “a vision of the German capital that embraced their feminine modernity.”

Moving forward in time to the beginning of the twenty-first century and traveling across the Atlantic to the metropolitan areas of the East Coast of the United States and New York in particular, Kristina Graaff analyzes the relatively new popular black genre of street literature. Employing the genre as a key to investigating the production of a material and narrative “street-prison symbiosis” within the social and symbolic structure of the metropolis, she argues that the genre and its protagonists, both literary and real, provide at once evidence of the interpenetration and interdependency between “a more dislocated, fragmented, and abandoned space” of “the streets” and the regimented state space of the prison, and can be read as “a response to urban segregation processes in twenty-first-century America.”

Returning to Berlin but remaining in the twenty-first century, Alexa Färber presents a “cultural analysis of a consumption landscape that is grounded translocally and has evolved around the water pipe,” as a means of evaluating the usefulness of thick versus thin approaches for analyzing such a metropolitan phenomenon. If the primary questions about “urban ethnicity” revolve around the production of difference, Färber argues that it is then necessary to look for mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within the “thick metropolis.” As relying solely on “thick description” could serve to obfuscate macrolevels of social and economic practices that contribute to the production of urban ethnicity, she advocates a “thick-thin” approach.

The final essay in this volume takes us back to the production of the imperial metropolis of Berlin, exploring how it was staged as the capital city of an empire that could compete with other global empires. Probing the erection of Berlin’s Siegessäule (or Victory Monument in English) that was raised in celebration of the Prussian victory over France in 1870–1871 and of the founding of the German Empire, Tim Opitz suggests that much of the symbolism embedded both in the materiality of the monument itself as well as in the ceremonial festivities around it foreshadows the entrance of imperial Germany as a colonial empire in the years to come. Critiquing histories of this event that only look to it as a symbol of the new nation-state, Opitz instead contends that the very founding of the nation-state of Germany was predicated on the impulse for imperial expansion, situating the metropolis in its complicated relationship between the nation-state and the world.
V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

All in all, the essays gathered in this volume posit a broad range of questions and offer many new insights regarding the conceptual viability of the metropolis and metropolitanism. We do not, however, purport that this volume provides definitive answers to these questions, but rather see this volume as contributing to an ongoing and evolving debate. Furthermore, we are fully aware that numerous important aspects have not been adequately addressed here. For example, given that this volume arose out of discussions held within a transatlantic research network focused primarily on Berlin and New York as exemplary twentieth-century metropoles, the essays in this volume, for the most part, reflect this concentration to the exclusion of other metropoles, most notably those of the Global South. Indeed, in order to decenter traditional metropolitan discourses and also to critically reevaluate the impact of colonial and postcolonial urban ideologies, non-Western perspectives deserve much more attention than they have been given here. Our own collective research is also moving in that direction. In a new international graduate research program, “The City in the World: Metropolitanism and Globalization from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,” we are turning our focus to the global dimensions of metropolitan developments in order to examine how individual metropoles could only gain predominance through their often exploitative engagement with other parts of the world. Through fostering and engaging in this type of research we hope to contribute to the writing of a new and too long neglected chapter in the field of interdisciplinary metropolitan studies.