Imagining Social Transformations: Territory Making and the Project of Radical Pragmatism

Response to Review

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Abstract

Saskia Sassen today and Jane Adams more than 100 years ago are both social scientists and public philosophers of reconstruction. Both offer defining contributions to a philosophical tradition that will be identified here as “radical pragmatism”. Sassen's theoretical stance “before method” serves as a key to understand Addams's locally embedded urban activist projects as a form of social scientific inquiry. Sassen introduces the concept of “territory making” as a spark of hope against rampant and destructive global trends of “expulsions”, which her approach reveals. In this article this concept of “territory making” will be explored in various contexts and with particular attention to Addams's Hull house project. It will be shown how a pragmatist brand of human imagination is critical in “territory making”. This leads to reconsidering the role of art in social transformation projects.

Keywords

radical pragmatism – territory making – expulsion – imagination – Saskia Sassen – Jane Addams

1 Introduction

Saskia Sassen warns that those new phenomena of globalization that give our reality a sense of dazzling complexity, such as worker mobility, runaway global financial markets, mass migration, progressing environmental depletion, and land-grabs, cannot be adequately understood at the abstraction level
of traditional scientific categories. In studying the complexity of new global
dynamics we need to shift more attention to embedded local contexts like the
transformation of urban places in global cities, the legal and material condi-
tion of migrant workers and the local effects of environmental degradation.
Sassen, who has often been brought in connection with pragmatist thinking
(Hickman 2013, Meagher 2013, Sassen 2013b), offers a formidable starting-point
for my analysis.

In this paper I look at Saskia Sassen and at Jane Addams, both in connection
with a philosophical tradition that I call “radical pragmatism”. Using this label,
I intend to point at an intellectual propinquity of the two thinkers and trace
how their highly imaginative projects in the social science offer a promising
approach to addressing exacerbating global problems of today.

What I mean by “radical pragmatism”\textsuperscript{1} is best exemplified by Jane Ad-
dams’s\textsuperscript{2} street-level advocacy approach to transformative social knowledge-
production (Lake 2014). Radical pragmatism can be defined in equal terms as
a methodological stance in the social science and an activist approach, which
aims at social change by means of inclusive and situated inquiry (Addams
2002 [1893]). Central to its functioning is the commitment to link theoretical
concepts back to experientially situated social reality. As an activist program,
radical pragmatism does not content itself with fixing practical problems, but
aims at catalyzing far reaching social change by means of local collaborative
action research. As a philosophical approach it addresses theoretical issues of
social relevance such as women rights, worker conditions under capitalism
or the need for improving sanitation and the environment, and it centers on
education and intellectual involvement of various stakeholder groups. Radical
Pragmatism implies far reaching political reform projects. However, it refuses
to begin social reform top down from the vantage point of a theory, a norm,

\textsuperscript{1} In their article “radical pragmatism” Sullivan and Solove (2013) defend the pragmatist tradi-
tion as a complex whole against Posner’s critique that pragmatism would have no substantial
content as a doctrine and thus yield itself to any political program as an “instrument”. Their
claim is that pragmatism’s insistence of normative inquiry and its democratic commitment
to sharing deliberative projects makes pragmatism a substantive or “radical” social program.
I agree with much of their analysis, but in contrast to their project, I here intend to develop
“radical pragmatism” as a distinct tradition within the mainstream of the pragmatist tradi-
tion. As used and developed in the present article the term “radical pragmatism” does not
rely on the work of Robert J. Roth (1998) who, under the same label, links the pragmatist
tradition to Christian commitments. I admit that I am not very familiar with Roth’s work.

\textsuperscript{2} The Stanford Encyclopaedia article on Jane Addams (Hamington 2014) is the only source I
found where her work was connected with the label of “radical pragmatism”.

an ideology or a philosophical ideology-critique. Instead radical pragmatism makes four practical commitments:

1. **Connect concepts to lived experience (as an iterative process):** radical pragmatism is an inquiry centered approach that takes the pragmatist creed serious to the last consequence that any theoretical concept in the social sciences must be generated, tested and revised in view of lived experience at ground level of human existence.³

2. **Attend to fringes of social systems:** an emancipatory social project, radical pragmatism attends to marginalized, displaced and outcasts elements of national and global systems. It does so not merely as a philanthropic duty but as resource for creative and imaginative social reconstruction. Jane Addams believes that people's sense of responsibility can be formed through local interactions with people and their problems, even under the direst of circumstances. This focus is valued, moreover, as most instructive in social scientific knowledge production.

3. **Foster solidarity though sympathetic and imaginative interaction:** radical pragmatism puts trust in the functioning of human imaginative capacities, of which developing shared sympathies is central for generating a spirit of solidarity. This solidarity can only arise from engaging in shared practices. Yet it is not enough to work together toward solving practical problems. Equally important is the engagement of participants in imaginative exploration of the possibilities, which their situation holds. Art plays a central role in this imaginative transformation.

4. **Strengthen education, communication and participation to facilitate bottom up emancipation:** radical pragmatism aims not primarily at unmasking ideological super-structures from an intellectual standpoint but at developing critical thought as part of general human growth in capabilities and the ability to take responsibility in complex and ramified problematic situations. In realizing emancipatory social transformations, it relies on democracy, which it defined as an associated way of life of shared experience and a commitment to communication as a medium of social deliberation.

In this paper I will do three things: first I will trace Sassen's method of “de-theorizing” social scientific categories as an attempt to reconnect concepts with experience in a complex and accelerating global world. Sassen's method

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³ This does not imply a general dismissal of theorizing at a high level of theoretical abstraction (see Sullivan and Solove 2013).
reveals an advancing global trend of “expulsions” in which people, entire populations and even non-human species and environmental habitats drop off the edges of global systems. Sassen’s approach will also serve as a lens to understand Jane Addams’s activism as a social scientific project. Second, Sassen develops the idea of “territory making” as a spark of hope and a countermovement to this destructive and alienating global trend. I will discuss Jane Addams’s Hull House project as an early paradigm example of territory making. Finally, I will look at the role imagination plays in realizing social transformations through territory making. This leads to an exploration of the critical role of art practices in social transformation projects. Both Sassen and Addams see participation in public art as central in social transformation processes. Throughout the article I refer to one art installation, named “sparkling slum”, that was part of the 2012 London Bloomsbury festival. This installation was a collaborative project between the Peruvian artist Fernando Caceres and myself. It addressed various aspects of the territory making in the context to contemporary and historical phenomena of expulsion.

2 Great Expulsions and the “inside/outside” Divide

According to UN Habitat the number of slum-dwellers worldwide has risen to 863 Million in 2014 (Cordaid 2014). In some cities the slum population has reached 80%. Slum-dwellings are rarely connected to the electricity or water grids and inhabitants exposed to countless threats, including communicable and waterborne diseases, exposure to toxins, and fire hazards, which lead to mortality rates well above the respective national averages. Nevertheless, slums are more than shelters; they are access points to social networks often embedded in cohesive neighborhoods and they provide opportunities for incomes that are, if minimal, irregular, exploitative and almost exclusively in informal sectors, still a source of sustenance.

Experience in local places best discloses the divide between “inside” and “outside” of formal social systems. In 2003, I spent a night in a slum in South Africa. Touring the garden route with a friend, we found a guesthouse advertised in the Lonely Planet guide in a township in Hermanus, a small town near Cape Town. The Landlady advised us to leave our car unlocked in front of her home as a sign that we are under her protection. Her house was the only brick fortified construction in midst of a vast expanse of shacks that were patched together from corrugated metal, plywood and refuse. The pension house was furnished with two camp beds and we were offered a meal of chicken liver and corn-porridge prepared on a camping cooker on the floor.
Realizing that the opposed categories of “indoors” and “outdoor-space” are not as stable as I had grown up to believe, that, on the contrary, they are functions of social, material and technological mediation processes, was one of the stronger impressions I took from the experience. Buildings in London, where I lived at the time, made the difference between “street” and “home” appear far and indisputable. Not only brick walls and finishing layers of plaster, tiles and wall paper create this distance to the “outdoors” realm, but many dimensions in our social matrix support that separation: postal addresses, land registers; municipal water supply and the weekly garbage collection. All these material, legal and functional elements create something beyond protected and comfortable “indoors” spaces: they define places within social systems (e.g. a real estate grid, a political system, a national economy etc.) to which both London properties and their residents belong as “insiders”.

Such “inside” places exist also in Hermanus. As in many parts of the world, only the width of a street separates the township we visited from a very upscale neighborhood of mansions. And this proximity and contrast made the inside/outside divide between formal systems and informal existence acute in my experience.

This and other experiences, that my friend Fernando made in his home country Peru and that we both made during further trips to South Africa, where we volunteered in the Zisize Education Trust in Ingwavuma, provided important conceptual and its aesthetic prompts for an art installation that we collaboratively realized in 2012 in central London as part of the Bloomsbury Festival. Our installation addressed the separation between “inside” and “outside” both as categories of architectural space and in the dimension of social distance: “sparkling slums” was an improvised shelter built from refuse found around one London square within a day. From the outside it was modelled after a slum or favela dwelling; from the inside it was designed as a refined space for aesthetic contemplation. The interior made reference to the ideal of perfect harmony demanded by the Georgian style, using leaf-gold decorated surfaces and hand printed wallpapers. The concept of the installation prescribed exclusivity of a single visitor at a time, who would encounter one piece of art (variably a painting or a music performance) in private.

In her book “Expulsions: brutality and complexity in the global economy” (2014) Sassen traces a type of phenomenon that signifies the contemporary phase of globalization history. Social, political and economic systems do not merely discriminate ever-wider groups, denying them participation in growing wealth and development. Nowadays entire populations are cast aside and pushed over the edge of systems into an informal shadow existence where they virtually vanish from sight and drop out of official records (Sassen 2015a).
One example are sub-Saharan farmers who have been driven from their traditional land in consequence world-wide speculative land grabs, which replace traditional local food crops with e.g. bio-fuel plantations. Being virtually unrestricted in the use of fertilizers and pesticides these industries contaminate wide surrounding areas. Displaced framers are thus ejected into the informality of slum-dwelling and shadow economies in the suburbs of metropolitan cities. Sassen observes the phenomenon of expulsion not only in the developing world: clandestine migrant workers enter Europe and the US without work visa and benefit neither from protections by labor legislation, nor from health care or other social services. Right at the core of western society expulsion takes the form of ca. 10 Million US households who lost their homes due to fore-closures during the recent US credit crunch, and 8 million US citizens that are currently in prison or under some form of penitentiary control. Sassen also includes advancing ecological disaster zones, like nickel mines Norilsk or goldmines in Montana, where ecosystems, and whole landscapes are destroyed and cast aside, tearing holes into the very fabric of national territoriality. All long term residents of western metropolitan cities are well acquainted with phenomena of gentrification, during which urban places become selectively upgraded from cheap and often dilapidated quarters of a predominantly low-income resident structure to upscale neighborhoods. This often brings with it the displacement
of the original inhabitants to cheaper and remoter areas as they are unable to keep pace with the price development in their quarters. Sassen further warns that contemporary processes of upscaling urban neighborhoods in global cities may be mislabeled as “gentrification” in times when the Royal family of Qatar owns more property in London than queen of England (Sassen 2015b).

Many systems and global circuits depend on the outcasts of such expulsion waves e.g. as cheap, flexible and exploitable labor force, as outlet markets, or as political justifications for investments in surveillance systems, yet the same individuals all but vanish from the public record in classical political and scientific accounting.

3 “De-theorizing” and Critical Micro-analytics

Received scientific concepts and categories that economists and social scientists rely on, such as “immigration”, “GDP”, “national territory,” often hide more than they explain. E.g. (another of Sassen’s examples) not long ago the IMF proclaimed a revival of the Greek economy based on official GDP measures. These data, however, concealed that ca. 30 percent of the Greek economy (both workforce and enterprises) had fallen off the official record altogether during the crisis, due to previous layoffs, bankruptcies, and moved into informal sectors. They moved beyond the reach of further GDP statistics (Sassen 2014).

It is, she concludes, dangerous to rely on customary categories and concepts that distinguish objects in conventional ways because these often hide the more dynamic and critical aspects of a reality in flux.

Her methodological approach links Sassen’s work with the pragmatist tradition (Hickman 2013, Meagher 2013, Sassen 2013a). Sassen translates reifying concepts and static explanatory structures into a language of process, of making and of functioning. This demand is as old as the pragmatist tradition (cf. Hickman 2013). “De-theorizing” is how Sassen calls the stance of turning away from aggregated theoretical concepts and toward ground level human experience, micro-processes and actual geographic locations. Tracing back the phenomenon of “globalization” to the transformation of localities in global cities is a way of opening black boxes in social and political sciences; studying “migration” in the mirror of self-descriptions of migrant workers and their employment patterns instead of their numbers in statistical almanacs, gives a voice to phenomena that only exist as “subterranean trends”. So far Sassen’s approach could be summarized as conventionally ethnographic.

The project of radical pragmatism goes further than reconnecting concepts with the microanalyses of contexts of human experience, and the redefinition of reifying categories in terms of processes, activities, and functions (see
Hickman 2013). An emancipatory approach, radical pragmatism develops an acute sense for the political content of scientific categories and for the contribution to forms of oppression, discrimination or “expulsion”.

Sassen expresses this position as standing “before method”, i.e. we are seeing ourselves confronted with established explanatory concepts and methods, which we can neither take for granted nor ignore. Before method is no theoretically innocent position that dismisses dominant explanatory patterns and searching for pre-theoretical facts or protocol sentences, but it is a standpoint of critical incredulity that asks what theory hides in the penumbra around its focus (Sassen 2014). “De-theorizing” destabilizes meanings of received theory-edifices by confronting them with the local, the experienced, and the ignored, marginalized realities that have become excluded from official social accounting. The critical aspect of this method leads Sassen to a standpoint that she calls “theoretical indignation” or “outrage” (Sassen 2014) directed at the brazenness with which reigning systems cover the brute violence by means of entrenching received explanatory categories.

Jane Addams represents the very beginnings of this tradition of “radical pragmatism”. She too decries scientific intellectualism as a critical starting point for social analyses.

Sometimes disparaged as a “not a very original thinker” (Levine 1962, see Brubaker 2004), Addams herself makes remarkable intellectual contributions e.g. to feminism, pacifism, education and democracy. Charlene Haddock Siegfried makes the convincing claim that Addams develops central notions that made it into Dewey’s theory of democracy (Haddock Seigfried 2013).

“De-theorizing” sounds like an apt label for Addams’s social science and public philosophy. Where Sassen sees herself standing before a powerful domain of established scientific categories, Addams sees overbearing social norms, an oppressive understanding of social roles and, most of all, alienation resulting from remote intellectual judgments passed without sympathetic understanding of people’s circumstances.

Addams’s writings offer, in chiseled prose, short practical accounts of human conditions and experience she made during her work at the Hull House settlement, and she draws lessons of considerable reach from them. Yet she eschews the literary genre of a treatise. Theorizing for Addams is a necessity in reconstructing social conditions. Her work takes the form a patchwork of vignettes by means of which theorizing is conducted strictly bottom up.4

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4 I am grateful to Marilyn Fischer, who, in a personal correspondence, pointed out to me that, while “vignettes” is an apt term to describe Addams’s style, these vignettes must not be misunderstood as “illustrations” of theory but they play a constitutive part in the structure of her arguments as “evidence” based on concrete experience.
With irony and wit Addams rebuts theory heavy and ideological contributions sometimes offered at the Hull House debating societies. However, she refuses to obtain an intellectual high ground respective any proposed view (Addams 1911). Her work indicates that social science has clearly another public function than arriving at adequately warranted assertions. Theorizing is an interactive and shared process, and a necessary “capability” (to use Sassen’s term) for realizing an associated way of life. It is the capability of a community to articulate its self-understanding, to share experience and to find a voice, with which to speak back to power. These ideas are central to the notion of democracy, which she and John Dewey developed. Addams devotes many resources in Hull house to facilitate these debates. Further, and of particular interest to the guild of pragmatist philosophers, is that Addams takes a partially humanist stance in the social science by making interpretation central to social science, as Marilyn Fischer poignantly explains in her article (Fischer 2011). Social scientists of her age often took Biology as a paradigm discipline for their work and saw human behavior and evolution as continuous with animal behavior and instincts, and Addams was perhaps no exception. However, she introduced the literary style as a method for communicating ideas. Joslin for example claims that Addams “turned the theory [of literary naturalism] inside out by making social science more like fiction.”(Joslin 2004, text inserted by Fischer (2011)).

Addams’s theorizing in numerous books and articles takes this pluralistic commitment to social science very serious (Fischer 2014). In her scientific endeavors she eschews all methods that start or end with grand theories and Addams develops her very own epistemological standpoint for the social science: (1) it is participative and anti-hierarchical. Addams refuses to see her interlocutors at Hull house from an intellectually distinguished position as “subjects” of her studies. She sees them as partners and collaborators, both in practical and in intellectual endeavors; (2) Understanding is sympathetic: sensitivity to the plights, sufferings, joys and hopes of her neighbors is the key to grasping principles governing their reality. Sympathy is essential in bridging social and cultural distances and disclosing the situations of others and actually “the only

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5 In the above mentioned correspondence Marilyn Fischer made me aware of the role of 19th century understanding of literature in defining Addams’s style and purpose of theorizing. In particular, Addams understood the methodological stance of sympathetic elucidation as the foremost task of literature, as George Eliot had made explicit (an author that Addams admired and quoted). In this respect Addams’s writings must be understood as literary utterances aiming at evoking sympathy in the readers and appealing to the reader’s literary imagination in exploring alternative interpretative stances on a given situation.  

6 Marilyn Fischer makes the link between Addams’s anti-hierarchical stance and her commitment to democracy her manuscript “Pragmatist Ethics circa 1895” (Fischer unpublished). I am grateful for her permission to cite this paper here.
way of approach to any human problem" (Addams 2002 [1912], 7); (3) Research work is collaborative: understanding social reality requires shared engagement with concrete problematic situations (see Fischer unpublished); (4) Her science is local: concepts and abstractions must be understood in their local and place embedded manifestations. (5) Social science is emancipatory: research is an interactive enterprise that uncovers the “subterranean” mechanisms underlying human conditions of hardship. De facto this approach makes Addams’s social science coincide with her social ethics.

Addams leaves no doubt that a settlement is a place of research and knowledge production or “applied universities” (Hamington 2014). In Addams’s own words: “The ideal and developed settlement would attempt to test the value of human knowledge by action, and realization, quite as the complete and ideal university would concern itself with the discovery of knowledge in all branches.” (Addams 1965 [1899]).

The intellectual propinquity between Addams and Sassen is apparent in this characterization. Salient is their shared commitment to challenging established categories by asking how they conceal rather than reveal reality. E.g. Addams uses the metaphor of the “charity visitor” to explain how received concepts and ruling moral principles fail to account for the social realities of her neighbors (Addams 1902): the charity visitor wonders why women in dire situations give priority to buying expensive clothing rather than investing in more “relevant” issues, like education or housing, implying a moral inferiority of the subjects. In contrast Addams adduces her observation that clothing is the only leverage poor women have on influencing the crucial variable of social status and recognition, which determines not only the respect they can command from others but also the level of protection they enjoy and even the economic opportunities they secure. Another example is the charity visitor asking why the poorest seem to have the lowest sense for the necessity of saving surplus money where possible. Many poor people, Addams objects, regard saving money as a bourgeois virtue that pertains only where a certain level of comfort has been achieved. Addams reports how her neighbors in Hull house would regard it as plainly unethical to safe money that could be used to improve their children’s living conditions now. Instead of saving, money these people rely on the principle of a generation contract, in which children provide for elders in return for their upbringing (Addams 1902).

In her time Addams operated at the system’s edges and she was keenly aware of phenomena of expulsion rampant in her age, the causes of which were migration, economic desolation, homelessness, disease, prostitution and, already then, a diversity of substance abuses. Addams clearly perceived the centrifugal tendencies of advancing industrialization as driving forces in expulsions and even exterminations of her day: “In industrial affairs isolation
is a social crime; for it there tends to [be] extermination. The process of extermination entails starvation and suffering, and the desperate moral disintegration which inevitably follows in their train.” (Addams 2007 [1895], 139). To counter this expulsive tendency, she set on the centripetal forces of “fraternal cooperation” and “propinquity [as] an unceasing factor in [the] existence” of the settlement (Addams 2007 [1895], 139). Fischer identifies Addams’s recognition of the power of “propinquity” in generating a sympathetic and shared understanding of a situation and its unique moral demands as one of the cornerstones of Addams’s theory of moral deliberation within situations (Fischer unpublished).

Addams never understood her work as philanthropic descent into zones of exclusion and informality but always as an inclusive enterprise, involving the establishment and the elites of her time in projects of reconstructive solidarity, which were never merely directed at re-integrating social dropouts or “fallen” individuals but also at renegotiating the system’s boundaries and exclusion criteria. Fischer states: “Outsiders might have viewed a settlement’s activities as charitable or philanthropic, but settlement workers themselves viewed their activities first of all as manifestations of a neighborhood citizenship, and the settlement itself as primarily a way of living” (Fischer 2011). Addams herself characterizes the “neighborhood point of view” as “good fellowship and mutual interest” (Addams 1896).

Addams decries that the “charitable agent really blamed the individual for his poverty, and the very fact of his own superior prosperity gave him a certain consciousness of superior morality” (Addams 1902, 11–12). Fischer further points out that the Victorian understanding of “benevolence was profoundly undemocratic” (Fischer 2011).

However, even in Victorian England Addams found congenial people and models for her own work. Toynbee Hall was the first London settlement project and avowedly Addams’s model for Hull House.

The radical vision was to create a place for future leaders to live and work as volunteers in London’s East End, bringing them face to face with poverty, and giving them the opportunity to develop practical solutions that they could take with them into national life.

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The two ideas, of integrating social activism with the academic work of a social scientist, and of reconnecting the intellectual and creative resources of elites with social hotspots of her day, were central concepts that Addams brought home from Europe as a 27-year-old woman, after visiting Toynbee Hall. This was right before she founded Hull House in Chicago.
4 Territory Making

I contend that Addams and Sassen have an interest in similar phenomena and follow related projects. Both observe the effect that global dynamics have on individual lives in local urban places. In particular, they consider immigrant populations from rural backgrounds in their transition to existences in metropolitan cities. Both develop a keen sense for the mechanics of and advancing capitalist system and its expression in conditions at bottom level (Addams 2007 [1895]). Moreover, both Addams and Sassen see local urban places in growing mega cities as the true battling grounds of the transformative dynamics of their respective age.

Yet saying that Sassen and Addams were interested in the same phenomena would seem to ignore one of Sassen's most poignant claims: phenomena and dynamics that define the contemporary stage of globalization are new and cannot be subsumed under previous historical trends. Historians who understand contemporary dynamics at financial markets or the corporate and expatriate land-grab today as a mere continuations of processes that were in full swing during the days of the Dutch or British East India Companies, fail to understand how contemporary developments disassemble and reassemble existing institutions and social capabilities (Sassen 2008, 2014). E.g. the very idea of “national territory” becomes undermined in global cities and their financial centers or in countries that sell out farmland to the PR China or JP Morgan Chase. Making visible, not merely the unprecedented quantity, but the new character or quality of contemporary developments is one of the major contributions of Sassen’s method “before method”. However, Sassen notes that the period we entered since the 1980’s has much more in common with the time preceding the New Deal than with any time after, especially looking at phenomena of income inequality. In fact, Sassen and Addams do face similar situations, with respect to structural traits of the phenomena they study. In her own age, Addams too was confronted with unprecedented social and global dynamics, such as labor migration streams from the south of Europe, waves of mass unemployment, new forms of industrial actions (e.g. the Pullman strike (Addams 1912)) or the first industrially conducted global war. Some of these resembled today’s upheavals in that they also transformed social capabilities and undermined received categories (e.g. family, nationality, or working class).

Sassen’s idea of “disassembling and reassembling” social capabilities, which pragmatists call “reconstruction”, was at the heart of the Hull House settlement project. E.g. Addams sought to build on the sense of loyalty and social cohesion that immigrants knew from life in Italian or Polish villages and which was threatened to get lost (or even turn into destructive parochialism in their
new situations) by redirecting it toward solidarity in the settlement project (Addams 1964, see Fischer 2014). At the same time she was eager to transcend traditional forms of family life in the experimental form of associated life in a settlement, which reassembled capabilities both of familial sympathy and civic relations in a democratic society (Lake 2014, Seigfried 1996).

Sassen’s recent work is a rhetoric movement in two steps: from indignation, outrage and despair exemplified in her “Expulsions” book (Sassen 2014), to a defiant stance of social hope, pointing at new forms of “talking back” and “territory making”. The latter project is yet largely unpublished but for several years she has given much insight into this work during public talks (Sassen 2012, 2011, 2015c). “Global Street” is a term Sassen uses to describe novel forms of urban territory making that use similar strategies of disassembling and re-assembling social capabilities as the new global players do in expulsions. But here cities “talk back” and show resilience to certain global dynamics. E.g. cities sometimes subvert the deathly capacities of cluster bombs or tanks, rendering them quite useless at least in a politico-strategic respect. Thus, she claims, protesters immobilized Tanks in Tahrir Square by leaving the ruling elites with only two alternatives: backing down or creating a Tiananmen-style massacre.

The difference between the “occupy” movement and previous protests is that occupy was not merely a symbolic demonstration voicing a demand or a political message but it was a form of appropriation of urban space of “territory making”. In fact, many complained that a political program was missing from the movement. Occupiers intentionally built structurally permanent camps, they erected an infrastructure for sustained existence in their places and even started food-production by urban farming.

The “Sparkling Slum” installation that I referred to in the beginning of the paper was an invited contribution to the Bloomsbury Festival, an established London public arts event. It therefore did not entirely fit the definition of territory making as informal re-appropriation of urban space, as Sassen explains with reference to the occupy movement. However, not merely in its symbolic references the installation and its production process clearly touched the edges of the formal system of central London and evoked reactions of authorities more than once. It is remarkable to discover the many layers of material, social and administrative fortifications a system like central London has put in place to prevent informality. They are almost invisible in every-day life, but they become very apparent when initiatives go beyond the staked out parameter-space of established practices, as Fernando Caceres and I experienced during the process of planning and realizing the Sparkling Slum installation in London. E.g. twice during the construction process we were stopped by police
patrols and long after the installation was disassembled, a paper trail over the disposal of the refuse material that we had borrowed for the construction from that very square followed us. More serious were those obstacles that we met during the planning process. Our initial design of building a tree house gallery met an unending series of regulatory and administrative hurdles. Fernando Caceres, who is a chartered architect, was able to procure valid construction plans and approvals from structural engineers. The Camden Parks and Gardens Council had concerns, which we could assuage with a modified design. What brought the initial project down (no pun intended) were health and safety requirements demanding a fortified staircase and the presence of a fire assistant on site at all times. This lead to the design of the sparkling slum as an alternative concept. Even for the sparkling slum installation we needed an architectural construction plan. An installation built from refuse after the model of a slum dwelling, these plans found their use as an ironic statement in the interior decoration of the “sparkling slum”.

Sassen’s term of “territory making” asks to be applied to the Chicago Hull house project. The settlement was neither a charity project nor merely an institution to provide public services. At the heart of Addams’s initiative lay the conviction that a settlement must be a collaborative process of creating space for associated living (Addams 1896). This space had to be created by inhabitants and their neighbors in countless initiatives, ranging from gardening, to bookbinding workshops, an art gallery and accommodation for those in dire need of shelter. Importantly, Hull house, like its model Toynbee hall, cuts across class divisions and intellectual divides. Many residents were educated professionals and academics, while others were laborers, immigrant ex-farmers and some individuals who had hit rock bottom due to poverty, domestic abuse, psychological conditions or drug addiction. Hull house was a political and social experiment as much as it was the attempt to provide services in a community (Gross 2009). It was very clearly conceived as proposing, developing and testing new ways of living together in large industrialized cities and thus it exactly fits Sassen’s description of territory making as “making a new version of the social” (Sassen 2012).

It has been fruitful to distinguish “slums of hope” and “slums of despair” in today’s world (Lund, Agyei-Mensah, and Owusu 2008, Stokes 1962, Chambers 2005). Many slums worldwide suffer from such levels of poverty, disease, pollution, hazard and stress that only a total collapse of all alternatives will make people seek refuge there. Such slums will be viewed by their inhabitants as shelters – not homes, and anyone with a sufficient capacity for hope and imagination left will see life there as a temporary stage to be overcome by escaping to better quarters outside.
Other slums have no access to public utilities either, they are not part of any planned and recognized urban grid, buildings have no fortified structures and inhabitants suffer from many of the same problems as the above. Nevertheless, occupants find it possible to identify their lives with these places. They make territory and their hopes are directed at improving establishing their lives locally. Peruvians call such informal settlements “Ciudad Jovenes”: inhabitants of such “young cities” make claim on their plots, however temporary and poor their constructions. They stake out land in the hope that their entire neighborhood will eventually grow into a recognized urban quarter (Fortin accessed 2/2014). Materially and symbolically these places strive to put themselves on the map.

The installation “sparkling slum” made reference to this struggle. Like its Peruvian counterparts it hoisted a Peruvian flag on the roof of the installation. In Peru this is a common practice in Ciudad Jovenes, not only as a way of claiming ownership but also as a means of putting one’s new territory under the legal protection of the national state administration. Interestingly the very conception of nation state thereby becomes re-made: no longer serving as a ubiquitous category of sovereign territorial authority, it now turns into a function and an instrument in people’s territory making. I believe Sassen would take much interest in this idea.

5 Imagination and Art as Social Transformation

In her account “20 Hull House” Addams points at the centrality of art in her settlement project. The first venue that opened on site included an art gallery, showing a collection of some of the finest works Chicago had to offer at the time (Addams 1911).

Countless art initiatives, reaching from music and drama projects to dance and painting lessons encompassed the life at Hull house and made it attractive to many visitors.

Their value to the neighborhood of course had to be determined by each one of us according to the value he attached to beauty and the escape it offers from dreary reality into the realm of the imagination. Miss Starr always insisted that the arts should receive adequate recognition at Hull-House and urged that one must always remember ‘the hungry individual soul which without art will have passed unsolaced and unfed, followed by other souls who lack the impulse this should have given.’

ADDAMS 1911, 371–2
It is important to note that Addams does not fully identify with this justification of art as offering an “escape” and bringing “solace” to hungry souls, as she attributes it to Miss Starr. Addams herself develops a much more acute perspective on the relevance of art in social transformation processes.

It is fair to say that Addams, over the twenty years between 1910 and 1930, came to see art and the possibilities of the imagination as hopefully as she had seen society and the possibilities of the intellect in her relative youth.

Joslin 2004, 225

Addams claims: “Social Life and art have always seemed to go best at Hull House” (Addams 1930, 354). The concept of “imagination” that early pragmatists like Dewey, Peirce and James (Alexander 1990) proposed doubtlessly received crucial ideas from Addams. Important are three aspects (Anonymized 2008): imagination explores and projects possibilities inherent in a situation. Imagining, we cross the boundaries between individual persons and develop a sympathetic understanding of other people's feelings, motivations and plights. Moreover, imagination is primarily a social practice, which Dewey characterizes with an association to theatre performances as a “dramatic rehearsal”.

Susan Griffith (2009) claims, that “Addams made a direct connection between imagination and building world community”. Addams herself says that the “insensibility and hardness” of the word is to a large share due to a lacking imagination, “which prevents a realization of the experience of other people” (Addams 1902, 8). Interesting for the current project is that Addams identifies human imagination with more than the capacity for sympathy and the projection of possible scenarios. If we believe her biographers and commentators imagination has a critical aspect: Griffin, relying on Joslin’s biography, characterizes Addams’s “Moral imagination … [as] illuminating what is not known and shedding light on what has been hidden. [It] encourages the capacity to recognize the actual circumstances of the world, while simultaneously seeing what lies beneath them …” (Griffith 2009, my emphasis)

This explanation points at the central role that imagination can play in the project of radical pragmatism as represented by both Sassen and Addams. By this definition imagination is crucial to two aspects of Sassen’s methodological stance: the one she calls “before method”, which sees realities that remain hidden by theoretical concepts, and also her more optimistic perspective on initiatives of re-appropriating public space by assemblages that “talk back” or initiatives of “territory making”, which envision new possibilities in reassembling social capabilities.
For Addams the arts are both a catalyst and a medium of social transformation and emancipation. Relegating art to a second-rate priority in the face of severe hardship and deprivation would be a contradiction her view.

Through text, melody, rhythm and dramatic elements of performance, music is a powerful *means of presenting alternatives* to deprivation and quotidian life.

Addams tells the story of two girls who suffered the pulling of a tooth by a dentist just so that they could steal a lump of teeth-gold, which was then converted into theatre tickets (Addams 1911, 385). She takes this as evidence for the position of the arts among the primary needs of humans.

Hull House practically demonstrated that the type of projective imagination that distinguishes slums of hope from slums of despair could be kindled in the worst of circumstance. However, it needed particular conditions. Art practices can have a midwife-like role in such social transformation processes. Elsewhere Andre De Quadros and I (2011) have described music and art initiatives involving sex-workers in Mumbai. These girls are outcasts by society and their families and have often lost even the sense that they control their own bodies. Not only did participation in expressive art projects help these girls voice their feelings and reconnect with their own culture and pre-brothel past, but it “facilitate[ed] re-ownership of the mind and body through a gradual discarding of the body language of the brothel” (De Quadros and Anonymized 2011).

Perhaps also this example can fairly be called a form of “territory-making” that re-appropriates one’s own body from an extreme form of “expulsion”. Such interactive art practices yielded not only psychological healing but also significantly improved participants’ physical health and stimulated their sense of responsibility in caring for their own bodily health.

6 Conclusion

This paper is synthetic rather than analytic in character and its stretch is wide. In it I draw lessons from comparing disparate life-worlds, as far apart as slums in the developing world, 19th century urban settlements and today’s global cities, and facilitate a dialogue between the intellectual projects of Sassen’s social science and Addams’s public philosophy. Nevertheless, some closely connected claims form a narrative.
A central claim is that in times of dramatic and traumatic global transitions, social science cannot rely on established descriptive categories and concepts. Social science has to obtain a critical reconstructive perspective (“before method”), which examines local conditions and human experience at ground level. This approach will inevitably cross the lines between social science, public philosophy and social ethics. From there the argument progresses to the importance of practical engagement and the role of action research in the social science. Looking at contemporary phenomena of systemic expulsions, it examines the concept of local territory making as a way of resisting disruptive and violent global trends and achieving social transformations though hope manifested in persistent local and sympathetic initiatives. Finally, territory making is connected with the pragmatist notion of imagination, which outlines the importance of projective intelligence, sympathetic social interaction and the eminent role of art in achieving social transformations.

A more systematic investigation into the role that imagination can play in processes of social transformation would be a logical next step after this contribution and it will be worth at least another paper.

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