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Transnational Trespassings: The Geopolitics of Urban Informality

Ananya Roy



To teach about cities and development, about urban informality, is to engage in the act of representation. That act, as Spivak reminds us in her seminal work on the "subaltern," can be understood in two ways: "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy," "a proxy and a portrait." It is an act that claims an object — to be represented — and through that claim, asserts what Spivak calls a "sovereign subject" — that which can represent.³ The political economy of urban informality is thus also the politics of representation; the poetics of representation is thus also the geopolitics of late capitalism.

GENEALOGIES OF REPRESENTATION

In the urban studies courses that I teach at the University of California, Berkeley, I often start my discussion of housing struggles and policies with two contrasting images, asking students to situate them in time and place (see FIGURES 11.1, 11.2). While the responses cover a wide range of territory and history, perhaps because the discussion is located within courses dealing with developing countries, students most often identify the two images as "Third World." This designation of a horribly dismal, but ineluctably foreign, "Other" is strangely comforting, particularly for a "First World" generation that bumps and weaves its way through panhandlers, bag ladies, and street bums on a daily basis.

Of course the two images belong to quite different moments, and embody strikingly varied genealogies of social documentation and commentary. The first comes from late-nineteenth-century New York, as captured by Jacob Riis.⁴ The



Figures 11.1. and 11.2.

second is a snapshot from a Cali squatter settlement that Edward Popko photographed in the 1970s.⁷ While they both belong to a rich tradition of photographic journalism, Riis's work comes laced with fear:

The sea of a mighty population, held in galling fetters, heaves uneasily in the tenements. Once already our city, to which have come the duties and responsibilities of metropolitan greatness before it was able to fairly measure its task, has felt the swell of its relentless flood. If it rises once more, no human power may avail to check it.⁸

The above passage is quite aptly quoted by Hall in his analysis of "The City of Dreadful Night" — the persistent theme of tumorous tenements and a sick urban body politic that emerged on both sides of the Atlantic in the late nineteenth century.⁹ Riis's words present a distilled and timeless poverty, characterized by what seem to be immutable traits of mob rowdiness, base instincts, and social immoralities. In other words, Riis's touching photojournalism turns out to be an unfortunate, though perhaps unintended, forerunner of "culture of poverty" discourses.

In contrast, Popko's work firmly situates Cali's squatter settlements in the political economy of urbanization:

Urban growth is the result of a hunger-dictated "push" from the country rather than an economic "pull" from the city. The city has created the illusion of providing jobs and opportunities for all. Although many migrants do find work and remain, the benefits often tend to be more social than economic, and thus the only initial change for the migrant is an urbanization of his poverty. . . . Faced with these realities, many urban poor resort to illegal means of finding housing for themselves and their families. They become squatters.¹⁰

Popko's lively photographic documentary is appropriately entitled *Transitions*, focusing as it does on the ways in which rural-urban migrants negotiate and create access to shelter, services, and community.

These two images comprise a constellation of moving similarities but crucially important analytical differences. First, as I have already briefly mentioned, Popko's *Transitions* is ultimately concerned with the political economy of housing and urban change. The central culprit of this narrative, unlike Riis's work, is neither poverty nor deplorable slums and tenements. Instead, it is the very socioeconomic structure of Latin American development and urbanization.

Second, Popko's words — and images — vest agency in the urban poor. Thus, his pithily dramatic note: "They become squatters." Migrants, squatters — these are all terms evocative of movement and action. They are markers of subjectivity, of personhood, of specific notions of citizenship. In contrast, Riis writes of "the other half," a heaving mass capable perhaps of revolutionary action, but subject for the most part to the organized violence of state power, as well as to the more genteel violence of poverty, redevelopment, and social reform. His urban poor, while foremost in the minds of reformers, are the "grounds" rather than the subjects of debate — they have been spoken for in the act of re-presentation. I borrow this terminology of subjectivation, or the lack thereof, from revisionist interpretations of British colonialism.¹¹ It is ironic, but perhaps only mildly so, that the suitable analogy for American urban planning is with colonial liberalism and its inevitably truncated concept of citizenship and selfhood.

This in turn takes me to my third point. If Popko's migrants and squatters are positioned as social and political agents, then they are so because their agency is linked to a wide gamut of shelter practices. Unlike Riis's emphasis on the city's heart of darkness, and the implicit fuel that this provides to middle-class fears and flight, Popko presents squatter settlements as an integral and indispensable part of the urban fabric. His squatters produce the city; they even demand what Harvey has recently called the "right to the production of the city."¹²

I do not mean to suggest that there is some immutable difference between Riis and Popko, between First World and Third World housing and poverty debates. However, I am arguing that there are specific genres of Third World housing and urbanization research that constitute a significant break with the language of urban pathologies and crises. For example, this book has taken as its starting point the well-established tradition of research on urban informality, much of it initially conducted in Latin America in the 1970s, and then continued through the 1980s and 1990s in various settings. The comparison between Riis and Popko highlights differences in such regional productions of knowledge, between the Anglo-American imaginary and the Latin American tradition, albeit in broad brushstrokes. Such differences are not merely at the level of discourse. Regional genres of housing knowledge are in turn rooted in varying pathways of

shelter struggles and housing practices. Holding the two genealogies of representation in tension with one another thus initiates important conversations about housing policy and housing politics, an issue to which I will return.

The photojournalism of Riis is haunted by the specter of poverty as social disease. Riis, writing with great sympathy, recognizes the "grinding poverty" that leads to homelessness, but then labels "young vagabonds" as the deviant "street Arabs."¹¹ In their naming, he demonstrates his unshakeable sense of the poor as essentially different, and of this difference as comprising lawlessness. Today, the American poverty debates continue to coalesce around a few keywords of difference, such as "underclass" and "ghetto." They reveal a cumbersome historical legacy of defining poverty in terms of behavioral pathologies and individualist moralities.¹² In contrast, the Third World research on urban informality, particularly its Latin American variant, has shattered the "myth of marginality."¹³ If the American debates contemplate difference as the "culture of poverty," then the Third World debates map the differential geography of capitalism.¹⁴ If the American debates anguish over the dependencies of the poor — on controlled substances or the state — then the Latin American perspective has made evident the fragile dependence of entire economies in the context of global capitalism. Here, dependency is inscribed as participation in capitalist production, and underdevelopment is seen as constantly produced through development.¹⁵ Within this historico-geographical setting, struggles over urban resources such as housing are carefully noted but rarely celebrated.¹⁶ The brilliance of the Latin American research is to show how the urban poor are able to stake claims to land, shelter, and services, but how such popular mobilizations spin webs of dependency, co-opting the poor through intricate relations of territorialized patronage.¹⁷

But holding the photo-narratives of Riis and Popko in tension with one another is useful beyond the comparison of differences and similarities. This transnational enterprise allows an examination of the norms and standards of urban discourse. Cast in the crucible of development, First World urban theory and urban planning has imagined an underdeveloped Other, the problem-ridden Third World city that must be reformed and managed. On the one hand, underdevelopment is narrated in an idiom of grim and stark crisis. On the other, the First World city is constructed as an ideal type, the normative model to be replicated through developmental practice, its history aestheticized and naturalized. The simultaneous discussion of Riis and Popko unsettles both the anomaly and the ideal. As New York comes to light as the site of a gruesome capitalism, so Cali emerges as the site of innovative shelter practices.

I believe that such transnational strategies constitute an important part of a pedagogy that challenges the normalized hierarchy of development and underdevelopment. For example, over the years, a steady stream of freshmen students have visited my concrete, minimalist office in UC Berkeley's Wurster Hall seek-

ing advice on how to write papers on homelessness in the Third World. They are frustrated by the rarity of the terminology of homelessness as they journey beyond U.S. borders. And while never fully admitted, there is quite a bit of surprise and even profound unease at the idea that "home" rather than "elsewhere" might be the underdeveloped Other, a site of the lack, or failure, so often reserved for the Third World. As they begin their research projects, they find themselves surrounded by a rich array of housing terms that are used in Third World settings — from "slums" and "squatter settlements" to "pavement dwellers" and "informal subdivisions" — a vocabulary that indicates a spectrum of housing practices. In many ways, the dominance of the term "homelessness" in the American context bears testimony to the poverty of housing responses here. In the transnational space between First and Third Worlds, my students are forced to interrogate *their ideas of self and Other, development and underdevelopment.*

It is important to take this a step further. As I have detailed elsewhere, transnational strategies can not only highlight different political economies of representation or deconstruct the normalized standards against which we have judged the Third World, but they can also do something more radical — i.e., pose Third World questions of First World processes.¹⁸ Unlike comparative methodologies that search for similarities and differences between two mutually exclusive contexts, transnational examinations can use one site to interrogate another. For example, in studying informal housing settlements in Texas, Ward looks across the border and asks why similar settlements in Mexico enable higher standards of living. His view of Texas via Mexico allows for an innovative discussion of American housing struggles and policies.¹⁹ Or, in the constellation of poverty representations, the Third World research on squatting raises the question of how and why the American urban poor have been unable to similarly stake claims to shelter and services.²⁰ Such transnational epistemologies have great potential, as in Fraser and Gordon's exploration of internationalist meanings of "dependency" in their discussion of welfare reform, Wacquant's analysis of ghetto studies in the postcolonial sense of a "new urban Orientalism," and Davis's use of the provocative apartheid metaphor of "bantustans" to map socio-spatial segregation in contemporary Los Angeles.²¹ In each case, the mapping of the marginal, the marginalized, makes apparent the margins present within the normal, in the normalization:

I would argue that we can learn from other regions by realizing that it is always the marginal or peripheral case which reveals that which does not appear immediately visible in what seem to be more "normal" cases.²²

THE GEOPOLITICS OF DESIRE

Transnational epistemologies can enable new policy and political possibilities. Thus, in recent decades Third World solutions are being brought to bear on First World problems.²³ For example, there has been a great deal of interest in replicating the success of the Grameen Bank microcredit program. From the Good Faith Fund of Arkansas to microcredit programs in inner cities, such transnational borrowings seem to promise hope for the thorny dilemma of persistent American poverty.²⁴ In the broadest sense, such border crossings are welcome, for transnational policy-making disrupts the teleology of development, which sees Anglo-America as the idealized yardstick against which all else is to be judged. But they require some critical analysis.

If I have earlier advanced the cause of transnational pedagogy, I now call for caution in how the transnational imagination is deployed and used. The attempt to simply mimic success elsewhere is not only pragmatically naïve but also methodologically problematic, for it maintains the universalist logic of development. While in First World borrowings of Third World policies the hierarchy of development and underdevelopment may be reversed, the erasure of geopolitical difference continues through the mechanics of imitation and replication. Against this universalist transnationalism, I argue for a *critical* transnationalism, one given to learning the paradoxes and contradictions of place-based policy rather than copying a litany of best practices or development miracles. To this end, I analyze two forms of transnational appropriation: a growing First World interest in Third World urban informality, and an enduring Third World interest in American urban reforms. Advancing a critical transnationalism, I show how each First World/Third World axis can provide important lessons. These lessons are not the blueprints of success, awaiting construction. Rather, they are historicized lessons about the peculiar vulnerabilities and exclusions that accompany each genre of representation and each model of political economy. It is in this way that the deconstructive critique embedded in critical transnationalism can lead to reconstruction.

THE SEDUCTION OF SQUATTING

The previous fin-de-siècle was marked by rabid discourses about the chaos of the First World metropolis. Likewise, at the turn of this century the Third World metropolis has emerged as the trope of social disorganization and unfathomable crisis. Urban planning emerged as a nineteenth-century drive to rationalize the city. Now, the ideology of "civil society" — a celebration of grassroots movements and self-management by the urban poor — bears the new millennial promise of taming the Third World. From the idiom of crisis, the pendulum has swung to a utopian recovery of Third World urban communities. Academic and policy discourses are rife with tales of self-sufficient squatter settlements, self-help hous-

ing, and thriving women's cooperatives. Particularly important is how this culture of entrepreneurship is being directed against a culture of poverty, a transaction that has taken on the form of Third World solutions for First World problems.

The popularity of such "Third World" models requires a closer look. How is the Third World and its informality represented in the transnational space of knowledge transaction? How, within the geopolitical space of the First World academy, are the practices of the Third World poor depicted and appropriated? Let me take the liberty of drawing upon two pedagogical examples from my academic home. In Spring 2002 two graduate studios dealing with Mexico City were offered in the College of Environmental Design at UC Berkeley. In each case I was invited by the students to provide critical review and advice. The first, a design studio aimed primarily at Master's students in Architecture, chose as its site a squatter settlement. Rather than a design program, the studio pursued a "found objects" philosophy, encouraging students to collect materials from the squatter settlement as inspiration for their designs. During their brief site visit students recorded the sounds of poverty, collected the dirt of poverty, acquired discarded objects of poverty, and returned to Berkeley to make a montage of their excavations. The squatter settlement figured in their imagination as an aesthetic experience, unshakably exotic, undeniably distant. For one student the experience of the squatter settlement was embodied by a battered drum she came across in her wanderings there. Returning to Berkeley, she placed gravel collected from the settlement on the drum, and played it to create contours and shapes that would then determine the topography of her design.

It would be easy to dismiss this exercise as the manifestation of an architectural discipline and profession prone to self-centered ignorance, one where design as an egotistical enterprise can only proceed by being hostile to the knowledge of material realities. Or it could be read as the inevitable epistemic violence of the act of design — and indeed also of the act of planning. But there is something particular about *how* this studio offends that bears consideration beyond the usual diatribe about professional hegemonies.

It is the second studio that reveals the issues at hand. This one was a sophisticated environmental planning studio, co-organized with universities in Mexico City, with students making frequent trips to the site, where they became deeply engaged with its natural and built landscapes. The mandate of the studio was to devise a master plan for Tlahuac, a site on the southwestern perimeter of Mexico City with an unusual ecology of "*chinampas*," artificial agricultural islands developed in pre-Hispanic times now facing extinction through the pressures of urbanization. The studio was an admirable effort, and the first round of design work yielded intricate models, gorgeous drawings, and very real enthusiasm. But in those first models, students were obsessively concerned with the need to create "defensive strategies" for the protection of the *chinampas*. As a reviewer, I asked: "Who are

you defending against?" Their answer was telling: they were defending against thousands of squatters who occupy the land around the *chinampas*. In the multilayered models that had represented every gradient of the topography, every flow and ebb of the watershed, the land that had been represented as blank and empty, as frontier, was in fact the living fabric of the site, inhabited by squatters. "Defending for whom?" I asked. Defending, intentionally in this case, for "intentional urbanization," came the answer — for the bourgeois city, for neatness and order.

Despite their differences, the aesthetic imperialism of the first studio and the well-meaning interventions of the second converge around two issues. The first is the portrayal of the informal city as *tabula rasa*, as clean slate, awaiting the sovereign hand of the architect-planner to write upon it. In the context of environmental planning, squatting was seen as a destructive process, while "intentional urbanization" was seen as environmentally safe. This allowed the history of the natural landscape to be carefully considered, while the history of the lived landscape was ignored. "If you had started not with slope gradients and water tables but with maps of land ownership or cartographies of livelihood, what would your master plan have then looked like?" I asked the students. "What would your design look like if you defined environmental sustainability not simply as the restoration of the *chinampas* but as the survival of the people who occupy this land?" In subsequent rounds of design, these environmental planning students met these challenges admirably, taking into account both informal housing and informal work, and situating them within the context of global change.

The second issue brought to light by the studio is less easily mitigated, however. It is the aestheticization of poverty.³⁵ By this I mean the gaze that looks toward a squatter settlement and sees in the original lines of beauty, the primitive organicism of the vernacular. Take, for example, the accompanying sketch, done in 1983 by a group of architecture students as they studied a squatter settlement in Colombia (see FIGURE 11.3). The student sketch contrasts provocatively with Popko's 1978 black-and-white photo-documentary of squatting. The contrast does not simply express a distinction between representation and reality. What is at stake are varying genealogies of representation. In particular, the aesthetic imagination sees the squatter settlement as organic beauty, a museum-like space that is pure and clean. Elsewhere, I have linked this representational genre to the museumification practices of colonial elites who sought to recover spaces of native tradition amidst the modernization of colonial planning.³⁶

One element of this aesthetic argument is the emphasis on the architecture of squatting, on the physical expression of informality. Thus, Serageldin talks about "an architecture of empowerment — that is, a built environment which responds to the needs of the poor and destitute, while respecting their humanity and putting them in charge of their own destinies."³⁷ This is indeed a noble sentiment, but the question that needs to be asked is whether or not a design imagi-



Figure 11.3. Artist rendering of squatter settlement, Colombia, 1983.

Courtesy of UC Berkeley Slide Library.

nation can foster empowerment. Is the architecture of squatter settlements their most significant component? Seeing squatter settlements as primarily a built environment has crucial implications. For example, it would imply that the "upgrading" of such settlements should primarily entail a package of environmental reforms. And it would further imply that the form of such upgrading should be determined by aesthetic considerations — specifically, by the aesthetic desires of professionals as they interpret informality and poverty. Such of course has been the common route of interventions in the urban informal sector, and often with unfortunate consequences.

For example, in a recent critique of such aesthetic interventions, Verma incisively analyzes how the award-winning Indore Slum Networking Project (Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Global Best Practices at Habitat II) was a miserable failure on the ground.³⁸ Citing extensive surveys, interviews, and local newspaper accounts, Verma tells a compelling story of how slum upgrading came to be defined primarily as the provision of physical infrastructure and landscaping. But such environmental reforms failed to take account of the socioeconomic structure of the slums. Thus, the Aga Khan Award citation claimed that by paying for and building individual toilets and connections to the water and sewerage systems, the project allowed slum dwellers to "enhance their quality of life and hence their pride in home ownership."³⁹ But Verma shows how households were unable or unwilling to make such an investment. The reasons varied: some were tenants

with no incentives to engage in these physical improvements; others lacked the space; others were without access to water mains, and thus could not waste their precious water on toilets. Without total hook-up, the sewage lines choked, and other slum residents became even less willing to connect to this infrastructure. Even the community-development projects lost legitimacy because the people's most urgent problem, choked drainage, was not being solved. Other components of the upgrading never materialized so that slum residents, when asked about "soft landscaping," said that if they did not have enough water to drink, how could they possibly maintain plants? And yet, as Verma provocatively argues, all through this period, the project received international accolades and transnational attention. When the British Prime Minister, John Major, arrived to pay a visit, the slums were once again aesthetically presented for viewing. A cartoonist in a local paper captured the spirit of the situation in his drawing of two IDA engineers in conversation saying: "If only we had the information of his arrival a little earlier we could have changed the huts into bungalows!"³⁰

This is not to say that the provision of physical infrastructure or the aesthetic upgrading of slums is necessarily unimportant or unwelcome. Indeed, as Jacobs perceptively notes, aestheticization can be much more than simply the "legitimizing skin of capital accumulation." As she argues, this "staging of difference" can "activate political struggles that are fundamentally about how different interests should be registered (aesthetically and materially) in the space of the city."³¹ The issue then is not aestheticization per se, but rather what Peattie calls "aesthetic politics."³² In the context of slum redevelopment, my concern is with how such environmental reforms are seen as the sole component of urban policy agendas, and how in turn these aesthetics represent the sensibilities of urban professionals. The Aga Khan Award citation for the Indore project claims definitively that "landscaped riverbanks now overlook a clean river that was formerly a sewage-filled, low-water river lined with decrepit slums."³³ However, such an aesthetic evaluation (the upgrading of the built and natural environment) is clearly different from other social criteria that could have been used to gauge the project's success: the upgrading of livelihoods, the upgrading of housing rights, the upgrading of political participation. Such, I will argue later, is the ideology of space — that what is redeveloped is space and buildings rather than people's socioeconomic experience. The parallels with gentrification are obvious.³⁴ And it is thus not surprising that slum redevelopment projects have often triggered processes of gentrification.

The Indore Slum Networking program stands in sharp contrast to the model of infrastructure provision developed in the Orangi Pilot Project, Karachi, Pakistan. Here, urban professionals provided expertise, but squatters determined the hierarchy and sequence of priorities, opting in this case for a sewage system that served their particular needs.³⁵ Similarly, Appadurai describes the "toilet festivals" organized by an alliance of NGOs in Mumbai. At each celebration, "functioning public toilets

designed by and for the poor, incorporating complex systems of collective payment and maintenance with optimal conditions of safety and cleanliness" are unveiled.

When a World Bank official has to examine the virtues of a public toilet and discuss the merits of this form of faeces management with the defecators themselves, the condition of poverty moves from abjection to subjectivation.³⁶

While we run the risk of romanticizing these self-help efforts, of instituting a model where the poor dig their own sewers and design their own toilets, there is nonetheless a difference between aesthetic purity and what Appadurai calls the "politics of shit."³⁷ The shift from one to the other is the move away from the professional hierarchy of needs to a public discourse about the politics of needs.³⁸ Here, the aesthetic agenda is transformed into what Jacobs terms the "activated spheres of practice."³⁹

Another element in the aestheticization of poverty is the interpretation of squatter settlements as vernacular, authentic, or traditional. Peattie asks: What do we see when we see a Third World shantytown?⁴⁰ She notes how Perlman, in her effort to undermine "the myth of marginality," presented as frontispiece of her book of the same name a photograph of a Rio *favela* spilling down a hillside. In the place of older representations of disorderly and chaotic slums, Perlman saw in this image a neighborhood in progress, careful planning, and innovative construction techniques. But at what point does this urban reality shade into pastoral nostalgia? In her article, Peattie reflexively notes how she too, in Venezuela, fell in love with a squatter settlement:

It took an American anthropologist struggling for a sense of balance in the modern technology utopia of a new city-planning project to look up the beach, see fragile beauty at the human scale, and fall in love with exactly that. . . . Both the building technique and the style of the house we bought evoked small-settlement roots, but to the builders the solution was dictated by poverty.⁴¹

In the context of teaching a transnational housing course, Peattie's writings returned me to my own field notes and field photographs. How had I gazed upon the squatter shack and the peasant hut? How had subsequent audiences interpreted my images? What were the spaces that had become icons? I reflected upon Amirjan's simple shack in a Calcutta squatter settlement (see FIGURE 11.4); and Noyon's peasant hut in a Bengali village (see FIGURE 11.5). How was it that various viewers had seen in them the pure elements of indigenous building, the simplicity of simple people? Had I not too? In the act of selection? In the act of representation?

The aestheticization of poverty has numerous implications. Most importantly, it mutes the social, political, and economic narratives that also underlie



Figure 11.4. Amirjan's shack, Patuli squatter settlement.
Photo by author, 1997.



Figure 11.5. Noyon's family hut, Tetutola village.
Photo by author, 1997.

poverty. Amirjan, a desperate migrant from the West Bengal countryside, had built this shack over the course of many months, only to see it demolished a few weeks later. Noyon's family owned no land other than this tiny homestead plot. Unable to feed their children, they sent all three daughters to work in the city as domestic servants at the age of six or seven. To present these stories as embodied in aesthetic structures is to imagine poverty or the informal sector as a precapitalist domain, free of material corruptions. Primitive organicism, as it turns out, can be directly related to a brutal primitive accumulation.

These aesthetic impulses also contain a particular ambivalence toward the commercialized aspects of poverty or informality. If the poor peasant's mud hut or the desperate migrant's flimsy shack become icons of vernacular beauty, how should we interpret the forms that coexist in the differentiated spaces of the rural-urban interface? For example, in Noyon's village, a well-to-do peasant wife proudly poses with her few possessions — a poster of the *hajj*, tinsel lanterns left over from Ramadan, clothes on a clothesline, her daughter in her fanciest dress, a newly painted house (see FIGURE 11.6). In Amirjan's squatter settlement a grandmother and child are similarly proud of their acquisitions: a refrigerator, solid furniture, electricity (see FIGURE 11.7). Taking note of this upgrading means challenging our aesthetic politics, that which leads us to turn away from the forms of capitalization that the upwardly mobile urban and rural poor engage in, and aspire to, in the spaces of informality.

The aesthetic unwillingness to see urban informality as a commercialized domain has served urban policy poorly. For example, Doshi's famous and award-winning Aranya Low-Cost Housing Scheme in Indore has been presented and re-presented as "creating a community character by establishing harmony



Figure 11.6. Peasant home, Tetutola village.
Photo by author, 1997.



Figure 11.7. Squatter home, Patuli squatter settlement.
Photo by author, 1997.

between people and the built environment, imitating the scale and security of a village community."⁴² Steele has even credited Doshi's research institute, the Vastu-Shilpa Foundation, with having discovered the "hidden order" of slums, including the determination that the "monthly incomes of the economically weaker sector are underestimated in the national statistics as they do not take into account the income from the informal economy."⁴³ Here, the informals are seen at once as entrepreneurs and as precapitalist or authentic villagers. But notice the surprise with this turn of events:

In a local report prepared for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, which the Aranya Low-Cost Housing Scheme won in 1996, one observer expressed alarm at the prevalence of brokering on the project site, outside a 1-block area defined by 80 demonstration houses designed and supervised by the architect. . . . This suggests a lack of community spirit in the project.⁴⁴

The mythicized community is, of course, constantly undermined by the processes of capitalist differentiation within informal settlements. In the case of Aranya, Steele goes on to note that this particular "observer" found that only 15 to 20 percent of the original plot owners still held the plots originally allotted to

them, with the resale price of plots averaging approximately ten times the original purchase price.⁴⁶ Perhaps the poor had been entrepreneurial; perhaps they had been displaced through gentrification. Regardless, the dynamics of the Aranya project makes evident the broader processes of urban development at work in the informal sector. And often government policies of slum upgrading, resettlement, or redevelopment accelerate, rather than negate, such housing and land markets.⁴⁶

Are there other ways then of seeing a slum or squatter settlement? Can we search for its essence not in the simple, poverty-induced form, but in what the processes of capitalization seek to mimic, in what Appadurai has called "houseless domesticity"?⁴⁷ What are the hegemonic forms and meanings that are thus invoked? How is this domestic desire a part of the circuits of capitalism through which housing is produced and lived in? If we understand a squatter settlement not as a static form of traditional dwelling, but as a dynamic process of capitalism, how may we formulate policy toward it (see FIGURE 11.8)? How can we move from what Spivak calls the "desiring subject" to a "theory of interests"?⁴⁸

Such issues, of course, can only be discussed in the context of our geopolitical desires. The aestheticization of poverty is the establishment of an aesthetic and aestheticized (rather than political) relationship between viewer and viewed, between professional and city, between First and Third Worlds. It is an ideology of space. Such a relationship is expressed primarily in the form of nostalgia. This



Figure 11.8. Upgrading.
Photo by author, 1997.

is a pastoral nostalgia that craves the rurality of a magical countryside in a rapidly urbanizing world, a nostalgia that, as Williams notes, imagines a landscape without labor.⁴⁹ In an unpublished paper about slum upgrading in India, Renu Desai, a key contributor to the production of this book, shows how high-profile slum upgrading in India has been primarily a series of aesthetic interventions. The aesthetics, she argues, imagine the informal inhabitant as the embodiment of "an idealized traditional lifestyle that is derived in some manner from the physical elements tied to an 'Indian identity in architecture.'" Such, for example, is the logic of the "vernacular-based" housing projects of Correa and Doshi. Desai notes that the most commonly circulated photograph of Correa's Belapur housing project is a romanticized image of two women carrying water, as though from a well:

The question that jumps out at me is: Does the Belapur housing project not provide running water to each house? Why portray a cumbersome daily activity in this idyllic manner in relation to a housing project?⁵⁰

As she points out, the reason is that Correa, as the aesthetic professional engaged in a "monologue," has determined that the village well is a space of social interaction, an open-to-sky space, in his schema of space hierarchies.⁵¹

Such forms of representation also contain an "imperialist nostalgia," an impulse that Rosaldo has interpreted as a "mourning for what one has destroyed."⁵² In the case of Aranya, the mysterious "observer" is quoted as having concluded the report thus:

The Aranya project is based on good intentions in which the innocence of the professional designers is symbolized in the 80 demonstration houses. If only slum resettlement projects were simply architectural problems capable of being overcome with good design.⁵³

How should we understand that operative term, "innocence"? It seems imperialist nostalgia simultaneously establishes innocence and allows the excavation of an "authentic" and "exotic culture" through paradigms of salvage. What is thus salvaged is seen as timeless and unchanging, standing in opposition to the modernizing forces of history.⁵⁴ Thus, Pugh, in a recent piece on the "sustainability, architectural contributions, and socio-economic roles" of squatter settlements contrasts self-help as a "human" impulse with the "modern" as "20th century technology."⁵⁵ While the aestheticization of poverty can be seen as an attempt to return dignity to the urban poor, it must also be seen as a geopolitical enterprise that ignores the terribly difficult conditions under which the poor survive and struggle and aspire.

But there is one more question that must be asked about the seduction of squatting: Why is it so prevalent at this particular historical moment? Why is

there so much policy interest in Third World informality? A straightforward answer is that such celebrations of poverty serve and reinforce the agenda of neoliberalism, shifting the burden of coping from the privatizing state to the shoulders of the poor.⁵⁶ But what are the rhetorical mechanisms of this displacement? Of the popularity of this displacement?

The popularity of such a view is amply evident in the latest work of Hernando De Soto.⁵⁷ In another chapter in this book, Ray Bromley skillfully tackles De Soto's key ideas. I want to pose a somewhat different question here: Why are De Soto's ideas so seductive? I would venture to say that the basis of this seduction are the two elements of the transnational transaction that I earlier outlined: the tabula rasa imagination, and the aestheticization of poverty. In *The Mystery of Capital*, De Soto imagines many different spaces as tabula rasa. The American frontier, for example, is represented as empty land, an unoccupied wilderness settled and improved by pioneering homesteaders. The Third World too is presented as tabula rasa, without colonial or imperial histories. And, as such, it is separated from the First World through the mechanical metaphor of a bell jar, rather than bound to it through dependency theory's geopolitical metaphor of an uneven geography of core and periphery.

Particularly provocative is De Soto's conceptualization of poverty as heroic entrepreneurship, a continuation of his earlier idea of informality as revolution.⁵⁸ In De Soto's words, the informal economy is "an epic struggle waged by the informals, . . . a long march toward private property, subjugating the state and formal society as they go."⁵⁹ As the culture of poverty allowed blame to be placed on the poor, so the culture of entrepreneurship allows the Third World poor to bear responsibility for their destinies. Furthermore, the idea that informality is simply a response to the cumbersome regulations of the state, a way of reducing transaction costs, demonstrates De Soto's concern with social capital rather than social power. For example, his interpretation of the market as revolutionary indicates his neoliberal interpretation of rights — granting informals the right to property rights, but not property rights themselves. That the market does not honor any rights, not even the right to participate, is of negligible concern. De Soto's narration of informality is thus an aestheticization of poverty. It presents capitalism as a benign trade in assets, and thereby presents informality and poverty as neither exploited nor exploitative.⁶⁰ The popularity of his work must be understood in relation to other such "nostalgic narrations," ones that seek to aestheticize the anxieties of global inequality.⁶¹

THE PROMISE OF "THE RATIONAL CITY"⁶²

There is a particular transnational geography to De Soto's argument, one that enables a First World appropriation of Third World informality, of the culture of entrepreneurship. But such a geopolitical transaction is fundamentally based on a

Third World desire for First World truths, for the history of developmental, even imperialist, success. Articulating the teleology of capitalism as the formalization of the informal sector, De Soto looks toward the American reforms of the nineteenth century, to the frontier and its institutionalization through the Homesteading Act. As I have argued elsewhere, this is a mythicized history, cleansed of its genocidal and feudal elements and packaged as a policy commodity to be consumed within the circuits of transnational consultancies.⁶³ Against De Soto, it could be argued that the wealth of the American landscape required the wholesale displacement of indigenous people, that propertied citizenship for the select was made possible through the impossibility of shelter and property for all. A critical transnationalism makes evident such gory histories, thereby laying bare the objects of desire. These objects include the rationalized Anglo-American city, the suburban home, luxurious in its free-standing spaciousness; the profession of urban planning as bolstered by the technologies of zoning, counting, and mapping. Such objects are, of course, myths concealing both their inherent disorder and their order of exclusion. While transnational transactions thus borrow the myths, critical transnationalism seeks to trace the troubled genealogy of both the objects and the desire.

As an example, let me return briefly to Riis and his crystallization of an anxious urban moment. That moment, the late nineteenth century, was particularly important in the formation of the Anglo-American city. Here emerges a series of urban reforms, the portfolio of planning, the shape of the city-region. The moment casts a long shadow on the twentieth century and beyond, bequeathing a legacy of urban diagnosis and cure that continues to set urban agendas. I do not mean to imply that the history of the Anglo-American city can be traced with definitive linearity, but I do think that the late nineteenth century, the moment of Riis and his "other half," can be interpreted as a prefiguration of contemporary anxieties and responses.

One such enduring legacy is the understanding of the Anglo-American city as chaotic, lawless, unnatural, and unholy. As Wilson notes, in the 1890s, "the medical metaphors of disease, degeneration, and filth coalesced into the rhetorical creation of 'cesspool city.'"⁶⁴ There are key elements to this rhetoric of disorder. It is a medicalized vocabulary that refuses to acknowledge the structural processes of poverty. In disassociating urban poverty from industrial capitalism, in rendering poverty ugly for the bourgeois gaze, it is an aestheticization. Indeed, it can be seen as a mirror image of today's aesthetic interest in Third World informality. Each embodies a pastoral nostalgia. The neo-urban representation of the dark city imagines a pastoral realm of refuge, such as the suburban home, to which to escape.⁶⁵ The entrepreneurial representation of the informal city imagines it as the pastoral refuge, the village in the city, as evident in the examples I have discussed earlier.

The implications of such forms of aestheticization are far reaching. In the contemporary American context, poverty continues to be defined as an aesthetic

problem — as in the ongoing debates about the presence of the homeless in public spaces. In the late nineteenth century the color line was often maintained through the rhetoric of disease and the practice of quarantine.⁶⁴ Today the urban poor are similarly managed and controlled through acts of spatial cleansing. The technology of disease begets the technology of containment.

It is interesting to make note of the various practices of nineteenth-century urban reform that constitute the myth of the rational Anglo-American city. Riis excavated the "other half" of the city, bringing into view tumorous tenements, the drunken masses, and lawless street Arabs. But he began on an important note: by recognizing the tenement as a type of speculative property holding, and by arguing that neither legislation nor charity could solve this problem.

The greed of capital that wrought the evil must itself undo it as far as it can now be undone. Homes must be built for the working masses by those who employ their labor; but tenements must cease to be "good property" in the old, heartless sense.⁶⁵

This fleeting moment — of locating the housing problem in cycles of property speculation, of linking the question of housing to the issue of decent wages — was radical. It conceived of the dark city as the heart of commercialization and capitalization, rather than separate from it. It thus linked production and social reproduction, making evident the structural basis of urban form and space. But it was just that — a fleeting moment. Merely ten years later, recounting the "battle with the slum in New York," Riis lost track of the nuances of structural causes in the imperative to reform and rationalize. And he identified two main professional themes: the need to "cure the blight of the tenements," and the need to appeal to the community's conscience.⁶⁶ Such themes, I would argue, are enduring elements of the rational Anglo-American city, that object of transnational desire.

In the U.S. a language of conscience and charity has dominated the discourse of poverty. In late-nineteenth-century American cities, social reformers sought to avoid providing direct aid, and instead attempted to act as "friendly visitors" for the tenement classes.⁶⁷ Today, "compassionate conservatism" places a similar emphasis on the evils of public aid and the need for personal kindness. Thus, a recent *New York Times* editorial celebrating Jacob Riis sounds the theme of neighborly service: "What Riis knew was that the greatest giving is an act of personal charity."⁶⁸ But such ideas require close scrutiny at a time of great structural inequality. Riis had insisted that "reform by humane touch" would not be about the delivery of "coal and groceries," but rather would create "bridges upon which men go over, not down, from the mansion to the tenement."⁶⁹ The implicit promise, of course, was that those in the tenements might just, with the right social behavior, make it into the mansion. Here are the seeds of that culture of entrepreneurship which is con-

stantly transacted in transnational discourses and desires. Today the American poor are given neither coal nor groceries; they are instead asked to have faith in faith-based charities. It is through the invisible hand of free-market economics that the moralism of a compassionate nation is made possible. And it is through the promise of private charity that crony capitalism is legitimated.

"We shall solve it by the world-old formula of human sympathy, of human touch," wrote Riis in 1900 of the "battle with the slums":

Somewhere in these pages I have told of the woman in Chicago who accounted herself the happiest woman alive because she had at last obtained a playground for her poor neighbors' children.⁷⁰

In U.S. cities the conscience of the community, it turns out, took shape in a series of environmental reforms meant to cure the slums of "blight." In New York, housing reformers created the improved tenement, nicknamed the dumb-bell tenement, which promised to solve the problems of the slum through slivers of air and light. In Chicago, Burnham envisioned the classical White City, its dazzling civic grandeur obliterating the dark city. All across the country, urban professionals created parks and playgrounds to ensure the moral-behavioral improvement of the poor. What was at stake in such reforms was not only the rationalization of the city but also the preservation of the family. As the city was seen as the site of prostitution and sin, of an unmaking of the natural order, so these environmental reforms sought to return the family to its rural settings.⁷¹ Thus, Veiller declared of his tenement reforms that by according the "proper share of space, natural light, and air," they would "restore the family, the most conservative unit in civilization," and thus redeem the tenement classes.⁷² The "corporeal vocabulary of the city" thus gave way to the "imagination of the city as a space of government, authority, and the conduct of conduct." Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, the city was seen as "a space of transparency and perfect administration," "a spatial projection of social happiness."⁷³ In this "spatialization of virtue,"⁷⁴ the city as diseased body was cured through the regulation and containment of social bodies — of the family as a gendered body, of the racialized body of Chinese laborer or black migrant, of the out-of-place body of the vagrant and the street Arab. And in this, environmental determinism was a technique par excellence.

The persistence of environmental determinism is today evident in the criminalization of America's homeless. As Mitchell notes, these techniques serve to "spatialize a problem that is not at root geographical, thereby deflecting attention from roots and causes of homelessness into questions about 'order' and 'civility' in public spaces."⁷⁵ They are evident in how housing reforms such as Hope VI rehearse the tired rhetoric of environmental change as socioeconomic change — that a shift from high-rise public housing projects to mixed-income, low-density

housing will negate poverty. It is also evident in the seductive lure of Third World informality, in the interpretation of squatting as spatial entrepreneurship, and in the efforts to respond environmentally to informal settlements. For all its laudatory work in bestowing honor on a slum-upgrading project such as the Indore Slum Networking scheme, in seeking to develop a "conscience for architecture," the Aga Khan Award citation ultimately makes the untenable claim that "major design innovations helped alleviate the poverty of the slums."⁷⁸

THE IDEOLOGY OF SPACE

The practice of environmental determinism is rooted in the ideology of space: of there always being space, of there not being any struggles over space, of spatial freedoms and mobility, of the ability of reformers and professionals to design and create space and spatial meanings, of tenements giving way to parks and playgrounds and eventually mansions. The seduction of squatting lies in a similar ideology of space: of informality as the urban frontier, unchecked and unfettered. The material reality of squatting is, of course, that it is very much about territorial exclusions, about the lack of space, about the spatial ties of livelihood that bind squatters to the most competitive terrains of the city.

I also mean the ideology of space in a specific sense. It is a borrowing of Castells's concept of an "urban ideology," one that "sees the modes and forms of social organization as characteristic of a phase of the evolution of society, closely linked to the technico-natural conditions of human existence, and ultimately, to its environment." The consequence of such an ideology, as Castells notes, is the belief that one may analyze a specific form of social organization, urban society, and explain it on the basis of the effects it produces.⁷⁹ This naturalization of the urban, this ideology of seeing it as a unique ecology, is surely a key aspect of the aestheticization of poverty — one that leads urban reformers to practice environmental determinism.

In other words, the rational city is an object of desire precisely because it perpetuates the ideology of space. It is this desire that is apparent in De Soto's invocation of the American frontier of homesteading as a model of property rights and land markets. It is this desire that is apparent in the long haul of urban development that has sought to reform the Third World's unruly cities in keeping with First World experiences. Against such transactions, I am arguing for a critical transnationalism that borrows not the ideology of space but rather the bitter lessons of geopolitical reality. Here it is worth returning once again to the late nineteenth century, and specifically to a quintessential American text: Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This iconic novel makes evident the social rights and exclusions associated with the American paradigm of propertied citizenship. *Huck Finn* is perhaps a surprising choice for a discussion about the city and its spaces. It is, after all, about boyish adventures, the pleasures of drifting on a raft:

It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn't ever feel like talking loud. . . . Sometimes we'd have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time. . . . We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened.⁸⁰

And yet it is precisely this notion of dwelling in space, the freedom of drifting, of imagining an endless frontier of land and water and sky, which for me so quintessentially represents the rational city. Huck's life on the raft can be interpreted as an American longing for the harmonious natural order, one that sees city life as a tearing asunder of such natural laws. In the closing words of the book, Huck rebels against the idea of civilization, of being forced to "sivilize":

But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.⁸¹

For him, dwelling in the journey is an act of freedom. But this is a freedom that coexists with great unfreedoms. On the raft is Jim, the unfree slave, and Huck believes that he is committing a great crime by not turning him in. He legitimates his action by inscribing the raft as a separate moral world, parallel to the norms and regulations of the adult world.

The freedom of Huck's boyish adventure, albeit a flight from an abusive father, can only be understood in the context of enduring slavery. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the controversial ending of the book.⁸² By the end of the novel, Jim, the slave, is imprisoned in a tiny hut at the edge of Aunt Sally's property. But Huck's long-term friend, Tom Sawyer, sets about an elaborate scheme to free him. Here is the catch: Tom already knows that Jim is a free man. His white owner had set him free in her will. Not only does Tom not inform Jim of this, but he proceeds to spin a game to free him, thereby inscribing slavery in the idiom of boyish adventures and pranks. This ending has been seen as "a unique cruelty," the long, drawn-out humiliation of Jim.⁸³ Tom even jokes that he could drag the prank out for eighty years because he is having so much fun — that he could leave it to his children to get Jim out. And besides, Jim would come to like it as he got used to it.

The ending can, of course, be read as the failure of post-Civil War Reconstruction, with the persistence of social, economic, and political slavery long after the formal trappings of slavery were dismantled. And ironically, the eighty-year mark after 1884, the date of publication of the novel, was 1964, the high point of the Civil Rights movement, when Jim Crow laws in the South were finally abolished.⁸⁴

Toni Morrison has titled an essay on *Huck Finn* "This Amazing, Troubling Book." In this territory that is "so falsely imagined as open," she writes, "the nation,

as well as Tom Sawyer, was deferring Jim's freedom in agonizing play."⁸⁵ Urban policies have played a crucial role in this racialized time-space deferral, in this agonizing postponement of social justice. Riis himself mapped the color line in New York:

If, when the account is made up between the races, it shall be claimed that he falls short of the result to be expected from twenty-five years of freedom, it may be well to turn to the other side of the ledger and see how much of the blame is borne by the prejudice and greed that have kept him from rising under a burden of responsibility to which he could hardly be equal.⁸⁶

But such concerns were overwhelmed by the "battle in the slums," in the calculus of disease and cure through which the rational city was to be created. In this rational city, the ideology of space is the promise of freedom in a land of great unfreedom, of environmental democracy in a structure of capitalist authoritarianism. Critical transnationalism reminds us that as desire for the Third World model of self-help must be tempered with a series of cautionary notes, so the desire for the American dream must be located within a historical understanding of the brutality of this context.

THE TRANSNATIONAL TRANSACTION

The transnational is a transaction. As a transaction of imitation and replication, it is an odd combination of universalist outcomes achieved through geographical difference. It is what Spivak has termed "the itinerary of recognition through assimilation of the Other."⁸⁷ The Other is acknowledged as essentially different, and in that appropriation of difference is assimilated into the hegemonic logic of the Self. This congruence of difference and similarity is very much at the heart of how Third World models are gaining transnational popularity, and how First World histories remain objects of transnational desire. Thus, the Third World informal city perpetuates the aestheticization of poverty and the techniques of environmental determinism in the First World. And the First World rational city maintains the promise of tabula rasa, of land waiting to be improved and developed, in the Third World.

There are other ways of doing the transnational, of borrowing across borders. Ward, for example, in his work on *colonias*, crosses the U.S.-Mexico border for policy lessons that are at once fruitful and sobering, taking careful note of the specific vulnerabilities of each country's system of housing production.⁸⁸ And Gupta indicates that rather than simply erasing geopolitical difference, development analysis can in fact make possible a critique of home:

Faced with the violence of its effects in the Third World, development discourse forces the West to confront a version of its own "childhood" in which colonial violence, ecological destruction, the genocide of native peoples, and the repression and displacement of its poor otherwise find no place.⁸⁹

A critical transnationalism, then, makes evident the "mechanics of the constitution of the Other," rather than invokes the "authenticity of the Other" — yet another phrase from Spivak.⁹⁰ It does not seek to borrow successes and best practices or claim assimilation; rather, it examines the processes through which geopolitical realities are constructed and depicted.

One more point. The transnational transaction is inevitably spatial, transacting across geographical difference and distance. This is yet another dimension of its ideology of space. Here it is worth turning to Jameson's spatialized interpretation of ideology. If Althusser conceptualized ideology as the "representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence," then Jameson argues that such a transaction occurs through the experiences of space. And it is in this sense that the aestheticization of squatter settlements and slums spins an ideology of space. It is in this sense that the narrative of Huck Finn embodies an ideology of space. But Jameson goes a step further. Drawing upon the ideas of Lynch, he calls for an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping," defining it as a crucial part of a radical socialist project. In his view, the cognitive map, the mapping of space, "enables a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole."⁹¹ In the context of my discussion of urban informality, the aesthetic of cognitive mapping can be seen as a process of subjectivation, allowing the occupiers of the spaces of informality to articulate spatial meaning. Surely, such is the power of a statement such as this, the statement of a resident of a Rio *favela*:

One has to be an artist to survive as a poor person — you have to imagine space where there is none.⁹²

Transnational techniques of analysis can also be seen as a type of cognitive mapping, enabling what Jameson sees as the "coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with unlived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality."⁹³

And yet such imaginations beg caution. Jameson's call for cognitive mapping can too easily turn into an ideology of space that imagines a transparent and navigable truth-economy, a global realm of circulation and dissemination that is unconstrained. It can resemble what I have earlier called a universal transnationalism. In contrast, a critical transnationalism is concerned with the frictions of

place and power, with how "the suppression of distance" is often the old space of the capitalist world-system rather than a "new space."⁹⁴ Note, for example, the provocative contrast between Jameson's politico-aesthetic project and the cognitive maps assembled by Hayden in her discussion of power and segregation in Los Angeles. While she is sympathetic to Jameson, she adds in a footnote that she is not sure how cognitive mapping would operate in terms of global capitalism.⁹⁵ More importantly, her examples demonstrate that for many social groups—in this case, poor African Americans and Latinos—cognitive mapping simply narrates a claustrophobic urban space. Thus, the geopolitics of place is not overcome by the poetics of representation. Similarly, our use of the term "liberalization" throughout this book indicates precisely such uneven geographies and unequal transactions. And my use of the term "trespassings" indicates an unease of spatial movement and a similar opacity of spatial knowledge. If critical transnationalism is not about assimilating geographical difference, then it is also not about bridging geographical distance. Rather, it is in the spirit of what Probyn has called "working in and against the local."⁹⁶ Such is the writing of Adrienne Rich: "I choke on the taste of bread in North America / But the taste of hunger in North America / is poisoning me."⁹⁷ Here, the transnational transaction becomes an effort to unmake the ideology of space.

If I have taken as my starting point the idea that the political economy of urban informality is also a politics of representation, I now want to end by observing how the politics of representation must engage with the political economy of urban informality. It is in this geopolitical transaction that the ideology of space can be unmade. Jameson remains fascinated by "city space," and particularly by the "precartographic operations . . . the itineraries" of cognitive mapping.⁹⁸ I have argued for caution in such projects of mapping and itineraries. His fascination resurrects a nostalgia — about a cognition that precedes lived cartographies of power; about an itinerary that winds its way through penetrable city space. It is a nostalgia that bears resemblance to the pastoral and imperialist nostalgias I have already discussed. It is a nostalgia that is dismantled by the vast and continually growing body of research on urban informality, the stuff of which this book is made. Against the "urban ideology," this genealogy of representation views the city not as a unique ecology but as a mundane articulation of production and social reproduction; not as a magical precartographic realm of vernacular authenticity but as a mapping and unmapping of interests and power; not as a separation of First and Third Worlds but as the constant interpenetration of these geopolitical axes.

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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2. *Ibid.*, 271.
3. My use of the terms "First World" and "Third World" is not meant to gloss over the geopolitical diversity that exists within and across these categories. Rather, it is meant to refer to these concepts as inventions, whose coinage signifies an international project of development launched at a specific historical moment, i.e., during the Cold War.
4. J. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975 edition, original 1890).
5. E. Popko, *Transitions: A Photographic Documentary of Squatter Settlements* (Stroudsburg: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, 1978).
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7. P. Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 35.
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9. L. Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," in K. Sangari and S. Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).
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18. A. Roy, "Paradigms of Propertied Citizenship: Transnational Techniques of Analysis," *Urban Affairs Review* (forthcoming, March 2003). In this paper, I demonstrate the various possible uses of transnational techniques, specifically in relation to housing struggles and policies.
19. P. Ward, *Colonias and Public Policy in Texas and Mexico: Urbanization by Stealth* (Austin:

THE GEOPOLITICS OF DESIRE

Transnational epistemologies can enable new policy and political possibilities. Thus, in recent decades Third World solutions are being brought to bear on First World problems.⁴ For example, there has been a great deal of interest in replicating the success of the Grameen Bank microcredit program. From the Good Faith Fund of Arkansas to microcredit programs in inner cities, such transnational borrowings seem to promise hope for the thorny dilemma of persistent American poverty.⁴ In the broadest sense, such border crossings are welcome, for transnational policy-making disrupts the teleology of development, which sees Anglo-America as the idealized yardstick against which all else is to be judged. But they require some critical analysis.

If I have earlier advanced the cause of transnational pedagogy, I now call for caution in how the transnational imagination is deployed and used. The attempt to simply mimic success elsewhere is not only pragmatically naïve but also methodologically problematic, for it maintains the universalist logic of development. While in First World borrowings of Third World policies the hierarchy of development and underdevelopment may be reversed, the erasure of geopolitical difference continues through the mechanics of imitation and replication. Against this universalist transnationalism, I argue for a *critical transnationalism*, one given to learning the paradoxes and contradictions of place-based policy rather than copying a litany of best practices or development miracles. To this end, I analyze two forms of transnational appropriation: a growing First World interest in Third World urban informality, and an enduring Third World interest in American urban reforms. Advancing a critical transnationalism, I show how each First World/Third World axis can provide important lessons. These lessons are not the blueprints of success, awaiting construction. Rather, they are historicized lessons about the peculiar vulnerabilities and exclusions that accompany each genre of representation and each model of political economy. It is in this way that the deconstructive critique embedded in critical transnationalism can lead to reconstruction.

THE SEDUCTION OF SQUATTING

The previous fin-de-siècle was marked by rabid discourses about the chaos of the First World metropolis. Likewise, at the turn of this century the Third World metropolis has emerged as the trope of social disorganization and unfathomable crisis. Urban planning emerged as a nineteenth-century drive to rationalize the city. Now, the ideology of "civil society" — a celebration of grassroots movements and self-management by the urban poor — bears the new millennial promise of taming the Third World. From the idiom of crisis, the pendulum has swung to a utopian recovery of Third World urban communities. Academic and policy discourses are rife with tales of self-sufficient squatter settlements, self-help hous-

ing, and thriving women's cooperatives. Particularly important is how this culture of entrepreneurship is being directed against a culture of poverty, a transaction that has taken on the form of Third World solutions for First World problems.

The popularity of such "Third World" models requires a closer look. How is the Third World and its informality represented in the transnational space of knowledge transaction? How, within the geopolitical space of the First World academy, are the practices of the Third World poor depicted and appropriated? Let me take the liberty of drawing upon two pedagogical examples from my academic home. In Spring 2002 two graduate studios dealing with Mexico City were offered in the College of Environmental Design at UC Berkeley. In each case I was invited by the students to provide critical review and advice. The first, a design studio aimed primarily at Master's students in Architecture, chose as its site a squatter settlement. Rather than a design program, the studio pursued a "found objects" philosophy, encouraging students to collect materials from the squatter settlement as inspiration for their designs. During their brief site visit students recorded the sounds of poverty, collected the dirt of poverty, acquired discarded objects of poverty, and returned to Berkeley to make a montage of their excavations. The squatter settlement figured in their imagination as an aesthetic experience, unshakably exotic, undeniably distant. For one student the experience of the squatter settlement was embodied by a battered drum she came across in her wanderings there. Returning to Berkeley, she placed gravel collected from the settlement on the drum, and played it to create contours and shapes that would then determine the topography of her design.

It would be easy to dismiss this exercise as the manifestation of an architectural discipline and profession prone to self-centered ignorance, one where design as an egotistical enterprise can only proceed by being hostile to the knowledge of material realities. Or it could be read as the inevitable epistemic violence of the act of design — and indeed also of the act of planning. But there is something particular about *how* this studio offends that bears consideration beyond the usual diatribe about professional hegemonies.

It is the second studio that reveals the issues at hand. This one was a sophisticated environmental planning studio, co-organized with universities in Mexico City, with students making frequent trips to the site, where they became deeply engaged with its natural and built landscapes. The mandate of the studio was to devise a master plan for Tlahuac, a site on the southwestern perimeter of Mexico City with an unusual ecology of "*chinampas*," artificial agricultural islands developed in pre-Hispanic times now facing extinction through the pressures of urbanization. The studio was an admirable effort, and the first round of design work yielded intricate models, gorgeous drawings, and very real enthusiasm. But in those first models, students were obsessively concerned with the need to create "defensive strategies" for the protection of the *chinampas*. As a reviewer, I asked: "Who are