

## Stasis in the Planetary-City: Conflict and Spatiality within the Fading of Western Modernity

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### Abstract

In recent decades, an unprecedented scenario has gradually emerged, assembling and dissolving previous conditions: the materialization of a “planetary-city”, intended as a figure for understanding contemporary political spatiality. The ancient Greek notion of *stasis* is tested on this hypothesis in order to measure the changing forms of conflict within the new political configuration. To elaborate this theoretical perspective, the article adopts a historical-political methodology. It firstly investigates the parabola of the state and war binomial during Western modernity and, secondly, it traces a genealogy of the city during the same period, showing the historical link between urban development and globalization processes. Thirdly, the paper analyzes the becoming-planetary of the city and the dynamics of conflict inherent to this framework, explained by using the notion of *stasis*. These hermeneutical hypotheses are discussed within their inextricable interconnection, showing the importance to open up a reflection on how an original cultural production is emerging, shaping and deciphering this new architecture of political concepts.

**Keywords:** *Stasis*, Planetary, Conflict, Space, City

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## 1. Introduction

Western modernity has produced specific configurations of spatial shapes according to the ways in which different forms of conflict have historically been managed. The war and state binomial has characterized this era. We argue that today the field of tension described by conflict and spatiality needs to be better understood as *stasis* (an ancient Greek notion which entails that of city and refers to a particular conception of factional war) within an unprecedented political arena that implies a planetary dimension, and which we define as the “planetary-city”.

The city is an alternative matrix of the political that throughout the so-called political modernity has been obscured by the state. In fact, conflict today is increasingly refracted through and mediated by cities – even while they are becoming something completely different from what they used to be in the past. The city is assuming a planetary form and the planet itself is becoming a city of cities. For this reason, the contemporary configuration of planetary conflict points to the centrality of cities. The aim of this article, then, is to propose a reflection upon the image of a planetary-city organized around *stasis* as its form of the political, shedding light on a lost conception of the dynamics of conflict that nevertheless resonates today. More precisely, our thesis is that the contemporary urban planet can be analyzed as the spatialization of *stasis*, which leads to a radical politicization of contemporary urban studies and, at the same time, to an urbanization of political thought. Furthermore, the hermeneutical lenses composed by planetary urbanization and *stasis*-dynamics of conflicts open up a reflection on how a new cultural production is emerging, shaping and deciphering this new architecture of political concepts. In this regard, as we will see, a relevant example is represented by the visionary work of the Italian artist Giacomo Costa, who for years has been engaged in an artistic research on the city through the use of digital technologies.

It is precisely the planetary dimension of the contemporary political arena that destabilizes the conceptual architecture elaborated on fixed spaces and scales. Moreover, the widespread

rhetoric of globalization has too often overlooked the multiple processes that have constituted it. Against this, Lefebvre (2009a: 257) affirmed that “the planet rises into our horizon only in separation”. In fact, talking about a planetary dimension does not necessitate considering space as unitary or uniform. On the contrary, it presupposes a One that is constitutively divided. The planet does not have an outside, but at the same time it is completely marked by internal processes of fragmentation and hierarchization. Adopting the city as a political matrix, seeing the planet like a city (Amin, and Thrift 2016; Magnusson 2011), is then a productive strategy that recalls the historical characteristic of the city: being one and divided at the same time.

Moreover, the contemporary political landscape cannot be reduced to current geographical maps, which render the world a puzzle of states as clearly bounded entities. This does not lead towards a complete disqualification of the state as a political dimension, but rather requires shifting away from such a perspective, recognizing that even if it still has a decisive role in our political context it is not the pivotal instrument through which the processes of spatialization and conflict can be understood (Robins 2007: 150–151).

More clearly, the planetary-city is a new way of thinking of a fragmentary wholeness. The city is in fact “the battleground through which groups define their identity, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate citizenship rights, obligations, and principles” (Isin 2002: 283–284). Therefore, we intend to recognize the contemporary planetary battlefield, marked by the emergence of asymmetric forms of struggles, through the adoption of the notion of *stasis*, which cannot be simplistically translated with the expression *civil war* – as does for example Giorgio Agamben, who assimilates the two concepts without pointing out their differences (Agamben 2015). For this reason, the etymology of *stasis* will be recovered in order to show how the functioning of this phenomenon today is deeply linked to the original polysemy of the Greek term, which admits two conflicting meanings. On the one hand it indicates *equilibrium*; on the other hand it designates *agitation*. In fact, the original meaning of *stasis*

presupposes an ambivalent threshold, or more precisely, the non-dichotomic coexistence between stability, instability, order and disorder. In short, *stasis* is not something different from the political system. It is inherent to it.

Thus, adopting the notion of *stasis* means taking up the challenge of re-using this ancient concept in order to discard war (especially interstate war) as the crucial model through which analyzing contemporary conflictual phenomena. As for the state, we are not saying that war, as classically defined during Western modernity, has no importance today. Rather, we affirm that wars can be read through the category of *stasis*. More precisely, unlike the way *stasis* is usually conceptualized, we suggest that we can recognize war as a form of *stasis*, even if the contrary is not true. Indeed, we can describe *stasis* not only as a notion which allows us to decipher the conflictual condition that constantly shapes the planetary-city and defines its forms of equilibrium, but also as a category of categories, which includes war as traditionally understood, as well as many different kinds of struggles (cultural, economic, social) that would not be called war.

The article is structured in three parts. Firstly, within the cultural-political elaborations of some well-known thinkers, we investigate the trajectory and the centrality of the war and state binomial during Western modernity with explicit reference to two phenomena that have greatly characterized and supported its development: the negation of civil war and the construction of a double spatiality (European/non-European). Secondly, we present a genealogy of the city, showing its historical link with the globalization processes, which leads to the transformation of the historical city into new shapes: from the World-cities to the metropolis during the 19th century and the global cities in the 20th century. Thirdly, we analyze the becoming-planetary of the city and the dynamics of conflict inherent to this process, explained by using the notion of *stasis*. It is precisely the planetary-*stasis* link, deeply underinvestigated within contemporary literature, which needs to be explored in its disruptive implications with respect to the very cultural-political conceptions of our times. These hermeneutical hypotheses are discussed to demonstrate how

planetary-city and *stasis* can represent a fecund perspective to re-frame and describe the transformations of contemporary political spaces and forms of conflict.

## 2. War and State as a Binomial of Western Political Modernity

Before concentrating on the significance of *stasis* and the planetary-city as new interpretative perspectives, we cannot but investigate the historical-philosophical conditions which previously made war and state the key models around which conflicts and space regulation were based, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and for almost four centuries. Indeed, the beginning of this era witnessed the formulation of the theory of the “Reason of state” (Botero 2017) and, subsequently, with the Westphalian peace of 1648–1649, the configuration of the modern political state apparatus, understood as a real antidote to the long season of religious civil wars which had dramatically marked Europe after the Protestant reformation.

In order to do this, we will focus in particular on two authors who can be situated on opposite margins of Western political modernity. Hobbes and Schmitt – the first considered as the archetypal initiator of this period (Galli 2014: VIII), the second as its last conscious representative (Schmitt 2010: 75) – delimit what can be defined as the main current of modern political thought, in contrast with another tradition, which ranges from Spinoza to Foucault. Clearly it is not within the scope of this paper to provide an in-depth treatment of these authors. However, a necessarily oversimplified consideration of their theories is indispensable, in order to bring out the overall sense of our interpretative hypothesis.

One of the fundamental nodes around which the rationalist theoretical line is structured is the idea of conflict management. Thinkers from Hobbes to Schmitt placed the state at the center of this problematization. While the city has always been conceived as a hotbed of unrest (Lefebvre 2009b), the state has become the historical-political architecture which pursued the neutralization of conflict within the boundaries of its territory and its externalization. Or rather, this double

functionality is what this “mainstream” tradition of the modern has claimed and believed to guarantee. The systematic structuring of the state-war binomial has therefore established itself as the indispensable symbiotic of modern politics. On the one hand, the state is recognized as the sole holder of the *jus ad bellum*; on the other hand, war has been identified as acceptable only in its interstate form. It is thus understandable how such an inseparable conceptual pair – very different in functioning from that *stasis* and planetary-city – has favored not only the structuring of the opposition between war and peace, but especially the dichotomy between external and internal war. The first tolerable and legitimate, the second unacceptable and illegitimate, harbinger of the extinction of a politically constituted unity.

### **2.1 From Hobbes to Schmitt**

It is the intent to expunge civil conflict from the meshes of society that leads Hobbes to the development of a highly effective argument based on two different discursive stratagems. First, according to the English philosopher, politics exists only as order. The whole Hobbesian conceptual machine is in fact elaborated to guarantee the illegitimacy (though certainly not the impossibility) of the concomitance between state and war. In Hobbes, politics operates indeed by means of depoliticization: the frontispiece of the *Leviathan* offers a representation of that. It depicts, in fact, an empty city – mere *urbs* separated from the *civitas* – made harmless through the deprivation of its citizens, reduced from multitude to unity, and enclosed in the sovereign’s body. In this way, the city, whose connatural disorder made it comparable to the state of nature, becomes a space which has no political relevance. Therefore, if the establishment of the state is necessary, since its absence would entail the “perpetual war of every man against his neighbor” (Hobbes 1998: 138), the stipulation of the *pactum* is the crystallization of the only political act available to individuals (Laudani 2013: 49–51), leading to the ratification of the sovereign who becomes the only legitimate political actor. In the Hobbesian state, the right to resistance is *de facto* neutralized and conflictual

resistance is materially preempted, at least on a theoretical level: “When, therefore, our refusal to obey frustrates the end for which the sovereignty was ordained, then there is no liberty to refuse: otherwise there is” (Hobbes 1998: 145). The main goal of Hobbes is indeed to ward off civil war by making it empirically impossible and the evocation of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* is what he instrumentally uses in order to describe the drama of a condition characterized by the absence of the Leviathan. If there is a civil war, this signals the nonexistence or the failure of the state. Therefore, war exists only outside the state, as an act of sovereignty against other states.

In order to build social order, Hobbes also resorts to a second stratagem based on the demarcation between the political space regulated according to the state structure, and for this reason pacified within it, and those pre-political territories without a state, crossed by a condition of inter-individual war among savages. The emblematic example of this second possibility is for Hobbes what happens “in many places of America” (1998: 85)<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the codification of the colonial world is useful, on the one hand, as a mirror demonstrating the superiority of Europe and, on the other, as a crutch necessary for its operation, for example through the practices of conflict externalization. In fact, we can recognize that there is no European modernity without a colonial space (Anghie, 2004) – which far from being a smooth land of conquest, has always been driven by battles of liberation<sup>2</sup>.

The centrality of the discursive stratagems elaborated by Hobbes – which undoubtedly have had an impact not only political but also cultural, for example in the creation of specific European and national identities (see Fichte 2009) – is also a fundamental part of the thought of the German jurist Schmitt, who presented himself as an unwilling witness of the final crumbling of the state-war binomial. Indeed, albeit considering Hobbes as “the classical representative of the decisionist type” (Schmitt 1985: 33), he notes a consubstantial element of weakness in the model elaborated by the English philosopher, precisely because he attempted to reduce politics to a rational order, able to completely neutralize conflict within the state

(Galli 1996: 797). According to the Schmittian analysis, the political represents, in fact, the constant possibility of war as a necessary guarantee of the political order itself (Schmitt 2007a), and the sovereign, as “he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt 1985: 5), is he which, at least potentially, is constantly called on to carry out this task, even if this could lead to a declaration of internal hostility.

Moreover, while for Hobbes the discussion of the diversity of non-state space is a strategic choice in order to enhance the state, Schmitt describes the radical political and cultural difference between Europe and the rest of the world – which means the radical superiority of European culture over non-European cultures (Schmitt 2006: 132) – as one of the necessary conditions that ensured the maintenance of Eurocentric global stability during modernity<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, the political and cultural crisis of the *jus publicum Europaeum*, which had allowed the transition from the *bellum justum* of the medieval age to the *guerre en forme* of modernity (based on the recognition of the *justus hostis*) derives, according to Schmittian analysis, precisely from the universalization of the model of the state, at the end of the nineteenth century. This made it impossible to limit war which has been “transformed into a police action against troublemakers, criminals, and pests” (Schmitt 2006: 321). The result is a breach of the distinction between exterior and interior, criminal and enemy and, consequently, the realization of the great Hobbesian nightmare, on a much larger scale than that envisioned by the English philosopher: the “global civil war” (Schmitt 2007b: 95), of which Schmitt wrote for the first time in 1963<sup>4</sup>. With these words, he describes a condition of totalizing war, extended to the whole global space, which is not an interstate war, but not even properly a civil war, as it does not develop within the borders of a state and does not presuppose all parties as intentionally belligerents.

## ***2.2 Another Tradition***

The crumbling of the inseparable binomial of Western modernity leads many thinkers to challenge the same fundamental categories of the modern era. It is from this

perspective that for example, in the '70s, Foucault inverts the Schmittian point affirming the need to cut off the king's head (Foucault 2003: 59), to abandon the Hobbesian model of the Leviathan in order to show the fallacy of an analysis focused on the institution of the state as a management point for political discourse and practice. According to the French philosopher, recognizing that the threat of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* has been used to justify obedience necessitates the move to a consideration of civil war as “the matrix of all the struggles regarding and against power” (Foucault 2016: 13), and to discover, by the reversal of the Clausewitzian formula (Clausewitz 2007: 28), that politics is the continuation of war by other means and not vice versa (Foucault 2003: 15).

Foucault thus shakes the prevailing discourse of Western modernity, showing what this era has pretended to be and what has never been. Analyzing war as an ongoing phenomenon within society and not just as a constant possibility to guarantee the political order (as for Schmitt), inserts him into an alternative current which recognizes as its archetype not Hobbes, but Spinoza, who invalidates the contract by stating that it “is vindicated not by the civil law, but by the law of war” (2004: 312).

Nevertheless, not even Foucault manages to cross the boundaries of Western modernity; to the present day it is not possible to analyze all the forms of conflict in terms of war/civil war, using exclusively modern watchwords, and without considering the new specific spatial dimension in which they take shape. In fact, it is no coincidence that the French philosopher does not talk about *stasis*; he could not have done it. *Stasis* presupposes the reference to a specific political and cultural space which is that of the city. While in *The Punitive Society*, lectures at the Collège de France of 1972–1973, Foucault employs the concept of *civil war* to describe a condition of ongoing struggle between collective elements, in “*Society Must Be Defended*”, lectures at the Collège de France of 1975–1976, he speaks more generally of *war*, in order to remove any possible reference to the state space. However, what is missing is precisely the reference to a definite theater of conflict: it is not the state, but not even the city, it remains

aleatory. What Foucault analyzes is, in fact, more the historical use of “the historico-political discourse” of war (Foucault 2003: 49) – which is based on a conception of war as a continuous phenomenon describing power relations – than the concrete functioning of war.

For these reasons, even the Foucauldian perspective – although very interesting – presents some aspects that must be overcome. More generally, the need is to amend the polemologies and to build, rather, a stasiology, useful for understanding the concepts of war and state, while recognizing that they are not the only possibilities. To that aim, and precisely because the notion of *stasis* implies that of city, before exploring the potential of a new stasiology – different from that proposed by Agamben (2015: 2) – we retrace the route taken by the political figure of the city: despite initially being “crushed” by the state, it ends up re-emerging, though radically transfigured, as a matrix of the political thinkability in our day.

### 3. The City through the Modern

Before the trigger of Western modernity, the city had been the organizational model for systems of power. The state, conceived in and through cities (Isin 2002), attempted to subsume it within the new state-form. This produced the historical break around which a vortex of new conceptuality and political construction opened up, also made possible due to the new spatialities that started to gain footing in the European historical experience. The telluric and aquatic movements described by Schmitt (2006) were nurtured by the unprecedented inter-state dimensions along which European armies started to move, and by the new extension of the oceanic colonial and commercial routes towards America and Asia (Munn 2020). Confronted with these new distances, cities were no longer able to acquire sufficient resources to compete within this new spatial arena. Moreover, the new emerging classes often found economic and political advantages in investing in states rather than in the increasingly conflictual landscape of cities. This is Machiavelli’s *problematique*, expressed in his call to Florence to keep its own arms

(Machiavelli 2008)<sup>5</sup>. He is unsuccessfully searching for a way to counter the rise of the modern states that are overthrowing his republic. The Prince succumbs to the Sovereign, and the distance from Renaissance Florence to the emerging London metropolis, where Hobbes wrote his opera, measures the gap delineating the jump into a new historical period. However, we will show that, even if not recognized nor legitimized as political by the logic of the modern state, urban movements continued “underground” to produce multiple political actions that will powerfully re-emerge later on, although radically transfigured.

Furthermore, the logic of the state leads to a specific discipline conceiving and organizing space: modern cartography (Pickless 2004). The new space of the political begins to play on a new scale, passing from the fragmented and “closed” feudal Europe to the emerging and sprawling Earth. The latter becomes a new vestment of knowledge, leading to an unprecedented extension of political thinking. It is no coincidence that the word *territory* derives from the Latin word *Terra* (Earth), and territory is the main tool for the definition of modern states’ sovereignty, through the transposition on increasingly vast dimensions of the police ordinances elaborated by cities, in order to govern their internal uprisings (Foucault 2009: 4–23). This contiguity has shown a political matrix since the beginning. The conception of *territory* derives not only from *Terra*, but also from *terror* (Elden 2009; Farinelli 2016). It is indeed on fear, one of the most political feelings, that the foundations of statehood are laid, thus highlighting how the state needs a power that plays on frightening citizens, which from “dissolute multitude” (Hobbes 1983: 109) of the city must now be enclosed in the body of the sovereign. “Another infirmity of a Common-wealth, is the immoderate greatness of a Town, when it is able to furnish out of its own Circuit, the number, and expense of a great Army”, clearly states Hobbes (1983: 256), explicitly showing how the city is potentially in contradiction with state-building. Nonetheless, while state-war thinking conceives of sovereignty as absolute, it has historically always involved “multiple sovereignties”, varying in relative power, for

instance, in different eras, and the city has never actually been completely subjugated by the state.

### **3.1 The World-City**

While late Medieval Italian communes were the incubators of the bourgeoisie (Weber 1966), they were not able, as in the above-mentioned case of Florence, to establish their political autonomy. They could not withstand the “shock of the Earth” as independent political entities. However, when cities were able to set up a fruitful relationship with the emerging monarchies, a new trajectory took shape, opening up a new era – combining the power of the market with the power of the state. Following the historical interpretative model elaborated by Fernand Braudel and followed up by Giovanni Arrighi, the first phase of the modern (i.e. the construction of the capitalist system) had, at its hegemonic core, the dialectic between Genoa and the Spanish Crown. Genoa was able to play a role as financial centre leaning on Spanish resources, therefore constituting a new economic-political form.

This was the starting point of the first cycle of accumulation leading to the world-system. Even though in this historical phase cities were no longer relevant political vectors, each subsequent cycle of accumulation will always have a city as its centre of gravity. From Venice to Amsterdam, London to New York, cities represented the logistical and financial heart of the world-systems, brain trusts where commodities, people and capitals were managed and amassed. These cities were laboratories of new cultural experiences, forms of coexistence and conflicts, miniaturized worlds. City-worlds, precisely, as again Braudel defines them (1992). Therefore, if the fracture at the origin of the modern was brought about as a result of the new dimension of the Earth (Terra), it is the figure of the world that needs to be philosophically considered to seize the *Zeitgeist* from the Glorious Revolution to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Earth is flattened into a map, to facilitate the tracing of the boundaries of states and to define the new oceanic routes (Pickless 2004: 92–106). If the Earth was the physical entity to be appropriated, the world indicates, instead, its shape within

what began to be defined as a *civility* – with its own borders, its laws, culture, and knowledge (Guizot 1997).

### 3.2 *Metropolis*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new powerful processes turned the previous framework upside-down. The dynamic introduced by the French and the Haitian Revolutions is “uncloseable” – always open on its own subversion. Moreover, the radical transformative processes posed by the so-called “Industrial Revolution” and the increasing extraction of resources on a global scale by European powers led to a paradoxical outcome. Just at the peak of power of the European states, new conflictual outbreaks erupted within them. The political figure that the modern state presumed to have obliterated, by decentring it into the colonial undertaking or externalizing it onto the states’ international system, re-emerges: the civil war. It comes back on the political scene, with cities as its arena. These were now places expressing a new power that, in the long term, could at least become an alternative to that of the state. Cities, rather than states, are the primary places of wealth production.

It was not by gold or by silver, but by labor, that all the wealth of the world was originally purchased, and its value, to those who possess it, and who want to exchange it for new productions, is precisely equal to the quantity of labor which it can enable them to purchase or command. Wealth, as Mr. Hobbes says, is power (Smith 1843: 13).

Following Adam Smith’s consideration, it is precisely the huge and rapidly growing concentration of people (i.e. the labor force) within cities midway between the 18th and the 19th centuries that causes the crisis of the state, because it generates a new source of power, making the state no longer its unique and legitimate owner. It is not by chance, as David Armitage demonstrates (2017), that the profound political breaks of the American and French Revolutions were in fact called by the “new” term *Revolution*; while confronted with the unprecedented emergence of the new typology of urban conflict, the *civil war* lexicon returns. This conflictual urban condition was emblematically described by Benjamin Disraeli (1845: 76): “Two nations between whom there is no intercourse

and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets. The rich and the poor”.

While today the possibility of posing a rigid separation between revolution and civil war is questionable, from the Disraeli's period on, the conflicts moving around the outlines of the profound industrial and urban transformations started to be frequently called “civil war”. And the city is the theater where this drama takes place. Class struggle encoded by Karl Marx plays the role of a historical turning point. Not without reason, the specter of civil war is emblematically embodied in the year 1848, the *annus horribilis* of the European *élites*: they see fighting back in cities, at the heart of rising nations, a multitude that was thought to be confined to the reassuring borders of the body of the Hobbesian sovereign. After his trip to America, Alexis de Tocqueville became a fervent supporter of the colonization of Algeria, going there twice in his life and then, when he was in Paris during the 1848 insurrection, he strongly supported its repression. Observing the tumultuous processes of the city, he realised that most of the Army Generals fighting to shut down the ongoing disturbances were exactly the same people he had known in Algeria. This highly representative episode sustains the discourse we are developing. War and its protagonists are no longer locked down within the “external” colonial space or on the rural battlefield of the previous European wars, but rather they bounce back to the heart of the metropolis, and begin to deconstruct the rigid political coordinates adopted up to that point. The city emerges again as the field of political conflict, and thus as a problem for the order of the state. Consequently, the effects of this historical turn induced new profound changes, which may be perceived primarily from the perspective of the dramatic spatial transformations that have occurred.

19th century Paris of the insurgency is morphologically very close to medieval Paris. The popular neighbourhoods are made up of heaps of houses and small, convoluted streets and alleys. It is this urban composition that became the object of advanced government strategies aimed at responding to the decompositional processes moving in the city. The Prefect von

Haussmann was charged with the responsibility of the perpetual eradication of the very possibility of conflict within the urban space (Harvey 2006). Therefore, between 1852 and 1869, he literally destroyed the ancient city's texture, drawing up an urban model that will soon be replicated all around the European continent. It is the dawn of the metropolis: namely, the dialectic structure that aims at containing, while at the same time representing, the new conflictual form leading the internal development of the state's political economy. Moreover, as the name itself shows, the metropolis is the attempt to keep hold (both internally and externally) of the metropolis-colony relationship. The relationship between the mother country and her colonies and an internal social order became permanently unstable and contested.

The metropolis, therefore, was born with the profile of civil war lacerating the state's territorial tissue and was quickly reproduced at several latitudes. At the end of the century there was also a huge increase of exchange and trade on the global scale, led by the deepening of the interconnection between metropolitan fabrics, stretching from Paris to Berlin, from London to New York, from Chicago to Calcutta. This was a break with the precedent set by world-cities, which were (or at least pretended to be) the unique centre of a world-system with a clear core-periphery geography (Tafari 1976). Moreover, the becoming-metropolitan of what were formerly world-cities triggered a new cycle, the so-called "first Globalization". Therefore, if the transition from the city to the state, with the opening of new spatial dimensions, was given in the name of the Earth, and if the first cycles of capitalist accumulation established themselves with the idea of the world, then the bursting of conflict within the historical city, and its subsequent destruction in favour of the metropolis, lead towards a new figure: the globe (Vegetti 2017).

Within this metaphoric sequence of analytical grids, it is therefore an element of sphericity and recursiveness that fits into this new historical phase. There is a "curvature" of the western world in its extension over the Earth – shaking the rigid linearity and the clean political demarcations. The order sustaining the capitalist world-system led by the

English Empire stands in front of an unknown development. This is produced firstly by the new dimension of the global (spheric) interconnection, where the rigid division of metropolis (mother country) vs colonies, European state space vs non-European space without states, and the segmentation of the state boundaries, are crossed over by the trans-national junction of the metropolises in formation. This historical acceleration had a stop during the two world wars, which represented at once the apogee and crisis of the historical pathway delineated thus far.

### **3.3 The Global City**

The short interlude of this cycle of rapid acceleration of urban connections led by the metropolis slowly “reboots” after the Second World War, with processes that will later be named “globalization”. These are nurtured by decolonization struggles and Fordism, by the opening of a new spatial frontier with the conquest of a new element – the air – as well as by a singular kind of war, the so-called “Cold War”. A new paradox, the risk of total annihilation introduced by the atomic bomb, makes it the most devastating weapon ever, but also an absurd tool for “peace” or at least of containment of the clash (Virilio 1993: 133; Virilio, and Lotringer 2008: 39). The impossibility to directly confront the enemy is a concrete result, adding a new twist to the very concept of war. Nevertheless, the absence on the global scale of an explicit clash between the two powers hides a proliferation of conflicts. These take various shapes, from the continuous confrontation between states and “irregular” players (*guerrillas*, popular movements...) to the multiplication of conflicts within the metropolitan fabric which, in the meantime, begin to expand over the whole territory of states and to construct a new political dimension.

Henri Lefebvre seized on this historical shift in 1967, when he anticipated in his book, *Le droit à la ville*, the political core element of what two decades later will be called the “global city” (Sassen 1991). He noticed that:

The creation corresponding to our epoch, to its tendencies, to its (threatening) horizon, perhaps then will be the directional centre.

This typology of centre brings together education and information, administrative capability and the capacity of institutional decision, it seems an on the way project of a new type of concentration: That of power (Lefebvre 2009b: 25–26).

What is the global city if not a global network of directional centres, a pattern of dots of a global urban texture expanding to the global scale and concentrating command functions? The world-city could be one singular city at the core of a world system. The global city is intrinsically multiple and relational. It is a new source of power, initially constructed during the sixties, with a dramatic acceleration due to the crisis of 1973 (the end of Bretton Woods and of the gold standard, the oil crisis), concrete implementation in the eighties, and its “triumph” in the nineties. However, parallel to the building up of the global city runs the intensification of the urbanization processes in the countries of the so-called Third World. It is precisely on this series of new fault lines that the neoliberal *ordo* is progressively imposed.

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent disappearance of the dual structure of power that had previously structured the global order, many authors started to point to a trend of a burning out of conflicts, most notably Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” (1992). Even though there were many counter-trends<sup>6</sup>, globalization without a political polarization on the global scale seemed to be a new and lasting historical opening. A new cultural political imaginary emerged, with discussions of the end of the state within a borderless world (Ohmae 1999), a new era structured around a global space of flows (Castells 1996) with social relationship organized around groundbreaking net technologies in a “global village”, marking an important transition point for media, technology, war and sovereignty (McLuhan, and Power 1989). However, the “triumph” of the global city and its excitements collided with history. The iconic passage of this fragmentation is undoubtedly Al Qaeda’s attack on the Twin Towers in New York City (Urry 2002; Graham 2004; Bunnell 2006). This event made clear a radically new configuration of conflicts on the global scale and rendered evident that one of the beating hearts of the global

city was vulnerable, and the entire cycle of accumulation was not invincible.

### ***3.4 The Construction Site of the Planetary-City***

The multi-scalar multiplication of fronts of conflict and warlike events characterizes the first two decades of the new millennium. To grasp this transitional phase, the close examination of the resignification processes of modern political concepts, as well as the introduction of new categories attempting to conceptualize the emerging spatial-political configuration are necessary. Outlined above is a summary sequence, through a-linear integrations, articulating the pathway from Earth to world to the globe. Next is the sketching out of the planetary order, including a trend towards technological, communicative, and productive “unification”, which goes hand-in-hand with a continuous multi-polarization. Indeed, the planetary order must be interpreted as a tensional field structured by heterogeneous forms of power, developing through a never-ending production of convergences and divergences. The notion of *stasis* that we will deepen in a while is a truly fruitful conceptual strategy to grasp this political dynamic.

If the metropolis and the global city signalled the re-emergence of a source of power supplementary to that of the state within a transfiguration of the city, we are now introduced to a new figure – the material basis of which is planetary urbanization (Brenner, and Schmid 2012: 10–13; Merrifield 2013: 909–922; Ruddick 2017: 1–18). In other words, we are faced with the progressive extension of an urban infrastructure on the whole planetary surface, defined through unprecedented concentrations – mega-cities with dozens of millions of inhabitants that seem to prefigure the backlash of the city-state for a new institutional field of government for the planetary (Khanna 2016) and the multiplication of logistical interconnections (Cowen 2014). This is what we propose to label – in a necessarily preliminary way, and conceptually forcing the framework – as the construction site of a planetary-city, a meta-city, a city of cities, that genealogically contains the preceding urban configurations. However, it is important to affirm that our conception is not primarily geographical, but

rather political, which means that when we refer to the city it is not meant as a closed territory or a dichotomous space compared to that of the countryside, but as an expanding phenomenon which, by definition, extends itself *extra-muros*, and presupposes separations and differentiations, also from a geographical point of view. In a nutshell, even the areas that appear as “natural” are invested by urbanization processes (Brenner, and Katsikis 2020) and should be understood as urban-political battlefields. Moreover, the state is now manifestly just one of many social movements, which together form the global urban.

Focusing on the city, then, is a productive research strategy seizing on the specificities of the planetary political space. Unlike what the Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition would have liked, on the one hand, the state today is considered a global state (Ricciardi 2013), an overall institutional infrastructure covering the planet’s surface; on the other hand, this modification has changed the concept of state itself, which is not, as during Western modernity, a territorial element supposed to univocally fix the order/disorder distribution.

On the contrary, the city is reaffirmed as the primary political matrix, exceeding the state, able to give an account of the actual forms of conflict (Virilio, and Lotringer 2008: 10; Gros 2010), because it presupposes heterogeneity and multiplicity and a re-new dialectic between the rich and the poor urban subjects (see Serafini, and Maguire 2019). This political figure can be productively employed on the planetary dimension to describe the rising political space characterized by extraordinary multiplication of borders, not only referable to the state (Mezzadra, and Neilson 2013). The planetary-city allows, in fact, an analysis revolving around the paradox between the unity of the planet and its irreducible fragmentation, which is the main characteristic of the city as political conceptualization. This contradictory, elusive profile leads to the absence of an “outside” that the planetary dimension clearly assumes.

The Earth was the political space of basically unlimited appropriation for emerging sovereign forms, the world was defined by the compliance of the Earth within the European

economic-political cycles of world-systems, and the globe was drawn up by the contradictory reticular unification of what was previously rigidly divided (metropolis/colony, external/internal war). The planet instead sets up a political space, hence the ongoing, profound mutation of forms of conflict, which are a dramatic condition (according to Schmitt) and an unveiling of the political organization and structure, Foucault would probably have said. Today, the very demarcation between an inside and an outside, which was crucial to guarantee, within the state-form, the delimitation and control of war, is quite problematic, especially if focused on one of the principal mechanisms pretending to juridify the conflict. Frequent declarations of “states of exception”, far from representing a suspension of the right, as argued for example by Agamben (2005), are rather configured as attempts of hypertrophic normative regulations in potentially threatening emergency conditions, whether “internal” or “external”. In this direction, the “urban yet to arrive” of the construction site of the planetary-city “emerges in and through the never-ending extensivity of urban forms and operations made possible by the same financial, technological and noetic desires and apparatuses underpinning frictionless sovereignty” (Bishop, and Simone 2020).

### ***3.5 Giacomo Costa’s (Planetary) Cities***

A cultural representation of this scenario is proposed by the visionary creativity of the Italian artist Giacomo Costa (2008; 2020), who shows an amazing ability to treat photographic reality with a creative freedom similar to that of a painter, giving life to a painting that looks real and to a photograph that is clearly fictitious. In fact, the originality of his art is given by the use of digital techniques and tools to portray unreal yet realistic cityscapes that seem to come from a probable future planet, perhaps already present.

A research-exploration that presents dystopian traits and is conditioned by the city in all its forms is what characterizes this artist’s works. The city appears in fact as a living matter, compact and at the same time decomposable, intrinsically One and divided, existing and non-existing. It is

inexorably torn apart by political, cultural, social conflicts – which can be productively read as *stasis* – that never cease to cross it and to define its ever-changing equilibrium. Indeed, the gigantic Costian cities – both terrifying and fascinating – capture the tumultuous process of planetary urbanisation, documenting battles and tensions, dialectics that do not know *Aufhebung*, explosions and implosions that invade the entire visual spectrum. Space is therefore diluted and the city becomes a planetary city.



Figure 1. Giacomo Costa, *Atmosfera n. 10* (2020). C. Print, cm 250 X 750, Courtesy Giacomo Costa and Guidi&Schoen Contemporary Art. Exhibited in Bologna, Italy (Salaborsa), January 24, 2020 – February 22, 2020 (exhibition curated by Valentina Antoniol & Niccolò Cuppini).

More precisely: by mixing art, architecture and photography in a single whole, this artist's work is made up of mesmerizing anthill-cities, composed of almost identical cells replicated exponentially, which create an out-of-control urban development and, at the same time, a specific, apparently irrational order (see figure 1). In this way, Costa reveals, with lucid violence, the failure of a utopian conception of the city fortified by monstrous architectures that act as walls and boundaries, built to protect inhabitants and their goods. This means that he uses his cities – which grow within a horizontal-planetary frame – to investigate the contradictions and paradoxes of society, and to radically explore – beyond any possible reductive dichotomy – the conflictual dimensions triggered by the interactions between human beings, culture, nature, urban development, ecology. What is shown is in fact an

“anthropic nature” where human beings – only apparently absent from the scene – are no longer distinguishable from the urban sprawl they have created and that has incorporated them.

In a nutshell, Costa’s work calls for a cultural and political redefinition of our urbanised planet. His majestic and terrifying images of disturbing dystopias and cityscapes focus on endless assemblages of urban artefacts teeming with latent conflictual tension, and offer a punctual and cutting-edge insight on the planetary urbanscape with its *stasis*-tissue.

#### 4. *Stasis* as Emerging Form of Conflict

If, in the course of Western modernity, from Hobbes onwards, there had been a clear separation between civil war and interstate war, resolved in an attempt to deny the former and regulate the latter, today we experience difficulty in identifying these two phenomena. In a city becoming a planet and a planet demarcated by the typical city’s heterogeneous lines of division, a form of immanent conflict emerges, productively understood through the category of *stasis*, that cannot but be one where the different players are divided by intersecting boundaries, all “internal” to the political space. Therefore, rather than defining clear-cut binaries of inclusion/exclusion, new forms of “differential inclusion” are emerging. Adopting this analytical perspective aims to show “how inclusion in a sphere, society, or realm can be subject to varying degrees of subordination, rule, discrimination, and segmentation” (Mezzadra, and Neilson 2013: 159), and consequently, how these processes of inclusion are far from being “pacified” or neutral.

This condition is increasingly interpreted through the lenses of a global civil war (Agamben 2005; Hardt, and Negri 2004; Nancy 2007; Schnur 1983), a framework that, as previously discussed, is derived from the 20th century. However, the civil war concept is inadequate because it is still too close to a typically modern conception of conflict and to a vision of the political trapped within the framework of the state. This obscures more than it explains about the current political scenario, and leads to the construction of an interpretative framework distinguishing between old and new forms of conflict.

Similarly, not even the concept of “Pure War”, as developed by Paul Virilio, can be said to be entirely satisfactory, as it is conceived as a “fusion between hyper-terrorist civil war and international war” (Virilio, and Lotringer 2008: 13). Furthermore, the Virillean perspective which, however, is very interesting because it assumes an inseparability between war, politics, city space and urban planning, considers Pure War as something intimately linked to the logic of nuclear deterrence and a critique without appeal to technology or, better, to “the art of technology” (Virilio, and Lotringer 2008: 192). At the same time, it presupposes the shaping of the political space as a military space. On the contrary, the notion of *stasis* in the planetary-city, which certainly presupposes a necessary urbanization of political thought (Magnusson 2011), is detached from any technophobic position – as it considers technoscience a productive battlefield capable of giving rise to conflictual mechanisms of resistance (see Haraway 1991) –, as well as to any exclusively military understanding of space: in fact, *stasis* rather defines a “civil” (conflictual) order.

For all these reasons, we propose a shift from polemology (Bouthoul 1951), which establishes a radical difference between civil war and interstate war, towards stasiology, which implies looking at diversified contemporary conflicts, where war (conceived in classical terms as a clash between organized military forces) is nothing more than a specific manifestation of conflict (and perhaps not the most prominent) among many others. Thinking in terms of stasiology means maintaining that “there is no field of human activity that is immune to conflict, no thought or action that is categorically outside the political” (Bargu 2011: 153). Therefore, the interpretative framework we are proposing is an act of nomination, which defines a conceptual constellation and describes the dynamics of conflict inherent to the planetary-city. In this regard, the notion of *stasis* proves to be extremely useful due to its inextricable link with the city.

As previously noted, there is no satisfactory translation of the Greek term *stasis* (στάσις) and this terminological deficiency is coupled with a conceptual lack. In fact, this notion has been abandoned since the Roman era: the use of *bellum*

*civile*, as adopted for example by Cicero (Grangé 2015: 111–129; Giorgini, and Irrera 2014), widely differs from the meaning of *stasis* as understood in the context of the Greek *polis* (Armitage 2017). Similarly, the expressions *civil war*, *revolution*, and *sedition*, as the term has historically been translated, do not grasp its deepest meaning and etymology. If on the one hand it designates *excessive movement, agitation, uprising, or to take stand*, in contrast to other *stands* from which derives the properly political meanings of *civil war*, on the other hand, it indicates *the absence of movement*, from which the current standard usage is derived, meaning *equilibrium, standstill, inertia* (Botteri 2009: 87; Chantraine 1968: 470–471; Vardoulakis 2009: 127–130). In short, the original meaning of *stasis* describes a condition characterized by different processes of political disorder that are not only unavoidable, but also preeminent and consubstantial in the constitution of the political order and equilibrium.

Clearly, it is not a question of comparing two immeasurable conditions such as the Greek *polis* and the planetary-city. Nevertheless, the notion of *stasis* is brought back, as it enriches, beyond the possibilities provided by the classical schemes of Western modernity, our political lexicon, cultural dimension and imagination, giving new life to a relevant notion which has long been forgotten and transfigured. Indeed, the category of *stasis* is useful to comprehend (here in the double sense of understanding and at the same time including) the various forms of conflict that develop synchronously with respect to a process of spatial redefinition, which recognizes as its yardstick the city or, more precisely, the becoming "city of city" of the planet.

Unlike the concept of civil war, which presupposes an ontological opposition to external war – the first conceived as pure violence<sup>7</sup>, the latter as a means that presupposes a political use of violence – the notion of *stasis*, which is not clearly opposed to that of *polemos* (πόλεμος), that is war in a wider sense (Chantraine 1968: 875–876; Grangé 2015: 11), underlines the inextricable relationship between violence and politics (Balibar 2015: 18). Nicole Loraux has in fact shown that *stasis* is a condition of the Greek *polis*: it participates not only

in its foundation, but it also remains an irreducible part of it: “*stasis* is congenital to Greek political existence” (Loraux 2006: 66). In the same way, *stasis* is not something that exists today outside the political order, as presupposed in the conceptualization of civil war, it is inherent to it. Indeed, *stasis* is not detachable from the city: it is the internal engine of its *in fieri* of modification. This is referred to what is known as Solon’s law against neutrality, as reported by Aristotle in *The Athenian Constitution*:

And as he saw that the state was often in conflict (*στασιάζουσαν*), while some citizens would let things take their course through idleness (*διὰ τὴν ῥαθυμίαν*), he laid down a special law to deal with them, enacting that whoever did not take a stand in a *stasis* (*στασιαζούσης τῆς πόλεως*) was to lose his citizenship and to be expelled from the polis (see Vardoulakis 2017a: 72).

From this passage it is evident that, at least in the Aristotelian conception, *stasis* is not understood in a dramatic sense (Grangé 2015: 47; Vardoulakis 2017a: 72), but is considered part of the democratic process. Even the option of neutrality doesn’t prove to be impolitic: in fact, it implies a specific political reaction, namely a series of measures, aimed at denying access to the democratic life of the *polis* for those who do not take stand in a *stasis*, from which derives a redefinition of the political structure of the *polis* itself.

Furthermore, the subject of citizenship, to which Solon’s law refers, is undoubtedly one of the main fields of tension within the planetary-city conceptualized by *stasis*. While a broad debate on the subject (Balibar 2003; Honig 2001) is not in the scope of this discussion, it is important to note how many conflicting dynamics at present are determined by the interest to acquire (or not to lose) political and civil rights, or are aimed at access to “the right to claim rights” (Isin 2009: 371). *Mutatis mutandis*, Aristotle again shows how *stasis* is both a physiological dimension of the city, consubstantial to the asymmetries belonging to the political order, and a necessary condition (intentionally) employed to change, and even improve on, this same order: “For party strife (*στάσις/stasis*) is everywhere due to inequality (...): the motive for factious strife (*στασιάζουσιν/stasiазousin*) is the

desire for equality” (Aristotle 1959: 1301 b 25, 374–375). As well, those who are excluded from citizenship, for example migrants, become key actors “in reshaping, contesting, and redefining the borders of citizenship” (Mezzadra, and Neilson 2013: 257). From this it follows that, even in situations where a choice of political inaction is exercised, a weakening of the individual condition may certainly result, but it does not eliminate *stasis* as a form inherent to the entire city. As Dimitris Vardoulakis states: “It is never the citizens who are in *stasis* (...). Rather, it is always the polis that is in *stasis*” (Vardoulakis 2017b: 714).

To conclude, there is a clear need to identify new interpretative perspectives within the fade-out of political forms inherited from the Western modernity. In fact, in recent decades, an unprecedented scenario has gradually emerged, assembling and dissolving previous conditions, leading to the materialization of a planetary-city, intended as a figure for understanding the contemporary political spatiality. Conceiving contemporary urbanization processes as a form of spatialization of *stasis* is transformative of the urban studies’ debate and of the dominant language of urbanisation, since it allows the urban dynamics to be read politically, where they are usually interpreted only as economic and social vectors. For these reasons, assuming the notion of *stasis* proves to be productive in order to measure the changing forms of conflict within this new political configuration. *Stasis* presupposes the compresence between order and disorder and it allows a vision capable of discerning the irregular characteristics of the planetary-city, in which what gives shape to the political order is a multifaceted plexus of conflictual dynamics. These different forms of conflict are not independent of each other, and this complexity linking them to their specific common space should be grasped.

The *stasis*/planetary-city binomial is therefore an original contribution that also has significant cultural implications, which find one of their most interesting exemplifications in artistic works such as those of Giacomo Costa. This artist’s work is important precisely because it clearly shows that the time has come for political theory to bridge the gap between contemporary dynamics on the ground

and how they are thought, analysed, described and represented. It is precisely in this direction that the consideration of “*stasis* in the planetary-city” can open up a research program as a productive starting point for a new understanding of our time.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Even more than in Hobbes, the distinction of the functioning between the European and the colonial space assumes relevance in the work of Locke where it takes a properly Atlantic dimension (Locke 1980: chapter XVI; Laudani 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The United States offers an emblematic representation of how a colonial space built a different political model from the "continental" modernity that has been conceived and developed (Wilder 2015). Thomas Paine, father of US political radicalism, probably represents the main example of a non-contractual conception of sovereignty (Paine 1995).

<sup>3</sup> As stated by Andreas Kalyvas (2018), Schmitt implicitly recognizes “the centrality of the category of the colony as indispensable to the spatial constitution of the international system of states and the geopolitical rise of Europe”. See also the critique of Lauren Benton (2009), who highlights that the division of the world between lawful and lawless lands is an ideological instance through which the intrinsic violence in imperial creations has been obscured.

<sup>4</sup> Note that Hannah Arendt used the same concept in the same year. She described the second world war as “a kind of civil war raging all over the earth” (1990: 17).

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, we refer to the interpretation of Antonio Negri (1999: 37–98).

<sup>6</sup> The 1992 Los Angeles riots were quite an unheard alarm in this sense, anticipated by Mike Davis (1990). It is remarkable to refer also to Hans Magnus Enzensberger. In fact, he talked about the emergence of a molecular civil war on a global scale (1994).

<sup>7</sup> This is obviously a necessary theoretical oversimplification. For an in-depth analysis of the issue, see Stathis Kalyvas (2006).

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