disability and the militarization of urban spaces: configuring radical accessibility and communities of support in contexts of war.

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introduction

Cities are spaces of battle. For years, the militarization of urban landscapes has made city streets, workplaces, schools, and homes into spaces of war. In these landscapes, urban residents are often called upon as combatants, and, unfortunately, sometimes number among the list of casualties. Indeed, processes of militarization have caused long lasting physical and psychological impacts on urban populations—especially on marginalized communities. In this essay I want to explore processes of militarization and talk about trauma as disability. I propose that urban struggles for demilitarization and resistance against violent structures and technologies of war require a critical disability analysis that acknowledges the realities of trauma, and makes space for taking care of both individuals and communities. This analysis will permit a clear confrontation of (dis)ableism within struggles of resistance against hegemonic systems of power, and allow for radical forms of accessibility within these struggles and political movements.

part 1: disability and processes of urban militarization

I use the term "militarization" to at once refer to and root this essay in a sociological and geographical study of war. Militarization takes places as a discursive process—one that involves the reproduction of norms and technologies that perpetuate cycles of violence and harm within urban communities (1). As mentioned in the introduction, a significant aspect of militarization is the way in which urban residents are looked at and acted upon within a militarized landscape. Urban residents are seen as potential enemies to the state. They can be called upon as combatants at any time. Consequently, they are also likely to suffer the violences of injury and trauma, and be counted among the casualties of urban battlespaces.

The notion of "battlespace" supposes "a boundless and unending process of militarization where everything becomes a site of permanent war" (2). Using this framework, I will explore how militarization processes violently disable urban communities. In this paper, I use the term "disabling" to refer to the processes through which environments disable bodies. Here I am referring to how these bodies experience environments in a way that does not enable them to live the fulfilling, liberatory lives they seek to experience. Disability at once interprets and disciplines bodily variations, determines a relationship between individual bodies and their environments, and prescribes a set of norms and practices that produce both the able-bodied and the disabled as two distinct, hierarchized categories (3). It is an extremely broad category that encompasses a multitude of lived experiences and identities that cannot and should not be reduced or simplified. In this paper, I do not claim to extrapolate knowledge across all experiences of disability, but rather seek to specifically study the relationship between militarization and disabling processes in an urban context.

1.1 structural militarization, gentrification and processes of exclusion

The structural transformation of city space is perhaps the most tangible way in which militarization is established. When historians and geographers attempt to locate the beginnings of urban militarization, they often refer to the colonial reshaping of the cities of Algiers and Constantine in Algeria during the late 19th century (4). In order to facilitate the control and colonization of these cities, the commanding general at the time, Robert Bugeaud, ordered the systematic annihilation of entire neighbourhoods so as to replace the windy, narrow streetscapes with European-style architectures, wide avenues, and grid-like street systems. The latter were designed to enable colonial troops and policing forces to easily access the city core in order to crush insurgencies (4). Not unlike present-day gentrification strategies of spatial reclamation, transformation, and exclusion, these tactics of militaristic destruction and reconstruction formed a

large part of the colonial war effort. They facilitated the control of indigenous, urban populations.

The militarization of urban environments is an inherently disabling process. Highly militaristic spatial monitoring and infrastructure inhibit bodies from gaining free and liberatory access (5) to urban space. To develop this point further let us consider, as mentioned above, the similarity between urban military colonization strategies of the 19th century and modern-day militaristic gentrification processes. The simultaneous structural and economic cleansing that takes place through gentrification systematically pushes away marginalized communities from the city-center—making the city inherently less accessible to non-normative, unwanted, or undesirable bodies. Through gentrification, individuals, families, and even entire communities are forced out of their neighbourhoods. Through gentrification, they are barred from the very spaces of social and cultural production, of sociality, wherein their own identities were formed. This represents an erasure of people—on both a physical and a psychosocial level—from public, urban space. Erasure through non-access is an extremely disabling process.

1.2 technological militarization and the normalization of violence

A second form of militarization occurs through technological input. At their root, military technologies monitor and identify bodies, as a means of controlling potential security threats (6) and maintaining state power (1). Today, urban technologies of militarization include satellites, surveillance cameras, militarized police or "riot" squads, police cavalries, aviation surveillance, chemical weapons such as tear gas and pepper spray, biometrics and facial recognition technologies—all of which direct the colonizing gaze inwards, towards urban residents (7). In order to focus on the insidiousness of militarization in urban life, I will turn to examining less obvious technologies of war making. Among many other technological advances, cellphones and the Internet were initially developed as military tools (8). It is through the study of these superficially apolitical technologies that I want to explore the advent of a "new" technological militarization within urban spaces, and how (dis)ableism is perpetuated. "New military urbanism," as described by geographer Stephen Graham, is the usurpation of normalized systems of consumption and mobility – such as streets, cars, trains, airplanes, schools, hospitals, borders, shopping malls, cell phones, or Internet systems – for the purposes of militarized control (1). For instance, state-sanctioned policing efforts can use technologies of communication such as cellphones or email accounts—integrated technologies upon which urban populations have become dependent for the smooth functioning of political and social economies as well as for immediate communication and social connection—to tap into data and information about bodies, movements,

actions, and ideas (1).

The process through which these technologies become normalized is similar to the way in which inaccessibility becomes justified. Normalized technologies are those that become embedded in urban space through constant discursive processes of justification. Drawing on the work of critical disability scholar Tanya Titchkosky, I would argue that military technologies rely on a "dis-education of the sensorium" (9) of urban populations. The sensorium of urban populations has been trained to "sense and make sensible the legitimate participants [in urban society] with their legitimated "normal" accommodation expenses"—at the expense of non-normative or subversive bodies that confront the question of access on a very regular basis (9). To illustrate the above point, I offer the example of security cameras in public spaces. At present, building designs are created with camera networks in mind. Employees may even request that cameras be installed in their work spaces for their own safety. Despite these justifying narratives (9), cameras still present a deep threat to many communities in an urban setting. Be they people without immigration status, already-criminalized youth in schools, homeless people, or politicized individuals who employ subversive tactics of resistance against oppressive systems of power—the safety of these communities is threatened by the proliferation of security cameras and the constant gaze of the police state. Here, the notions of "safety" deployed by those who are deemed to have "legitimate accommodation expenses" rely on the criminalization of non-normative and potentially threatening and/or disruptive bodies. These bodies are thus "included" in security justification narratives as "excludable types" (9). That is, these communities are both erased from narratives of public security and included within these discourses as threats to security. Theirs is an "absent presence" (9)— and indication of the relationship between the "dis-education of the sensorium" (9), and the expulsion and erasure of non-normative bodies.

part 2: radical accessibility and communities of support in contexts of war
In urban battlespaces, bodies are constantly watched, vilified, controlled and repressed. Further, as communities have to negotiate through disability, infiltration, internalized violence and self-policing, the work of resistance becomes an increasingly difficult task. In this section I intend to address some of the ways demilitarization struggles can be informed by a critical disability work, and vice versa.

2.1 radical accessibility within battlespaces
A.J. Withers has proposed the notion of radical access: "real and meaningful inclusion of all people, including disabled people" (5). But what does it mean to think about

radical access in a context of war? How can we make battlespaces more accessible? Critical disability analysis asks who is missing from struggles of demilitarization. Who is not present in organizing circles, meetings, and social spaces? Who is not able to conform to crisis-based work ethics that lead towards burnout, stress and anxiety? Who is not included in discussions of warfare strategies and resistance? Bodies that cannot access spaces of resistance are those that remain marginalized and (re)victimized. Inaccessibility, in this case, is unacceptable.

For all bodies to be included there is a need to acknowledge disability at all times in anti-violence movements. Instead of perpetuating narratives of justification for the absence of disabled bodies (i.e. "We regret to say that the venue of this queer dance party is inaccessible to wheelchair users"), communities can sharpen their analyses and shape priorities accordingly. Paired with these discussions is a need for radical networks of support, especially given the traumatic nature of anti-violence struggles. Failure to recognize the immediacy of mental health needs in crisis situations, such as mass arrests, deportations or expropriations, views these situations from an ableist lens. This, unfortunately, is seen time and time again. To address this issue, there is a need to incorporate discussions of radical support—both for individuals and for communities as a whole—into imaginations of radical accessibility and demilitarization. The creation of networks of support and anti-ableist, radically accessible spaces should be an integral part of anti-violence and demilitarization struggles.

conclusion
Though cities are violent battlespaces, there is the potential to create spaces in which and from which demilitarization can take place. For cycles and technologies of violence to be confronted, however, there is a need to understand the ways in which they are normalized and perpetuated. In this essay I explored the structural and technological ways in which militarization disables individuals and communities. I presented the urban process of gentrification as an example of how marginalized and politicized populations get attacked and uprooted from spaces of kinship, support, resistance, and survival. Living through and dealing with the violence of exclusion can be an extremely traumatizing and disabling experience—one that requires further conversations about radical accessibility. Demilitarization is about more than changing infrastructures, taking down cameras and keeping police outside of neighbourhoods; it is also about how we think of bodies, how we support each other, how we frame demands and do our work. In asking "who is missing?" disability analysis interrupts normative processes of violent exclusion—even within communities of resistance.

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