



Transcript Ep.52: Book Review Roundtable: Fragments of the City

[Intro] *This is the Urban Political. The podcast on urban theory, research, and activism.*

[Nitin Bathla] So, hello and welcome everyone to the newest episode of Urban Political Podcast. I am Nitin Bathla and I'm part of the extended collective of the Urban Political Podcast, which was founded by Markus Kip and Ross Beveridge. And today we are here to discuss the newest book *Fragments of the City*, by Professor Colin McFarlane. Colin has previously published several books on infrastructure and informality. These include *Infrastructural Lives*, which was published with Stephen Graham. *Everyday Sanitation: Informal Settlements in Mumbai*, which was published in 2011. *Learning the City: Knowledge and Trans local Assemblage*, which was also published in 2011. He's published these books among a dozen of journal articles, book chapters, and edited volumes. In my opinion, it would not be unfair to say that this recent book, *Fragments of the City*, then brings the prolific writing of Colin, on infrastructure and informality, together across the extremely wide geographical range that he's operated across.

So, *Fragments of the City* is published by the University of California Press. It contains 328 pages and 28 photographs. Not quite a lot, I would say, for a book which is so creative and fun to read and so imaginatively written. It's available for \$34.95 in the United States or £27 in the United Kingdom. And it's available in both, in paperback and e-Book. I read the book in about two sittings, on a spring day here in Zurich. And it is rare that I stick to a book, and I read the book so quickly, and it's a testament to the way the book has been written. It really makes you turn the page. Well, I have a lot to say about the book, and it intersects with a lot of my interests on filmmaking and art.

But maybe listening about the book from me is not so interesting as listening about it from the guests we have today. So today we have with us Dr. Kevin Ward, Dr. Tatiana Thieme, and Dr. Theresa Enright, who have so generously taken time out from their busy schedules to discuss Colin's book. Thanks a lot for joining us. And we also have Colin McFarlane with us, the author of the book to respond to the interlocutors. So, thanks also to Colin for joining us. I feel that the author and the interlocutors need little introduction, however, I'm still going to say a few words about each of you for the benefit of our listeners who may be unfamiliar with your work.

So, starting with Dr. Tatiana Thieme, she's an Associate Professor of Human Geography at the University College London. At a broad level, Tatiana's research focuses on ethnographies of entrepreneurial and makeshift urbanism in cities of the Global North and of the Global South. She's written about everyday cultural and economic geographies of precarious labour, that take place outside of, or alongside waged economies with particular interest in hustle economies and what they teach us about non normative labour relations and urban practices at the margins. Her research focuses on urban political ecologies of waste, sanitation and repair with a particular passion for seeing what lies beyond negation. Her recent research projects have been funded by the ESRC and by the British Academy. And she is currently working on a book project drawing together 15 years of ethnographic material from Nairobi, Kenya.

Next, we have with us Dr. Theresa Enright. Her research examines urban and regional politics with a focus on infrastructure and mobility. She has written about conflicts over urban transit in Toronto, London, and Paris. Her most recent work considers cultural dimensions of transportation through an analysis of the art, architecture, and design of urban rail networks. Dr. Enright is the author of *The*



Making of Grand Paris: Metropolitan Urbanism in the Twenty-first Century, published by the MIT Press in 2016. And editor with Ugo Rossi of *The Urban Political: Ambivalent Spaces of Late Neoliberalism* published by the Palgrave Press in 2017.

Next with us is Dr. Kevin Ward, who is a professor of human geography and the director of Manchester Urban Institute at the University of Manchester. He's also the Editor in Chief at Urban Geography. His research interests centre on comparative urbanism, municipal finance, policy mobility studies, and urban governance. He's the author and editor of 11 books and author of over 80 book chapters and journal articles, including publications in the *Antipode*, *Environment and Planning A*, *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research*, *Urban Geography*, and *Urban Studies*.

Lastly with us is Colin McFarlane, the author of the book. He's a professor at the Durham University. His research focuses on urban living, densities, fragments, and learning across different cities, focusing in particular on economic margins. He's the author of several books, some of which I mentioned at the start of this podcast. So perhaps to open up this discussion, I would like to invite Theresa Enright to say a few things about Colin's book. Welcome, Theresa.

[Theresa Enright] Thank you, Nitin, for inviting me to be part of this conversation and of course to Colin for writing this book. I really enjoyed reading *Fragments of the City* and I found it to be incredibly generative for the project of making sense of cities, both as an intellectual project, but also more personally, just for learning how to reflexively and responsibly be in city spaces. And since reading and rereading the book, I've come to notice and respond to fragments in different ways. So, I think that's testament to the book's force. And I think the aspect of the book that I found most refreshing is that it invites a really unscripted reading of how urban worlds come to be and how they come to be otherwise. Emphasizing that the urban is always plural and provisional, *Fragments of the City* starts with elemental details, and it links them together without assuming from the outset any inherent structural logics or formulas or any final shapes and goals. And in so doing, it calls into question many of the taken for granted approaches of urban theory today, which so often connect the world's dots into shapes that conform to existing beliefs. The book thus cuts a bold and original path into and through the field of critical urban studies, but it does so in a manner that's also thoroughly modest and eclectic.

Through a range of methodological excursions into fragment urbanism, *Fragments of the City* asks compelling poetic questions. Its patchworks colourful happenings across different contexts, and it sounds out resonant concepts for theorizing a multiplicity of urban experiences and politics. The book is also endlessly pedagogical for cultivating modes of attention and modes of action, so ways of seeing, walking, feeling, writing, making, thinking, and being that are attuned to the complex interplays of actual urban life. And on page 91 in the book, you referenced David Kishik's call that we let the city change the way that we think. And for me, the book really achieves that. So, I understood it as an attempt to be really receptive to modes of urban expression that might otherwise not be recognized. And as a result, the book is very performative.

So rather than approaching criticism as a matter of exposing or unveiling or interrogating all of these very violent metaphors that we use to describe rigorous work today, the book is instead constructive and creative, dialogically engaging interlocutors in the very connective practices that it analyses. It thus provides a provocation and an example for how to do urban scholarship in a way that takes critique into productive and growth making directions. So, both in its form and its content, the book really highlights how to increase shared capacities through rearranging elements and reshaping relations.

While the book presents a clear-eyed account of extreme forms of violence, dispossession, and indignity, it nevertheless remains incredibly hopeful. *Fragments of the City* is veritably humming with the potentials of collectives in the making. And I think it's a really challenging task to convey the discontents of contemporary urbanization and the severity of differentially experienced and multiple overlapping urban crises, while also emphasizing the margin of manoeuvrability that enables life to persist and sometimes to thrive. And the book does both of these things at once. Forwarding a radically pragmatic politics that exists in what Eve Sedgwick once called the heartbeat of contingency. And I have many thoughts and many questions. Writing in fragments, of course, encourages reading in manifold directions. But I'll just briefly comment on two of the ways that the book resonated with me, and then I'll raise a few questions for a discussion. So, the first theme that I want to talk about is really the role of aesthetics and imagining, sensing, and learning the urban.

So many of the claims in the book centre around epistemological practices and the kinds of embodied sensory situated and relational knowledges that are needed for apprehending the city and its incessant dynamics. And I was particularly struck by the turn to art in the book as a potential site for both reading and for activating fragments. There's a real prominence to artistic practices throughout the chapters, from the co-created exhibition in Kampala celebrating Namuwongo, to the analysis artistic collaborations around junk art in Los Angeles, to the invocation of the work of a whole range of artists and artistic practices, from music performance to visual arts. And so, I was wondering why artistic practices as creative sense making endeavours feature so prominently in the book. What, if anything, is distinctive about art as a means to engage and politicize fragments? Do artistic practices that are attuned to fragments reframe the way that we think about the relationship between aesthetics and politics and political agency? And if so, how? And what can we as researchers learn from art? So, what are the implications for this emphasis on the artistic for how we engage in urban scholarship practice and policymaking?

The second set of questions that I have focus on the ambivalence of density as a political force and the extent to which density is both the condition and challenge of urban politics today. And maybe this is just actually an invitation for Colin to speak about the relationship of fragment urbanism to some of your more recent work. And I was struck by the paradox throughout the book that on the one hand, density connotes this cruel map of resource scarcity, inadequate infrastructure provision, and debilitating oppression. Where living close often means the accretion of durable forms of racialized, gendered, ableist, classist exclusion and incapacity. And on the other hand, density also intensifies and multiplies interactions and connections in positive directions. It's a precondition and a resource for social infrastructure, and through what Antonio Negri and others might describe as an aleatory materialism, it has the potential to furnish joyful capacity, increasing political engagements of all kinds. So how do we understand density as both a condition of political openings and closures and of different kinds of politics? How can we think about this relationship between fragments and density across varied contexts where the affordances of propinquity might differ? And then, lastly, I suppose, summing these up, if you could elaborate on the connections then between fragment urbanism, density, and the urban political. Thank you, I'll stop there.

[Nitin Bathla] Thanks Theresa. Thanks for that really brilliant analysis and for the set of questions as well. Tatiana, would you like to go next?

[Tatiana Thieme] Thank you, Nitin, so much for the invitation and to Colin for this book. And I'm delighted to be with you all today. So, this has been a really wonderful journey into a book that, to me,

feels like it brings together in really generative ways, a lot of the different work that I've been following over the years. So, Colin, it's a *tour de force* in many ways, and I'll just share a few overall impressions, I suppose. And then, because I read the book during the last few weeks, where I also did a little bit of reconnecting with some fieldwork in Paris, I'll just evoke a couple of points that made me think differently about what I was seeing in Paris. Sort of using your book in a way as a methodological companion, I suppose, as well as a way of thinking conceptually about fragments. And then I'll highlight a couple points for potential discussion or questions that I'd love to hear more about from you. So, my overall impression is that this book does so much, and yet it also anchors itself very firmly within a well stated aim, which is to bring different ideas and scenes from different places in conversation with one another as a way of seeing the urban world. Near the end, you state that you write in a register between metanarrative and local specificities, and I think that you do this very well by presenting what feels like a kind of kaleidoscopic effect, a mix of different elements and situations and indeed scales that are manifest through both, the kind of content that you cover, but also your different kind of methodological manoeuvrings. So, you move from walking the streets where the granularity of city life sort of hits us with various scenes that evoke, perhaps, places of more longitudinal research and also places, where one senses, that you've been for perhaps more fleeting engagements. And so, we move from these walkabouts to the kind of aerial view where you invite the reader to reflect on wider dynamics and issues at stake, from the vertical to horizontal forms of urbanism, the visible to the invisible, to both, the, I suppose the different scales at play. When we think about contemporary urbanism and indeed historical geographies of urban life.

So, I suppose at its core, this book to me contends with some of the vibrant paradoxes of urbanity and modernity. The violences and destruction on the one hand, but the generative experimentation and agentive solidarities that are often born out of shared struggles. And you then use your various empirical engagements as a way into thinking about how some of these struggles are, as you say, put to work. How are they represented and narrated, contested, curated, performed, and politicized? And what's remarkable, I think, about the book is that you do some of that work of representing and narrating, contesting, and curating, and performing, and politicizing, but you also make so much room in a very generative and generous way to a host of other, not just urban scholars, but also activists and artists from across disciplines and across a range of temporal scales.

What I really also appreciated is this continuous return to the register of the inevitable disturbance that toilets and sanitation politics provoke in particular. And you make, I think, an important case for thinking about the material and embodied lived experiences of those dealing with inadequate sanitation, or as you've called it before, forced improvisation, but also the vital forms of knowledge and social infrastructures that shape the modes of care, repair, and coping strategies in all forms that often take place around, what Brenda Chalfin calls, excremental politics, so where fragments, in a sense, become reflective of both what is absent or broken, but also what is repurposed and assembled. And you introduce, alongside the first introduction of the toilet politics that you've been writing about for some years in your Mumbai field site, you also introduce the kind of relevance of the dump site. And returning later, several times, to the different evocations of garbage fragments, scraps, junk yard, what becomes junk art or assemblage sculpture. And in a sense, this conceptually and symbolically and materially hooks back into this theme of the urban archive at work. And as someone who works on discarding practices or discard studies and also works on urban sanitation, I personally really appreciated the ways in which you wove in these excremental politics and its different registers and the affective registers of trash and ruination into the writing and the narrative arc of the book. So, working with different conceptual registers that link into your kind of narrative of fragments, such as traces and remnants, to express different kind of ways of thinking about time, and stories, and

palimpsests. As Walter Benjamin's arcade work, you know, looking at rags and refuse and as a kind of counter narrative to the mirage of progress and coherence.

And so, I felt like it was a very deliberate move to keep returning in different ways to the kind of humanitarian and political object of the toilet and to the different registers of refuse, and residue, and remains, and remnants and so on. And as an aside, something that might just be useful, I've been taken for some years by the work of Rachael Kiddey, who has done some really extraordinary work in what she calls contemporary archaeology in Bristol and York, working with rough sleepers to assemble a kind of archive of homelessness as a form of cultural heritage work. And has more recently been working on what she's calling migrant materialities. And so, some of the ways in which you are mobilizing these different registers of remnants and traces and ruins made me think of this relatively niche but really interesting area of contemporary archaeology and ways of knowing the city.

What I also really loved is how you take us on this ride exploring diverse scales of knowing fragments from the etymology of the term to ways in which fragments have long served as a tool for representing urban destruction and decay, generation, play, and creativity. And in so doing, you at some point, kind of pull us into a more autobiographical interlude through this small chapter, *The Gap*. And I think here is where, again, it seems to be a deliberate pull into a more personal story about the Pollok housing estate in Glasgow, that no longer stands, where you grew up. You talk about the all-vibrant activity that no longer has a territory. And at the same time, remembering that activity with your readers and its territory connects the earlier part of the book to your own lived experience, in a way that I think is really powerful, but also an important reflection connecting your own childhood years in that neighbourhood and the wider effects of these post war social housing estates across different cities, in particular across the UK or the different parts of Europe, in underserved neighbourhoods that have over time undergone various stages of austerity under investment. And eventual demolition or regeneration. And there is a particular exhibit at the moment in Paris in Aubervilliers called *La vie HLM*, which also does this work, with an estate that was built in 1957 is about to be demolished in the near future, in the name of urban regeneration. And where the exhibit in part tries to take up this way of creating a kind of museum of popular neighbourhoods through storytelling and testimonials of people who have lived there or who no longer do but remember these kind of childhood memories and these different kind of material and affective registers by having people walk through these different apartments with different remnants of their past pieces of material culture, letters, personal administration, and various objects of their homemaking.

I guess this brings me to two final points, which I wanted to make, which is one that alongside these moments of more autobiographical interlude, in a sense, I felt that there was both a kind of honesty with which you periodically reminded the reader of your partial rendering and the inevitable limitations of any medium of expression, whether it be the exhibit in Kampala or the impressions from walkabouts. I would love to hear you speak a little bit more about your own positionality and your own ethical conundrums and methodological dilemmas, I suppose, because in many ways, because we're working in this way of walking through these different fragments and vignettes, we often walk through, but we don't sit with different key interlocutors that you write about. And so I just wondered if you could perhaps, in your comments, speak to that a little bit, in a way that's perhaps, if I might make an observation about the empirics that come through, the writing is both incredibly generous in its citation and its intertextuality and in its, you know, huge amount of sensitivity towards your interlocutors and the people that you write about. And yet, there is a kind of absence in a way of your own relationality or the relationships to these different field sites. In other words, the relationality that would be part of a more ethnographic encounter seems to be somewhat written out. Not to say that it's not there, I just wondered if it was deliberate to write it out. In other words, to pull out the potential, as Ruth Behar would put it, vulnerable observer in your method.



And my second and last point to ask about is, although there is so much that you've covered in the book, so this is not a criticism, but I was curious about the relative absence of attention to, as you call it on page 12, the world of work for the urban poor.

And so here is where you evoke on a few occasions urban livelihoods. And again, perhaps this is because I'm particularly interested in the future of work and in the different kinds of ways of conceptualizing work. But I just wondered if you could speak to this kind of world of work that seems perhaps less part of this particular text. And in terms of your call at the end to renewed politics of the city, which again speaks to, as Theresa was putting, the kind of hopeful register, which is very, both refreshing and, in some ways, very needed. I wondered if I could just ask you about what your thinking is on the potential divergent politics of the city, when we think about the rise of right-wing populism and its entanglements with the very effects of neoliberal urbanism and uneven capitalist relations and the production of different kinds of marginalization. I just wondered when you talk about liberal cities of rights and state institutions versus the city in the wild, the city of situated everyday negotiations and makeshift political bargaining. Where does a place like Budapest fit in? So where are the cities where there is a present state and processes, but a very authoritarian one at that, or the recent French elections, which have seen the rise of the National Front, like never before, which in a way expresses the fact that there's a kind of peripherality or what was called the left behinds or peripheral France or peripheral Britain in many ways, versus perhaps the way you articulate urban margins.

So, the different kinds of political claim making that happen when you have, on the one hand, refugees in Berlin or in Seine-Saint-Denis in Paris who are sleeping rough and who are making a claim to the city, and in contrast, other precariously housed and underemployed aggrieved groups who are also feeling like they are excluded from various kinds of services and parts of the city. I'll stop there. But again, thank you very much for the chance to read the book in such depth and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

[Nitin Bathla] Thanks Tatiana. So, we have Kevin next.

[Kevin Ward] Hi, everyone. Thanks for the invitation to be part of the podcast. Thanks to my two discussants for their insightful and thoughtful comments. And lastly, thanks to Colin for writing *Fragments of the City*. I guess let me just say, from the outset that I really enjoyed the book, most of it, most of the time. It's a book of many parts, which add up to a whole lot of different things, as I think we just heard from Tatiana and Theresa. Chapters are long and are short. They're directed, but they're open. They're polemical and they're reflective. Some draw upon Colin's own academic research, which is well known, of course, and others are reactions to one artistic or cultural product or another. So, an art installation or novel or a poem.

On the one hand, the book's focus is on the urban world, as Colin calls it. However, this singularity, this whole, often disappears from view, in its place examples, or fragments. Multiplicity is not variations, or may be variations. Is there a single logic, structure, or theme running through the book, I wonder? The material is fascinating. Those familiar with Colin's work won't be disappointed. We have discussions of urban housing, informality, infrastructure, politics, and sanitation. We have comparison, and as he has in his most important past contributions, here Colin is both creative and provocative about how we as academics render cities comparable. And while I guess it's not a main issue or theme that's in the book, I guess it was something that I was just alive to, given my own work. And as always, Colin leaves us thinking a bit about how we compare cities, about how those activists and agents of change do the comparative work themselves. So, I guess when I think back about the book, Colin's points about comparison are ontological, epistemological, but they're also, I think, profoundly political.

The book has challenging discussions on representation and writing on data and in methods. As to what the book adds up to, I'm not sure. I'm reminded of Jane M. Jacobs, writing on the comparison of cities using Deleuze and the Deleuzian ways of thinking about the world, which is a formula of subtraction $n-1$, rather than the $n+1$ that guides much of the academic literature on comparative urbanism, my own work included. And it's fitting I think she appears on the back of the book with her endorsement because I see elements of Jane's work present in the book and Tatiana's point about the old buildings that are kind of torn down and the lives, the violence that damned people's lives through the notion of urban regeneration, whether it's in the cities of the north or the south, is also something that Jane's talked about in her own work on high rises, both in Singapore and in Scotland. And I guess when I think back about the Deleuzian points of argument that Jane makes in her piece in *Urban Geography* on comparison, maybe that's the point. Maybe one of the points of Colin's book, I take out, is to know less or to be less certain about what we think we know. Colin writes about comfort zones in his reading fragments chapter. And I guess I would put myself as one of the readers who found himself profoundly outside of his comfort zone. And that probably doesn't surprise Colin, given what he knows about me academically.

Interestingly, Colin notes the following towards the beginning of his book. And I'm going to quote him here: "The process of assembling text into a book is inevitably a practice of holism. It is integrative, standardizing, structuring, and disciplining. It is a form of tidying up in which fragments are placed into position with inevitable consequences for how they might be read, both in themselves and in relation to one another." That is of course an important and necessary step for a book. But for a book about fragments that seeks, at least to some degree, to experiment with what writing fragments might enable, it's a tricky process, and I've not found this question of form to be straightforward, and I'm reassured that Colin found it less than straightforward in writing it. He also goes on to note that the book does not have to read in a linear way. So, for Colin the form follows the function that is organized in the book in a non-additive, non-linear manner. Writing in fragments in his words, allows him to experiment with how best to package and represent the register in between meta narratives and local specificities.

So, I guess one of the things that would be interesting to hear Colin to reflect upon, but I guess all of us can reflect a little bit about, about how we organize our thoughts and how a book gets read. So, I guess I'd be interested in how Colin put this book together, maybe how he wrote the book. And in particular, I guess, just the last sentence of that opening chapter where he said the fragment form is, after all, just intensification of what we all know about how we read any book, that is dialogue, translation and relational creation. And I guess that line has troubled me a little bit as I've wrestled with the book and dipped back in and out of it. And maybe that's the point. How does that intensification matter? Is Colin arguing that this book is not that different from the ways in which academic books are written or read? Because for me it stands out as something quite different from other kinds of academic books. And I don't mean that in a bad way, I think it's great and interesting. But I guess, it's just thinking a bit about what the notion of intensification does for us, when we wrestle with the material, the way in which it's put together? And does it make a difference about how we think people read our work? And here I'm not talking about edited collections, I'm talking about authored collections, but still, does that matter in some ways, in terms of how we represent our work?

Anyway, in terms of thinking about questions or issues that I think it might worth wrestling with and building upon Tatiana and Theresa's comments, I guess I wondered whether Colin might, I guess, reflect upon the risks of eschewing a whole urbanism approach, because that's essentially what Colin's counterposing his book against, and replacing with fragment urbanism.



Is whole urbanism some meta narrative, and if not, [unintelligible] as something else? Is whole urbanism one that objectifies completeness, while the latter emphasizes incompleteness and openness, or is there more going on in Colin's argument about ways of thinking and imagining Urban worlds? And I guess that takes me on to a second point, if we're focusing on the fragments of [unintelligible], do we lose anything? And if so, in what ways does this matter in understanding efforts to make urban worlds?

And I guess the final thing, and I understand it's interesting to reflect upon the kinds of things that made it into the book and the kind of positions at which it's written. I guess for me, what's not missing, but thinking a bit about the ways in which others that are involved in making urban worlds don't appear in it. And thinking about how those charged to design and plan them, in the form of policymakers and practitioners appear in the fragment. So, in what ways do those who are making decisions around infrastructure or sanitation or housing, in what ways do they appear in that fragment and what difference does their appearance make to some of the stories that appear in the book? Partly because on page 223, Colin talks about without connecting fragments and wholes. So, in a sense, he's aware of the fact, about this fragments that suggests that it's important. And I like that point about connective devices in that chapter, but it suggests that Colin's aware of the work that needs to be done in terms of the ways in which we think about wholes and fragments, and how we might think about widening the repertoire of people who are involved in those conversations. But those stories are not as present in this book. I'll leave it at that, thanks.

[Nitin Bathla] Thanks Kevin. We have Colin now with us and perhaps Colin, would you like to respond?

[Colin McFarlane] Yeah. Thanks very much Nitin. Can you hear me all right?

[Nitin Bathla] Yeah.

[Colin McFarlane] Great, thanks. Well, firstly, thank you so much to Theresa, Tatiana, and Kevin. It's really humbling just to hear people talk so eloquently about something you've produced. There's always a weird sense when you write a book, it lives on your laptop for a very, very long time. And then it goes out into the world and part of you wonders if anyone will ever read it. And part of you is terrified that people may. So, it's a curious experience when you put your work out there in this way and to have people whose work I admire so much and who are so thoughtful and so brilliant to engage with the book and to take this time especially at a point in our teaching terms when we're all a bit pushed. I'm just really genuinely grateful and humbled by that. So, thank you. I've wrote down lots and lots of notes that I will be thinking about for a long time. I'll just respond, I'll try to be as brief as I can, so please do interrupt, Nitin, if I end up going on too long.

Theresa I'll begin, because Theresa started, thank you again so much for those fantastic comments and suggestions, really, really helpful. I'll just go straight to some of the questions you asked, in case I lose my place and go on too long, but you asked partly about the kind of presence of the visual and the artistic in the book and why the book sort of gives so much space to thinking about art practices and what that means for writing about fragments. And I think it's partly sort of echoing what Tatiana was saying about the way in which the book focuses on waste and sanitation so much. Partly because that's simply been a very long-standing set of concerns and interests that I've had in previous work.

It's partly for that reason that I was drawn into some of the more artistic debates around fragments because there's a very long history of art working with fragments of urban waste. And many of the examples in the book then delve into this relationship between, and I think Tatiana put this really well in her comments, I don't have to repeat this, but between sanitation struggles in very poor neighbourhoods in places like Cape Town and Mumbai and elsewhere, where there are longstanding deep inequalities around sanitation, infrastructure provision. We have very heavily fragmented and broken up inadequate systems and where people are forced into all kinds of improvisations and political claim making as a result. And [unintelligible] are around, around that relationship between waste and the nature of the urban condition, the production of inequality and the possibility for some kind of alternative urban configuration. So, artists in India, for example, writing about waste and sanitation, which I draw on, but also in other parts of the urban world. I think what's compelling about that work, that tradition of work on waste in art, often it's about taking fragments and putting them into a new context, and in doing so, sparking a conversation.

So, this I think really speaks to fragments both as, to echo Kevin, both as nouns and verbs. So I'm kind of interested, in the book, primarily in forms of art that want to say something about the urban condition and urban inequalities, but which do so in a way which creates a kind of stepping back, a generative space for discussion and reflection on certain conditions, whether that's in relation to particular artists or in relation to the exhibition in Kampala with Jonathan Silver at Sheffield and other colleagues that Theresa mentioned, which sought to assemble knowledge fragments to generate a conversation about a particular neighbourhood in the city. So, it's kind of about the way in which art creates a space for discursive politics, whether that's challenging stigma, or recognizing different lives and positions, or telling stories that aren't often told. And I think that's partly what's distinctive about art as a means of engaging in politicizing fragments, this capacity to create space for representations, stories, and possibilities. Exhibitions do some of that work and that's partly why the book focuses on them. And in that form of politics of fragments, that you see in that tradition of art and waste, I think is very different from the other forms of politicizing fragments I discuss in the book. For example, the demonstration on the street or the occupation around protesting against refugee conditions in Berlin, for instance. I think these are different kinds of politicization of fragments, which nonetheless might resonate with some of the art experiments but are quite different in terms of what they enable, as a space of political reflection.

The question then is what we might learn from artists and how they pull together different relations in creative ways. And partly, as you were intimating Theresa, it's partly about trying to understand how artists open up possibilities rather than shut things down. So rather than the kind of decision of critique, that things are a certain way, ought not to be a certain alternative way, art pauses with a space of discussion and generative reflection for all this messiness and strengths and weaknesses and limitations, which I think is a little bit distinctive and I think we can learn something there from how artists work. The last thing I'd say about the aesthetic is that it also features I think in the book *Beyond Art*, even if only in passing. So, for example, I'm talking about these protests in Cape Town where residents and activists threw discarded buckets of waste, human waste into certain spaces in the city, the state legislator and so on. This, again, is based on work with Jonathan Silver. And a lot of what's going on there is a politics of spectacle, mediatized circulating images that generate a kind of visceral effective response. So, there's also an interesting kind of way in which if we expand the aesthetic beyond art specifically and think about the politics of spectacle in a larger sense, the ways in which fragments are thrown into a mediatized politicization. And I think those indicate different ways in which art, broadly cast, may become political around fragments.

You also, Theresa, mentioned density and I'll try to be quick here about this. Thank you for bringing that up, it's absolutely right that the book talks a lot about density. The main reason for that, as you

were sort of saying, Theresa, is that many of the cases that I focus on, places like Kampala, Mumbai, Berlin, and elsewhere involve the politicization of fragments in very dense, marginalized, often very poor urban contexts. And so, density figures here, is rather straightforwardly simply because of the equation of provision versus numbers of people. So, the history of state disinvestment, abandonment, and violence of particular dense spaces, creates these huge inequalities in say sanitation or water or housing conditions, which then puts additional pressure on these systems, which often leaves them in fragments and requiring fragments of stuff just to maintain them and keep them going and so on.

And so partly then the question becomes how densities are configured into social infrastructures through which people formally or informally work together or get into conflicts and so on. So, density is a kind of active resource in the unfolding nature of fragment urbanism in different places. But as you were saying, it unfolds very differently in different places. So, we know, for example, that the capacity to advance a politics of presence. We're talking about numbers of people massed in space in different cities is controlled by different political regimes. So, it may be easier in some places simply to use density as a political resource than it will be in others because of the nature of political control, policing, disciplining, violence from the state, so on and so forth, that shuts densities down, the limits, the forms of densifications that can occur and so on and so forth. So, which takes me to the second way in which I use density. Which is really to think about it as a resource for protests, for occupations where sort of the temporary gathering of people massing in place is vital to the making visible of claims about living with fragments, struggles of living with fragments. And this matters in different ways in different contexts, which I don't go into in a huge amount of detail in the book. And I think the last thing is density figures in, I suppose in a third sense, around how artists in the book use fragments where we see cases where there's a kind of densification of people, ideas, and things knotted together to tell a larger story about urban culture or urban violence or urban possibilities. So, this is where the histories of fragmentation are in a sense densely enfolded into the fragment itself when it's staged as a kind of artistic object. This rendering of densification as a kind of concentrated knotting of pasts and presents and possibilities. That's the third notion of density, which I don't go into in a huge amount of detail, but hopefully that says something more about the broad relationship between density, the political and fragments in the book.

I'll move on quickly, Tatiana, just with time here. Thank you so much again, Tatiana. Fantastic, really amazingly helpful, wonderful to hear your thoughts. I'll just go straight to some of the questions you asked. I suppose we should really learn some positionality and multi sightedness and this moving across different contexts and moving through different contexts. And sometimes there's a sense in which perhaps there's a kind of absence of my own relationships on these field sites, which is potentially a bit written out, as you were putting it. And I think it's partly a product of the fact the book is quite rangy. So, it cuts across different scales, as you were saying, some of the cases are quite recent and active, some are historical, some are personal encounters. And I wanted to try to write something, part of my impetus for writing the whole book, which also goes to Kevin's points, was to try to write something that was not a case study. There's nothing wrong with writing case studies. There's a reason why it's the cornerstone of the tradition of urban research. I do it myself, I'm continuing to work on case studies at the moment, but it's obviously a form of work that we're very wedded to in the urban tradition, that kind of writing.

And I thought I had an opportunity with the book. And I very much recognize it's a privileged opportunity to move across different scalar and temporal registers, drawing on different cities and different contexts. So, the book's kind of a bit of an experiment in that sense, and it does mean, when you're writing across these different contexts, and you're also, the difficulty of deciding where to sort of linger in particular places and moments, and where to move on to the next place in the next moment was a continuous question I was facing. And I suppose talking about my own relationship to these

places was not, when I was trying to figure out what I really wanted to say over the space of a couple of pages or more on a particular fragment in a particular place, writing myself more into the texts. Which I have done, as you see, in different places. I kind of pulled back from, I suppose. I guess part of it felt like, there comes a point when it starts to feel indulgent, it starts to feel like the privilege that enabled me to write the book in the first place, to move across all these many cities, to be able to get the opportunity to do this work in different cities with great colleagues and so on. To then continue to talk about me was difficult. So, I talk a little bit about my encounter with walking and some of the struggles, some of what's opened and closed off from that encounter in terms of how you see fragment cities.

And I talk a little bit about my own relationship to the writing process at the start, as Kevin was intimidating. But as I started to go beyond that throughout the book, it started to feel more and more biographical. And I started to get more and more uncomfortable about that. I don't know if that's just some kind of historic sense of don't talk too much about yourself, rather than an intellectual position, it's almost an instinctive thing. But there is a lot more I could have said about particular moments and encounters. Actually, Tatiana, your paper in *Society and Space*, or *Staying with breakdown* from 2021. Where you go through a series of vignettes from different ethnographic encounters across different cities in the world. I think it's a really nice example of how to write about both the struggles in place, but also your conversations, your discomforts, your uncertainties, your moments of doubt and concern and excitement in these different moments. You do that really rather elegantly, and I think it's a kind of a model of how to do that. I'm not sure I've done that. Well, I've not done that to the same extent, for the reasons I've given. So, at the same time, I wanted to try to write in a way that didn't feel bombastic or too certain. I wanted to try to keep a sense of the uncertainties I nonetheless do have about some of these places, the complexities of what's going on, the fact that there's a lot of different places in the book, many of them are changing really radically. You're writing about particular encounters, particular moments in time. With people who have moved on or who are in different circumstances, or sometimes are in the same circumstances, and it's trying to keep a kind of modesty to the sheer multiplicity of the urban world without descending into saying nothing of any substance about the larger nature of poverty and inequality, which is partly why I wanted to do the book was to say something larger about the nature of the experience and politicization of fragments on the margins of the urban world.

So, I try to do that hopefully in a way which doesn't end up with a definitive statement on what and how cities are. But that doesn't either end up in a position where it's descended into uncertainty, that the larger of pictures disappears from view. So that gets a little bit to where I was with the relationship to the field and the writing. There's a lot more I can say there, which I wrote down, but I won't get into.

Last thing I'll say just quickly before going to Kevin's comments is just labour and work. You talk about that, Tatiana, being a bit missing. I think that's a fair point. I mean, labour is something I talk about a little bit in other work that I've worked on around sanitation, for example, and the management and maintenance of sanitation systems, for instance. But it hasn't been a preoccupation of a huge amount of my work to focus on labour. So, I tend to talk about labour in the book as something that is important. The formal and informal work of holding fragments together, of repurposing them, of having to do this often gendered work around sanitation, for instance, keeping things taking over. And I'm aware of, in the book, of pointing to that labour and describing it in some parts of the book, the Right to Pee movement, for example, in Mumbai, talk about how they inspect toilets and all the rest of it, and the work that goes on around maintenance.

But without really going into a huge amount of detail on it, and I'm really aware that, I was certainly absolutely aware writing the book that there was so much more to say about the sheer work of keeping

fragments on the go, day by day, the physical and mental exhaustion of all of that, and the toll it takes on communities, as well as the possibilities it creates for solidarities and livelihoods and all kinds of things that you've described in your work, Tatiana. But I think it's absolutely a fair point, there's so much more to say about it.

I think I'll just, there's a point about populism, but I'm a bit worried about time, so maybe we can get back to that in discussion. I'll move on quickly to Kevin's comments, and we can perhaps come back to the comment about populism that Tatiana made, because I think that's important around the sort of liberal city stuff that's in the background of the book.

Kevin, thanks very much again, fantastic, really helpful to hear your thoughts. I did wonder what you'd make of it. It's interesting you said you weren't in your comfort zone reading it and I wasn't either in my comfort zone writing it, but I've sort of said why I wanted to try to write it and try to do something a bit different, for me at least, a bit different from what I normally try to do. And you're always aware when you're doing something a bit different, it's a bit of an experiment. I appreciate you saying you enjoyed the book and the bits you liked in the book, but I also appreciate you saying, well, what does this add up to here? How do we read a book like this, which is written in these different fragments? How do we think about it? And I think that there's a lot to see there. On your point about the fragment being, the point I make in the book about reading always involving a kind of fragment relation. I suppose what I was saying there was not that all books are written in fragments. Of course, they aren't. This book is a bit, as you were saying, a bit different from many urban books in that sense, at least, for better or worse, probably worse. But I think what I was getting at there was that whenever we encounter books, whenever we read papers, books, go to conference talks, seminar talks, whatever. Most of the time, what we take away are slivers of elements of that particular encounter. I don't know about you, but I've noticed that I can read the same academic book over time and take very different things from it, or notice very different things in it, depending on where I'm at the time, where my head is, what I'm working on, whatever it might be, where I read it, what's happening around me. And I think that doesn't mean there's not consistencies across those different reading experiences, it doesn't mean that there aren't kind of take-home messages. But I do think there's a kind of niche, there's a kind of sense whenever we read that we're often encountering, we take away fragments of understanding of those texts for all kinds of reasons.

So, I think that was the point I was trying to make there, to imply that there's a kind of holism that you can achieve in a book that readers will all take away. There's a kind of singularity that you can produce in a book that readers will take away. I think that with some books that's more likely than others, and this book is at the less likely end of that spectrum. But I think it's also a massive presumption to think that we can do that. Because I think that we read things in radically different ways, and we underestimate the extent to which that happens a lot of the time. I'm continually noticing that in terms of how people interpret different things. But I don't think the book tries to skew a whole urbanism approach. I think it's true that I don't talk a lot about wholes, but that's partly because there are lots of books that do that in different sorts of registers. And my aim here was to stay with the fragment idea and experiment with that. So, I do think that wholes are important, as you were saying, Kevin, in your own comments. And actually, they're unavoidable and inevitable. And I think that the fragment idea very often conjures a notion of the whole, political campaigns are in fragments, for example, and cities often carry a vision of the whole with them. So, some sanitation struggles, for example, have a vision of an integrated sanitation system, a particular kind of whole, if you like.

So that's partly why I think that there are things we can learn from activists, and I argue in the second half of the book, for instance, groups like the Right to Pee group in Mumbai, which is a sanitation movement. I think what's really interesting there is the way in which a group like Right to Pee is both

involved in the messy work of maintaining and working with fragments *in situ*, so in place with state officials, landlords and local political groups and civil society groups and residents and so on, to maintain fragmented infrastructures in different ways. But also trying to call the state into question, always bringing data to the state of, the nature of toilet blocks in the city and looking for new policy frameworks, looking for increased budgetary provisions for sanitation across the urban realm, trying to build some kind of network, not necessarily material, but some kind of network provision of sanitation that would resemble some kind of whole. So, I think there's always a kind of sense in which the whole is there. Nonetheless. I think I could have probably said more about wholes in the book and their necessity to big picture thinking to big politics, big budgeting, big transformation in the city. Those are actively vital questions for all of us interested in cities and stuff that I'm working on in other work.

But I was pleased though, Kevin, that you felt the book prompted some reflections for you around the relationship between fragments and wholes and how they interact, how they're defined, how they're thought and politicized. And that's partly why I was talking about connective devices towards the end of the book between fragments and wholes. And that was one of my hopes for the book, that the book would maybe generate some interest around that relationship between fragments and wholes. And there's a lot more to say that the book doesn't say, I think, about that.

I'll just kind of wrap up here because I'm aware of time. The last thing I'll say, there's a lot more to say about wholes and fragments and incompleteness, Kevin, that you mentioned, but I'll turn to your note about the fragment as a thing or a noun. I think you were getting at fragments as both noun and verb, correct me if I'm wrong there, and what we lose in keeping a hold of fragments both as things, nouns and verbs, forms of doing, relations, and so on, as I do in the book. And I try to keep hold of both the fragment as thing and fragment as verb, because the context I'm describing quite often see people encountering, using, changing, politicizing fragments, in different ways over time, in different ways over space. And so, as things fragments can sometimes be redefined in the doing in the ways in which they are put to work or thought or made political. So those Cape Town protests, I briefly mentioned earlier, for example, is a kind of reinvention of fragments of waste in order to make a larger political point about the ongoing inequalities of post-apartheid cities in South Africa. And relationships between race and waste and class and so on. But you raised the question, what's lost in doing that? And I think it's a really important question because the book works with quite an expansive notion of the fragment as an idea, as a form of knowledge, as a material thing, as a form of expression, as a way of writing. And so, it ranges, very rangy, as I said earlier, across very different ways of thinking about fragments, as well as very different places, and types of organizations and types of action and so on. So, you could add a bit, for example, that stuck more closely to fragments as nouns, fragments, for example, as small things, literally very small bits and pieces of broken or discarded materials. And that may give you also a much more materialist story of fragments, in the sense of actually the material composition of fragments, how they're made, what their histories are, and what that reveals about the nature of cities. I try not to lose sight of the material composition of the fragment throughout the book, but what I prioritize is the relationships fragments are enrolled into.

So, I'm interested in what fragments are made to do, whether it's about survival or politicization or opening up new possibilities or ways of seeing for activists or artists or residents or whatever. I'm interested in that, and that's why I talk about this making of urban worlds, that sense in which fragments are pulled into all these different relations over time, even as they are also part of habitual repetitive relations as well. There's that element as well. There is more in here, about policy and practice. And you'll just say very quickly on that, Kevin, thanks for that. The book doesn't focus specifically on policy and practice in any huge amount of detail, because it tends to stay with the residents, the activists, the artists and so on, the writers that you mentioned.

But what I tried to do was draw in policy, the state, practitioners, in the fragment in the examples that I talked about. So, whether that's in Berlin, when we're talking about how refugees and activists encounter the state and where the state becomes present in the fragment in its lack of provision of decent water or sanitation or shelter, for example, or in the case of the LA Watts riots in the late 1960s in the US. Looking at how fragments of debris from those events, those so-called riots, become part of a conversation about the history of state, this investment in violence and about the remaking of fragmented neighbourhoods. Or in Kampala, the nature of the state appears in people's stories, of the kind of a disinvestment of the state in, say, road infrastructure. And again, Mumbai Right to Pee, the state appears around negotiations around local level maintenance of sanitation as well as in investment across the urban realm and so on and so forth. So, there's these ways in which the state appears and there are cases where the state is addressing fragments much more than it is others. Sometimes it's very destructive. Sometimes it's more progressive. And what I try to do in the book is instead of foregrounding the policy practice kind of element, I turn instead to the forms of politicization by residents, activists, and artists. And I ask the question, what kinds of strategies work where and when, and try to say, well, rather than be prescriptive about any particular strategy, what we see over time and space in these different contexts is that different strategies work better or worse at different times. And there's things that we can collectively learn from activists, from artists, by looking at that when we're thinking about changing state policy or lobbying the state in one way or another. Nonetheless, I think there's another book to be written, which would be really interesting for me at least, to read around how policy and practice see fragments and encounter fragments and what the consequences of that are. Socially, politically, ecologically, and so on in the city. And I think that also goes a little bit to Tatiana's point about populism in France and also Budapest and other places. So, I'm aware of time, there's more to say, but I'm going to stop talking to allow more time for conversation and just thank everyone again for those really fantastic, challenging, thoughtful questions.

[Nitin Bathla] Thanks, Colin. So, we have time for an open exchange. Perhaps Theresa, Tatiana, Kevin, if you would like to respond to some of the things that Colin raised now.

[Tatiana Thieme] I have a quick comment, if that's okay. Thank you, Colin, those were wonderful responses. And I just wanted to try to very briefly, I guess, speak to that last point about policy that Kevin raised, but also to pick up on my comment about labour. And I completely take your point that that's not a primary focus. And I also think you do it really well in how you conceptualize this notion of care and consolidation. So, it's not to say that labour isn't absent in your framing at all. And I think the way that you talk about care and consolidation works really well to think about the kind of different forms of social infrastructure at play. But I guess I'll say this very briefly. There was something that I really thought was wonderful, this is on page 171 at the end of the exhibit in Kampala, where two of your collaborators, Josephine and Amiri reflect on what goes unseen or unincluded in the curation of the exhibit. And I felt like it was a wider acknowledgement of what goes unseen in our research outputs. Even when we have a kind of inbuilt spirit of collaboration and outreach. And one of the things that they remarked on was youth issues of income generation and what residents' priorities are. And so, to make a bridge between that comment and this question around policy and my point about labour. I guess, one of the things that I found really useful about thinking with fragments when I think about my own interest in work and labour and how people interested in the future of work, who are thinking across policy spheres, public, private and third sector, how might fragments resonate with them.

So to think about your various field sites, in Germany, one of the things that I was noticing when I was working in Berlin around 2017 onward was the lamentation by both refugees or new Berliners and older Berliners about this kind of workfare system that Germany had become, where your entrepreneurial or economic contribution was what would allow you to have the right to stay or the right to be visible vis-à-vis the State.

And so, the irony of that was that there was a relatively kind of celebration of the ability for new and older Berliners to get work and their lower rates of unemployment. And yet, local interlocutors would talk about the perverse logic of the one-euro job or the mini job, the five-hour job a week or the one-euro job, or this *Ausbildung*, program of continuous serial kind of apprenticeship, which can go unpaid for months. And so, I think of that in relation to gig work, the on-demand kind of gig of the last decade or so, which has obviously been both celebrated and abhorred, depending on whether you think it's kind of fantastic creative flexibility or casualization of labour. And the last 40 years of work done by different anthropologists and economic anthropologists and urbanists around informal economies who note that there is a diversification of income activities amongst informal sector workers that is often negated or thought of as two piecemeal or invisible vis-à-vis policy actors. And in a sense, it just feels like actually thinking through fragments can be a productive lever to thinking about the different ways in which work is making work, is assembled. Outside or alongside the wage and the insecure wage increasingly. So just thinking about different ways in which people become economically active and thinking through fragments, perhaps, also contends with your very vital point, early on in the book, about not romanticizing entrepreneurial urbanism, et cetera. That's just one thought about how to think about bridging this issue on policy, how to think with fragments. And something that I thought was really nice that you put forward Josephine and Amiri's point about acknowledging what goes unseen in our research outputs or what is unknowable.

[**Colin McFarlane**] Thanks, Tatiana, that's really helpful. I can see what you're sort of driving at there and kind of thinking about fragments of labour and the ways in which those stories are foregrounded or seen and unseen and the kind of policy potentials of that. And it's interesting to think about the forms of labour, which I suppose, residents would wish for, in some cases at least. Greater visibility, protection, investment, security, and so on from the state, but also the forms which, I'm thinking partly of people like AbdouMaliq Simone's work, for example, in terms of some of the forms of labour where perhaps the visibility from the state can become the problem or can at least become perceived to be a risk in different ways for different groups. And that's sort of a very delicate line there around visibility, forms of labour, state seeing and the consequences which unfold and how that unfolds in different cities and different places. It's quite a wild politics that often can move in unpredictable directions. But I think it's a fascinating question. So, thanks for adding to that, Tatiana.

[**Nitin Bathla**] Thanks, Tatiana. Thanks, Colin. Theresa, Kevin, do you have something to add?

[**Theresa Enright**] I have an additional question and actually maybe it just repeats some of the comments that Kevin's already made about the practice of writing and writing in fragments. And I did have some questions about in what cases is it helpful to write in fragments and in what cases do we want a more kind of coherent view of things. But I also have just practical questions, because I find this book really inspiring and wonderful in so far as it does kind of defy these conventions of academic writing, but not everyone can do this. And so, I guess I was wondering, how you went about convincing your editors that this was a book. But also more generally, how in our practices of doing academic

work, can we encourage more provisional experimental forms of writing, because so often the constraints of the system, of journal publishing, of book writing, of academic presses or peer review prevent this from happening at all.

[Colin McFarlane] Thank you, Theresa, for bringing that up again. It's a really great question. I mean, Kevin's absolutely right, it was not comfortable. It's in many respects I've been trained to write in a very conventional way. I'm very comfortable with 8,000 words case study. The amount of times I asked myself, why the hell am I doing this to myself during this process. Friends who I've complained to about this, will know what I'm referring to, because I actually originally wrote the book, I didn't see this in any detail, but I originally wrote the book in sort of more conventional chapters, and then as I got through the writing, I started thinking, hang on, to what extent would it be worth pushing myself a little bit here to try to use form to mirror content, to try to experiment with the idea that it may lend greater weight to a story about a broken urban world, broken urban worlds, to use Tatiana's phrase, to write those worlds through this kind of resonance moving across quite different contexts, but hopefully showing some of the shared sense of struggle in politics or forms of politicization that come out of those different places, by moving quickly between them, and by being sparing, or relatively sparing about the amount of detail I go into. In order to create a Reverberance or echo across the different places. To say, here's a set of places which in the face of it, and they are extremely different, they are singularities, to use Tariq Jazeel's language, in many respects, but there are resonances between them around the shared struggle of just trying to piece together daily life in the context of a violent, hostile or disinterested state. And to try to form ways of not just coping, but politicizing, changing, challenging, experimenting with different possibilities, even despite all those challenges.

And to see that some of that was resonating across places as different as refugees in Berlin and people fighting for sanitation in Bombay or Cape Town. And that was the gamble. And I thought the fragment form, it felt like it was right to try and to explore with it. The California press, the editor, was just really open to it. And I don't know to what extent I, and maybe many of us, have ingested this notion that actually journals, and book editors are more restrictive than perhaps they actually are. I'd be curious to hear from Tatiana about her experience of publishing the Society and Space paper I mentioned earlier, because that is also written in these vignette form fragments. As Kevin said, some respondents, some readers, some editors are more open to this than others, and for good reason.

It's important to challenge it and say, well, why are you doing it this way? There's a reason why conventional forms of writing are conventions, it's not just sheer habit, it's also because it often works quite effectively, actually. So why do it? You have to put the case for it. They were very open, California, and they, from the start, got the idea that there was a relationship between content and form here to be explored. And they wanted to be convinced by it, but they listened, and they took on board my rationale and they were happy to support it. So that was fantastic. And I know not all publishers would do that. I'm aware as well that it's hard to do that when it's, say, your first book and you're maybe trying to get published the first time. I guess it's probably harder to do that, to push a more experimental style. I mean, I can't be so sure because it's difficult to second guess what the larger editorial context is. But it's maybe a bit more difficult for people who haven't published very much before because editors might be less keen to try new styles. I don't know.

I've also heard from other colleagues that the pandemic has had a bit of an impact on some presses, where some presses are maybe less open to experimental forms. Partly because the pandemic had an impact on some presses financially. I don't know if that's true, but I've heard it said before.

I don't know. What do you guys think about that question? If it's an important question. Kevin, would you like to?

[**Kevin Ward**] I know I kind of feel like I should say something now. I thought your response, Colin, was very good, and I was being a little bit naughty and provocative with my thoughts. And I really enjoyed the book. I do think, I love the word rangy. I think that does sum up my sense of the book as a mode of organizing and writing. And I guess, yes, I think there probably are some presses that are a bit more open to this than others. And if you get the right person who's open to it and you make a convincing case, they'll probably more likely to publish it. A bit like journal papers, some journals are a little bit more open to slightly alternative forms of representing our ideas, whether you start with stories or vignettes or poems or whatever else. So, an EMPD, a site in space, one of the more open of all the family of geography journals, I would say. What's interesting, I think, your point about how this book differs from other kinds of academic books. I mean, clearly outside of academia, I'm looking at Richard Hoggart's pages and his books and some of this stuff I've got. There is a tradition of non-academics writing, or Will Self collection of pieces, of writing thoughts and collections and bringing together pieces that move through time and space, as Tatiana said, and making them work for the author in a kind of way that academics don't tend to do that because usually, as you said, Colin, we have a certain way of disciplining ourselves. Which of course actually doesn't always, as you quite rightly said, doesn't always sit with how people read your work. I guess the interesting point was about partly around how we imagine people. Why we continue to write in a way we imagine people read our work in a certain way, even though we know they don't do that.

And so, your point about dipping into books and taking things from them, and actually it's a relational thing in the sense of what you take from books. There's a lot about what else is going on in your life, et cetera, et cetera. And again, though, people dip in and out of books, even books where there's notionally some overarching, coherent, logical, additive, you collect stuff as you go through the book, and you end up with a big thing at the end. Even there people, I think, often read books by dipping in and out of chapters or taking stuff from them. So, given what we know about that, why are we not more open to writing the kinds of books that you've written? I guess your point I think at the beginning of the book, which I quoted about discipline and order, that's absolutely how I think about stuff generally in life. That's why I struggled with the book because there's a sort of asymmetry between the chapters. Some are short and some are long. I find it disconcerting when I read those things. I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do with them.

And like all readings, they're always personal things. You kind of take stuff out of them. My comfort zone is probably narrower than some of the people's. And so, I'm prepared to admit that I found the book a challenge to read. Not that it wasn't enjoyable. And as you say, you take stuff out of it, and you go away and work with those ideas that come out of the book in your own fields. You raise some interesting, important issues, leaving aside all the kind of interesting issues you also raise, I think. About the actual narratives and the stories and the challenging about how we understand the world and the way it's made. That's a separate issue, this is actually as a mode of writing and representing ideas, I think it's a great contribution. So, well done Colin.

[**Colin McFarlane**] I was just going to thank Kevin for his comments, and I totally appreciate everything you've said and actually recognize it and feel a lot of it. You know, I think the other thing I would say just lastly, with very few exceptions writing, I think, it's quite an uncertain process for us to go through regardless of how we write quite often. Whenever I talk to other academics about writing, it's very rare that like, yeah, totally know what I'm going to say and I'm confident about doing it, and I go about, I do my thing and I write bish bash, it's gone. Occasionally you hear that. But for most people I speak to, there's just deep uncertainty that comes with the whole process. All I wanted to say really was all these ambivalences that we're sort of pointing to here, about how we write, how people read what we write, what they take from it, whether they read it cover to cover, which I think is increasingly rare for books, they're always there. And I think it's just worth just acknowledging that kind of seed of doubt, as well as the seeds of excitement and hope and that people will pick it up and engage with it and all of those doubts are always there, regardless I think of the form of writing. So that I think is just about the production end. I think the consumption end though, there is a bigger question. I honestly don't know the answer to it around the extent to which people are actually really reading full books in academia just because the sheer amount of time that people have pressed for other things and calls and commitments increasingly. For many academics. And that's something that I've been thinking a little bit about as well. I'll leave it there. Thank you, Kevin.

[**Tatiana Thieme**] Can I just say one thing, actually, Colin? In the rush to try to finish the book, I have to admit, there were moments where I thought, can I skim a few pages here and there? And it was impossible to skim. So, this is an unskimmable book, it's a compliment because I think what happens is that other books that have the more conventional form of writing, as Theresa put it, case studies, where your intro chapter basically does an amazing synopsis of what's to come. And then if you are rushing, you can sort of pick and choose certain chapters and maybe think about shelving it for a bit and then return to another chapter. But this book actually, it merits a full read through because you're kind of nervous to miss out on any one of these fragments. And what you do really well, I think, is to signpost so often to try to remind the reader and perhaps yourself about these linking threads. I think it was very much a feeling of mosaic tapestry threading together, braiding together. In a way that the notion of chance operations, which is what Merce Cunningham, the 20th century choreographer used to play with, with Rauschenberg that you mentioned, was this idea of throwing up 11 different forms of choreography, and almost in a random way, deciding what different kind of movements to piece together and part of the interest was seeing how bodies would struggle to get from jumping to falling and moving from one thing to the other. And here I feel like there's maybe a little bit of chance operations, but then not because you definitely feel like there is a flow and a logic across the fragments and a continuous effort to signpost for the reader and bring them back. So, it's an unskimmable book that is.

[**Colin McFarlane**] Thank you, Tatiana. Thank you.

[**Nitin Bathla**] I would completely concur with Tatiana on this. It's a completely unskimmable book. And thanks a lot Tatiana, Kevin, Theresa, for bringing the fragments of your thoughts to this podcast. We would like to conclude this podcast here. And thanks for listening and thanks for participating.

[**Outro**] *Thanks to you for listening. For more information visit our website urbanpolitical.podigee.io Please subscribe and follow us on Twitter.*