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MARTIN COWARD

Abstract. This article examines the nature of the destruction of built environments. Such destruction should be seen as a distinct form of violence: urbicide. This violence comprises the destruction of shared spatiality which is the condition of possibility of heterogeneous communities. Urbicide, insofar as it is a destruction of heterogeneity in general, is thus a manifestation of a ‘politics of exclusion’. However, this account of the destruction of the built environment is not only an insight into a distinct form of political violence. Rather, an account of urbicide also offers a metatheoretical argument regarding the scholarly study of political violence: namely that destruction of built environments contests the anthropocentric frame that usually dominates the study of violence.

Introduction: urban destruction and ‘anthropocentric bias’

On 9th November 1993 the Bosnian–Croat army (HVO) destroyed the Stari Most, or Old Bridge, in Mostar, Bosnia Herzegovina. The bridge had spanned the Neretva river for over 400 years and was regarded as being both integral to the city of Mostar as well as an outstanding example of both Ottoman and Bosnian cultural heritage. Video footage of this event featured in numerous television news bulletins, adding to the stream of horrifying representations of suffering emerging from the bloody disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. The destruction of the Stari Most was striking insofar as it dramatically illustrated the violence perpetrated against Bosnians and their heritage.¹

¹ Michael Sells’ definition of Bosnians (as opposed to Bosnian–Croat, or Bosnian–Serb) as ‘all residents of the internationally recognized sovereign nation of Bosnia–Herzegovina, regardless of their religious affiliation, who consider themselves Bosnian, that is, who remain loyal to a Bosnian state built on the principles of civic society and religious pluralism’ is the one that I would follow in this argument (Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. xiv). This definition is more adequate in describing those who were the principal victims of such violence than the somewhat mistaken designation of ‘Bosnian Muslim’. Just as the Jews were not the only victims of the Holocaust, so those who could be identified as ‘Muslim’ were not the only victims of the Bosnian Serbs. Indeed, in most discourse ‘Muslim’ is deployed as a ‘catch-all’ category for all those who found themselves to be opposed to, victims of, or excluded from, the Bosnian–Serb or Bosnian–Croat nationalist programmes. See also in this regard Tone Bringa’s comments on the evolution of *Bošnjac* identity (Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 34–36).

However, although it became a singularly iconic event, the destruction of the Stari Most should not be seen as an isolated case of urban destruction. Indeed, this incident is representative of a widespread assault upon urban fabric that has been a defining feature of post-Cold War conflicts such as the 1992–95 Bosnian war, the Russian invasion of Chechnya, and the intensification of the Israel–Palestine conflict in the wake of the second *intifada*. These conflicts have witnessed the deliberate destruction not only of symbolic cultural heritage, but also of the more mundane components of the built environment: shops, flats, houses, car parks, cafés, public squares and so on.²

Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulic's *Mostar Bridge Elegy*, written shortly after the demolition of the Stari Most, represents an attempt to understand the significance of such urban destruction.³ Writing about the relation between a photograph of the space left between the two banks of the Neretva by the collapse of the Stari Most and a photograph of a Bosnian Muslim woman with her throat cut (after the massacre at Stupni Dol), Drakulic asks, 'Why do I feel more pain looking at the image of the destroyed bridge than the image of the woman?'⁴ She goes on to reply:

Perhaps it is because I see my own mortality in the collapse of the bridge, not in the death of the woman. We expect people to die. We count on our own lives to end . . . The bridge [however] was built to outlive us . . . it transcended our individual destiny. *A dead woman is one of us – but the bridge is all of us.*⁵

At first glance, this assertion appears counter-intuitive: it seems to contradict our most deeply-held values. Our immediate reaction is one of scandal. Drakulic's assertion requires us to accept that it is possible for the destruction of a building to be more significant than the death of a human being. Her remarks contest that understanding of the world which portrays subjects living out their lives centre-stage against an ephemeral background. Instead, Drakulic is suggesting that it is 'life' which is ephemeral and that the 'world' must be understood as being constituted by that which was previously thought to be the mere background for activity: buildings. Thus Drakulic is arguing that it is not sufficient to regard the bridge as a part of a material backdrop against which lives are played out, or as equipment instrumental to the pursuance of this 'life'.

If we follow Drakulic's comments, understanding the phenomenon of urban destruction requires a reversal of the 'anthropocentric bias' that accords more value to human life than to the 'material' in, around, and through which that life is lived. Anthropocentrism can be defined, broadly, as an implicit or explicit assumption 'that human reason and sentience places the human being on a higher ground'.⁶ This assumption is the ground for a conceptual division between human beings and nature, or, more broadly, between human beings and all the other non-human elements that comprise the world and which, whether living or non-living, are seen merely as the context within which human lives are lived. Such a conceptual division

² Nicholas Adams, 'Architecture as the Target', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 52 (December 1993), also available at (<http://www.kakarigi.net/manu/jsah-ed.htm>).

³ Slavenka Drakulic, 'Falling Down: A Mostar Bridge Elegy', *The New Republic* (13 December 1993), pp. 14–15.

⁴ Drakulic, 'Falling Down', p. 15 (my emphasis).

⁵ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

⁶ Hakan Seckinelgin, *The Environment and International Politics: International Fisheries, Heidegger and Social Method* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 31.

has led to an understanding of the world in which the activities of human beings are understood to be of paramount interest and engagements with the remainder of the world are construed solely in terms of the uses to which humans put their material context.

In International Relations thinking, the identification and critique of ‘anthropocentric bias’ has been developed primarily within discussions of environmental politics.⁷ This is hardly surprising insofar as one of the central concerns of environmental politics has been to overcome the division between man and the environment that has resulted in the latter being conceived of as an instrumental resource for the gratification of the former. Overcoming such an anthropocentric conceptual division is necessary in order to see the material world as a complex ecology in which human beings are part of, not distinct from, nature.⁸

The ‘anthropocentric bias’ is not, however, confined to environmental politics. Indeed, ‘human centered’ understandings of the environment are representative of the anthropocentrism at the heart of enlightenment thinking.⁹ According to such a proposition, the distinction between humanity and its environment reflects a wider set of cultural discourses in which anthropocentric principles are deeply embedded. Though the roots of this anthropocentrism can, according to Giorgio Agamben, be traced to Aristotle’s *De Anima*, its enlightenment formalisation (and, hence, the source of its grip upon contemporary cultural discourse) is attributed to Descartes and Kant.¹⁰ This anthropocentric bias in modern reason holds that by virtue of being the sole entity endowed with reason, the human takes priority over all other entities (living or non-living).

This anthropocentrism has exercised a strong grip on modern thought, defining not only our understanding of nature, but also our philosophical, political and ethical discourses. From the anthropocentric ‘Copernican turn’ of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* to the centring of discussions of the nature of the *polis* on the reasoning and discursive capacities unique to humans, accounts of what it is to be human have consistently taken the material amongst, in, around, and through which our lives are lived to be of secondary concern: resources at the disposal of human subjects to be deployed instrumentally to satisfy their requirements.¹¹

⁷ Seckinelgin, *The Environment and International Politics*, p. 31; Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); R. and V. Routley, ‘Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism’, in K. E. Goodpaster and K. M. Sayer (eds.), *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 36–59.

⁸ Seckinelgin, *The Environment and International Politics*, p. 9–10.

⁹ Taylor uses the term ‘human centered’ interchangeably with ‘anthropocentric’ (Taylor, *Respect for Nature*, p. 11). The link between anthropocentrism and the Enlightenment is made explicit by Seckinelgin (*The Environment and International Politics*, pp. 86–108).

¹⁰ For a discussion of Aristotle, see Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). On Descartes and Kant, see Seckinelgin, *The Environment and International Politics*, pp. 86–108.

¹¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929); one of the best examples of the manner in which the human capacity for reasoned discourse is cast as the defining characteristic of the *polis* is Jurgen Habermas’ notion of ‘discourse ethics’ (see Habermas ‘Discourse Ethics: Notes on Philosophical Justification’, in J. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 43–115; for a critical recasting of the question of what it is to be human in a manner that contests anthropocentrism see Donna Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991).

One can see the imprint of such an anthropocentric conceptual schema in reactions to, and commentaries upon, the 1992–95 Bosnian War. For many observers the Bosnian war was characterised by genocide against the so-called ‘Bosnian Muslims’.¹² The violence against Bosniac bodies that underpinned this genocide dominated the political imagination of those observing the war. This violence against individuals thus shaped both understandings of the war itself and resultant attempts to provide relief, institute cease-fires/settlements or reconstruct postwar Bosnian society. Such understandings were predicated upon images of the dead and displaced. Thus news reports such as ITN’s from the camps of Omarska and Trnopolje, or documents such as the UN report into the death of 7,000 men and boys in the aftermath of the capture of Srebrenica, became emblematic of the stakes of the conflict.¹³ In concentrating upon the human misery the 1992–95 Bosnian war undoubtedly entailed, such reports have refracted their analyses through an anthropocentric political imagination in which all other forms of destruction are subsidiary to the death or injury of individuals.

The destruction of buildings has similarly been refracted through an anthropocentric lens. The destruction of the built environment in a number of post-Cold War conflicts (Bosnia, Chechnya, Israel–Palestine to name three) has thus been taken to be contingent to, and thus dependent upon, violence perpetrated against people. The rubble these conflicts generate is understood to be a sideshow to the ‘greater’ violences of genocide or civil war, rather than a form of political violence in its own right. And yet, as Drakulic’s *Elegy* shows, we should be wary of ‘thinking in terms of “collateral damage”, incidental to the general mayhem of warfare’.¹⁴ In these post-Cold War conflicts the built environment was deliberately targeted, a fact suggested by the manner in which the violence against buildings is rarely in proportion to the task of killing their occupants. Drakulic’s understanding of the destruction of buildings suggests, therefore, that we should contest the usual, anthropocentric, conceptual schema according to which political violence has been understood.

In the following argument, I will elaborate upon the necessity of considering the destruction of the built environment as a distinct form of political violence. A nascent literature has referred to such destruction as ‘urbicide’. I will argue that a consideration of such ‘urbicide’ demands that we challenge the anthropocentric bias in studies of political violence. I will not argue that we should forego a concern with the humanity that anthropocentric accounts focus upon, but rather that urbicide and the destruction of human communities coexist in complex ways. However, if we remain limited to an anthropocentric outlook, we will fail to perceive the entailments of urbicide as a distinct form of political violence. Before embarking on this

¹² See fn. 1 regarding the inadequacy of the term ‘Bosnian Muslim’. I use it in the text only due to its prevalence within the commentaries upon the 1992–95 Bosnian war.

¹³ Roy Gutman, *A Witness to Genocide: The 1993 Pulitzer Prize-Winning Dispatches on the ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ of Bosnia* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. xiii; Regarding ITN’s reports, see David Campbell, ‘Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – the Case of ITN versus *Living Marxism*’, Part 1, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1:1 (March 2002), pp. 1–33; and Part 2, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1:2 (June 2002), pp. 143–72; United Nations, ‘Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998): Srebrenica Report’ (New York: United Nations) (<http://www.un.org/peace/srebrenica.pdf>).

¹⁴ Andras Riedlmayer, ‘Killing Memory: The Targeting of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage’, Testimony presented at a hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, US Congress, 4 April 1995, *Community of Bosnia Foundation*, (<http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/killing.html>).

argument, however, it is worth briefly noting two entailments that will remain largely implicit.

Firstly, It is worth noting that critiques of anthropocentrism have, like critiques of Enlightenment humanism, been criticised as anti-human.¹⁵ However, a critical stance towards, or contestation of, the ‘anthropocentric bias’ that has affected the majority of scholarship on political violence, does not represent a turning away from concerns with the well-being and security of individuals. In this regard it is worth revisiting Martin Heidegger’s comments regarding his critique of humanism. Heidegger noted that his

opposition [to humanism] does not mean that [his] thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, [nor] that it promotes the inhumane and depreciates the dignity of man. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough.¹⁶

For Heidegger then there is more to humanity than humanism can comprehend. Similarly, a non-anthropocentric approach to political violence would argue that there is more to the constitution of a *polis* than the gathering of *anthropos*. That is, the various non-living entities that anthropocentric accounts see as simply the backdrop against which political community is enacted are, in fact, to be seen as constitutive features. And, hence, the destruction of such ‘material’ must be an attack on that political community. In that sense, in order to understand the insecurities felt by members of political communities, it will not be enough to focus solely on the threat of harm or displacement experienced by human bodies.

Put another way, ‘[i]t is the expected thing to say that people come first . . . And they do, but the survival of architecture and urban life are important to the survival of people.’¹⁷ Drakulic indicates that the urban environment is that which constitutes the possibility of political community (the emergence of a space in which ‘all of us’, not simply ‘one of us’, exist). Insofar as such community comprises a fundamental aspect of human existence, the deliberate destruction of the built environment thus poses questions as fundamental as the death and injury of individuals. Responding to such questions will, however, require contesting the anthropocentric political imaginary that would otherwise obscure such forms of political violence.

Secondly, it should be noted that the recasting of scholarship concerning political violence in order to overcome the ‘anthropocentric bias’ that has historically shaped its conceptual horizon, is consonant with a wider rethinking of the intellectual terrain of security and conflict studies. In particular, in the post-Cold War era scholars have both redefined the agenda of security studies and identified new, historically specific, forms of war.¹⁸ On the one hand, the emergence of concepts such as environmental and human security onto the agenda of security studies have demonstrated that security is a more complex phenomenon than the traditional focus on the military protection of sovereignty implied. Moreover, these ‘new’ concepts of security imply

¹⁵ Seckinelgin, *The Environment and International Politics*, p. 32.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger ‘Letter on Humanism’, in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by D. F. Krell, Revised Edition (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 233–4.

¹⁷ Nicholas Adams, ‘Architecture as the Target’.

¹⁸ For a general discussion of the contemporary security agenda, see, T. Terriff, S. Croft, L. James and P. M. Morgan, *Security Studies Today* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); on new forms of war see: Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

that the referent object of security cannot be understood in a wholly anthropocentric manner.¹⁹

On the other hand, the identification of 'new' forms of war (that is, forms of conflict specific to the contemporary era) have suggested that the traditional conception of war shaped by Clausewitzian ideas should be rethought. Whilst much of this literature has focused on the impact of transnational interconnections upon the conflicts of the post-Cold War era, there has been growing interest in the emergent nexus of urbanisation and war. The conjoint fact of the increasing urbanisation of the global population and the perception that wars of the future will increasingly be fought in a built-up terrain previously thought to be proscribed, has led to a concern with the manner in which violence in and against the built environment will be central to understanding wars of the future.²⁰ This literature seeks to move beyond the 'anthropocentric bias' and note the manner in which an understanding of post-Cold War conflict must take into account the assault on buildings, logistics networks and communications infrastructure. That is, these accounts argue that in order for scholars of political violence to understand the impact of contemporary conflict upon individual victims, the range of referents of political violence must be expanded beyond the anthropocentric horizon to include the fabric that comprises the city and which defines the nature of the lives lived in its environs. It is in this vein that the following analysis of the destruction of urban environments in post-Cold war conflicts such as the 1992–95 Bosnian war, the Russian invasion of Chechnya, and the Israel–Palestine conflict, will proceed.

The perilous state of the city

Watching the destruction of the former Yugoslav cities of Vukovar, Mostar and Sarajevo at the hands of the Serbianised Yugoslav National Army, Bogdan Bogdanovic issued a passionate plea for the recognition of the perilous situation of the city in the face of such violence.²¹ For Bogdanovic, architect and former mayor of Belgrade, the Balkan city was faced with a multitude of city-haters threatening its culture of urbane, plural living. This understanding of the violence faced by cities such as Vukovar, Mostar and Sarajevo became popular amongst observers of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, prompting a rhetorical coding of the violence as a 'revenge of the countryside' upon the city.²² Carl Grodach, for example, notes the way in which one analysis of the 1992–95 Bosnian war blamed 'much of the

¹⁹ It is worth noting that security studies could be argued to have escaped the anthropocentric bias insofar as the sovereignty of the nation-state is, strictly speaking, a non-human referent object. However, in practice, traditional security discourses either anthropomorphise the state (viewing its security as the security of the 'body politic') or views the delivery of security to comprise the delivery of conditions of safety from harm for the citizens of the state.

²⁰ See, for example, S. Graham (ed.), *Cities, War and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); and Alice Hills, *Future War in Cities: Rethinking a Liberal Dilemma* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

²¹ Bogdan Bogdanovic, 'The City and Death', in Joanna Labon (ed.), *Storm 6: Out of Yugoslavia* (London: Storm/Carcanet, 1994), pp. 53–7; and Bogdan Bogdanovic, 'Murder of the City', *The New York Review of Books*, 40:10 (1993), p. 20.

²² Xavier Bougarel, 'Yugoslav Wars: The "Revenge of the Countryside" between Sociological Reality and Nationalist Myth', *East European Quarterly*, 33:2 (June 1999), p. 157.

violence on 'uneducated armed hillsmen, with a hostility toward urban culture and the state institutions'.²³ For these observers, the violent assault upon cities such as Vukovar, Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Mostar was evidence of a long-standing resentment of the cosmopolitan plurality of these cities by a population that was culturally rural and backward.

The problems of such an interpretation are, as Grodach notes, manifold.²⁴ Not least, such an idea encourages a simplistic division of the landscape of the Balkans into urban and rural domains each of which are accorded contrasting and clearly identifiable cultural characteristics. As Bougarel notes, such a division is (despite some popularity) difficult to maintain under sustained analytic scrutiny.²⁵ There is no fictional dividing line between the inside and the outside of the city. Nor is there an identifiable cultural character shared by all rural or all urban populations. Most problematically, however, the notion of the 'revenge of the countryside' perpetuates a modernist myth that the city represents progress whilst the countryside remains backward, resistant to change and, ultimately pre-modern. In short, the notion of the 'revenge of the countryside' perpetuates stereotyped notions of the anti-modern backwardness of those who dwell outside the city.

We would be foolish, however, in the wake of such reservations about the stereotyping at work in castigations of 'city-haters', to simply dismiss observations of the perilous state of the city as the conceit of urbanite intellectuals. Indeed, not all observations of the destruction of cities in the 1992–95 Bosnian war were associated with these motifs of progress and primitivism. For example, in 1992 a group of architects from Mostar raised the issue of the destruction of the built environment in Bosnia in a publication entitled *Mostar '92–Urbicid*.²⁶ This publication illustrated, through photographs and factual reporting, the extent to which the destruction of the built environment of Mostar (and, by extension, Bosnia) was a central aspect of the 1992–95 war. Furthermore, *Mostar '92–Urbicid* demonstrated that the devastation of the built environment could not be understood as collateral damage secondary to the killing of the citizens of Bosnia. This publication thus explicitly put the case for understanding the destruction of the built environment in conflicts such as the 1992–95 Bosnian war as a deliberate and distinct form of political violence: 'urbicide'.

The concept of 'urbicide' negates the crude stereotypes found in castigations of the city-haters. Rather, those who advocate the use of the concept of urbicide note that the destruction of the material, built environment has a meaning of its own: that the destruction of buildings can be a distinct form of political violence. Those who view the destruction of built environments as a confrontation between the urbane and the primitive, cannot grasp such destruction as evidence of a distinct form of political violence. Indeed, according to the 'revenge of the countryside' argument the destruction of buildings is a backdrop to a wider cultural conflagration: the target is not the buildings *per se*, but a perceived cultural characteristic of the lives lived in

²³ Carl Grodach, 'Reconstituting Identity and History in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia Herzegovina', *City*, 6:1 (2002), p. 77 (the quote is from R. Donia and J. Fine, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 28.

²⁴ Grodach, 'Reconstituting Identity and History in Post-War Mostar', p. 77.

²⁵ Bougarel, 'Yugoslav Wars'.

²⁶ *Mostar '92–Urbicid* (Mostar: Hrvatsko vijeće obrane općine Mostar, 1992). Extracts of this publication were published as 'Mostar '92–Urbicide', in *Spazio e Società/Space and Society*, 16:62 (1993), pp. 8–25.

amongst these buildings. Moreover, this inability to see the destruction of buildings as a distinct form of political violence is not limited to the simple caricatures of the ‘revenge of the countryside’ argument. Those observers who take the destruction of buildings to comprise an element of genocide, similarly, fail to see urbicide as a distinct form of political violence, seeing it simply as an adjunct to the project of destroying a specific (racial, national, ethnical or religious) group in the urban population.²⁷

In contrast to such understandings, ‘urbicide’ names a form of political violence at the heart of which is not a supposedly cultural confrontation or the destruction of a specific identity group, but, rather, the destruction of the built environment as the ‘substrate’ in and through which a specific form of existence is constituted. Urbicide, then, is a term for a form of political violence aimed not at the character of the population, but rather at its material environment: the buildings that constitute the spaces in which any population lives its lives.

Urbicide as a distinct form of political violence

Despite the historical prevalence of attacks upon the city, the authors of *Mostar ‘92–Urbicid* perceived a distinct, and yet hitherto unelaborated, form of violence against the built environment in the destruction of Bosnian cities in the 1992–95 war. Moreover, these authors were not alone. A number of observers of the 1992–95 Bosnian war, the Russian assault upon Chechnya and the Israeli destruction of Palestinian homes have perceived a distinct form of political violence.²⁸ This violence has two distinct characteristics. Firstly, widespread (beyond any symbolic or militarily necessary purpose) and deliberate destruction of the built environment. As Adams notes, along with ‘mosques, churches [and] synagogues’, ‘markets, museums, libraries, cafés, in short, the places where people gather to live out their collective life, have been the focus of . . . attacks [in the 1992–95 Bosnian war]’.²⁹ In Chechnya, for example, the Russians revived the policy of ‘rubbleization’ first deployed in their invasion and occupation of Afghanistan as a mechanism of place annihilation.³⁰ Whilst population displacement remained a significant consequence of the assault on the built environment of cities such as Grozny, the destruction continued long after it was achieved. Targeting the built environment should thus be seen as an end in

²⁷ See, for example, M. Shaw, ‘New Wars of the City: Relationships of “Urbicide” and “Genocide”’, in S. Graham (ed.), *Cities, War and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 141–53.

²⁸ On Bosnia, see Milan Prodanovic, ‘Urbicide and The Chances for The Reconstruction of Balkan Cities’, in Joan Ockman (ed.), *Out Of Ground Zero: Case Studies in Urban Reinvention* (London: Prestel, 2002), pp. 138–49. For reflections on Chechnya, see: Juan Goytisolo, ‘Urbicides, Massacres, Common Graves’, *Index On Censorship*, 5 (1996), pp. 15–26. Regarding the Israel–Palestine conflict, see Stephen Graham, ‘Bulldozers and Bombs: The Latest Palestinian–Israeli Conflict and Asymmetric Urbicide’, *Antipode*, 34:4 (2002), pp. 642–9; and Stephen Graham, ‘Lessons in Urbicide’, *New Left Review*, 19 (January/February 2003), pp. 63–77.

²⁹ Adams, ‘Architecture as the Target’.

³⁰ On ‘rubbleization’, see Larry Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (London: University of Washington Press, 2001), pp. 60–6; on ‘Place Annihilation’, see Kenneth Hewitt, ‘Place Annihilation: Area Bombing and the Fate of Urban Places’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 73:2 (1983), pp. 257–84.

itself. This, then is the second distinguishing characteristic of urbicide: the built environment is a target in itself not a means to a greater end.

Taking into account these distinguishing factors we can make two observations regarding urbicide that will clarify the scope of this argument. In the first place, although urbicide is portrayed as a novel element of the post-Cold War era, it has antecedents throughout history. The distinguishing factors of the targeting of the built environment as an end in itself can be discerned in, at the very least, the 'rubbleization' of Afghanistan and the saturation bombing of German cities in World War II. It is important to note, however, that not every instance of the destruction of buildings comprises an instance of urbicide. In order for such destruction to be regarded as urbicide, specific distinguishing features must be present. It must be noted, however, that such features are present in multiple instances throughout history and so claims for the post-Cold War novelty of urbicide should be treated with due scepticism.

Secondly, we must note that urbicide, like most forms of political violence, is never present in a pure, singular form. Urbicide coexists with a number of other forms of violence such as genocide or state-sponsored repression. Part of the assumption of some forms of 'definitionalism' surrounding forms of political violence such as genocide seems to be that the presence of one form of violence precludes the presence of other forms.³¹ However, it is possible, for example, in accounts of the 1992–95 Bosnian war to discern both genocide and urbicide. It does not necessarily serve any purpose to reduce one to the other or to claim that discerning the conceptual outline of one precludes the other being a useful category of analysis. Rather, and this is the second point worth bearing in mind, forms of violence coexist in complex patterns. Drawing out the conceptual contours of one implies a certain focus and an interest in the entailments of that violence. It does not necessarily imply the absence of any other forms of violence. This is especially important in cases such as the 1992–95 Bosnian war, the Russian invasion of Chechnya or the contemporary Israel–Palestine conflict. In these cases an analysis of urbicide permits a focus upon the entailments of the widespread destruction of the built environment as an end in itself. Such an analysis should, not however, deter those wishing to examine coexistent forms of political violence. Only in this manner might we begin, perhaps in a piecemeal sense, to build up a picture of the various political logics at work in the complex and chaotic context of conflict.

Urbicide and the disavowal of heterogeneity

Having noted that urbicide is a distinct form of political violence, it is necessary to outline both what urbicide is and what such destruction entails. Lexically 'Urbicide' refers to the 'killing, slaughter' or 'slaying' of that which is subsumed under the term 'urban'.³² At stake in the meaning of 'urbicide', therefore, is what is to be understood

³¹ On 'definitionalism', see: Israel Charny, 'Toward A Generic Definition Of Genocide', in George J. Andreopoulos (ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 90.

³² See '-cide', in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 3, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 213–14.

in the concept of 'the urban' that is 'killed' in urbicide. 'Urban' refers to that which is 'characteristic of, occurring or taking place, in a city or town'.³³ Insofar as 'urban' refers to the characteristics that identify towns or cities, it refers both to the material conditions that constitute the town or city as such, and the way of life occurring in such material conditions. That is, 'urban' refers both to a particular built environment and a way of life characteristic of such an environment. Urbicide, thus, refers both to the destruction of the built environment as well as to the destruction of the way of life specific to such an environment. Indeed urbicide is the destruction of a specific existential quality through the destruction of the built environment. This 'existential quality' is a common characteristic of *all* those ways of life that are considered 'urban' by virtue of occurring in the spaces constituted by the built environment. The question, therefore, is what specific characteristic is common to all those ways of life that could be said to be 'urban'. Once we have identified this characteristic it will be possible to address the manner in which destruction of buildings comprises a destruction of this existential quality.

Louis Wirth argues that the size, density and heterogeneity of the populations of cities constitute 'those elements of urbanism which mark it as a distinctive mode of life'.³⁴ Despite also referring to size and density, it is heterogeneity that is the principle aspect of urbanity for Wirth. Indeed, the size of an urban population is pertinent only insofar as it leads to a greater number of different identities and associations and thus heterogeneity of tradition and belief. Moreover, density of the urban population is important insofar as it gives rise to a greater frequency of encounters between these heterogeneous traditions and beliefs. *Heterogeneity*, then, can be said to be the defining characteristic of, or existential quality that defines, 'the urban'.

Buildings can be said to be constitutive of such heterogeneity insofar as they are constitutive of shared spaces. Such spaces are not restricted to those which are formally designated as 'public'. Rather all spaces established by buildings are fundamentally public (hence the common use of restrictive regimes to restrict this publicness). Each and every element of the built environment is, prior to the establishment of disciplinary or restrictive regimes, fundamentally public insofar as it is available to all as a indicator of place, a marker of orientation in the built environment. The shared space constituted by buildings is shared, therefore, because insofar as buildings are fundamentally public markers of place, the spaces constituted between them are open to the general abstract possibility of always already containing others who orient themselves according to these markers. The built environment is thus shared in the sense of being in-common (prior to any restrictive actions) to all those that might navigate through, or orient themselves in relation to, the places and spaces around buildings.

Such shared space is not spatial in the Newtonian/Kantian sense of a neutral medium.³⁵ The shared space of the built environment is not a simple medium open to everyone. Rather, the built environment is constitutive of a certain 'spatiality'. Buildings are the points from which the inhabitants of the built environment are able

³³ See 'urban', in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 19, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 331.

³⁴ Louis Wirth 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout (eds.), *The City Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 190.

³⁵ Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, 'Introduction', in Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.

to compose relational networks of meaning that orientate their experiences. Spatiality thus refers to the relationality inherent in the built environment. This relationality is inherently public since each and every point from which a relation might be traced is open to others.

This model of public, shared spatiality draws upon Martin Heidegger's understanding of 'dwelling': a mode of existence accomplished in locales constituted by objects and buildings.³⁶ In his essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking' Heidegger addresses the manner in which buildings are not merely resources at the disposal of humans, but rather constitutive of the worlds within which those humans exist. In other words, a building is not simply a structure erected in a pre-existing world; rather, building is an activity which generates structures that, by bringing new networks of relationships into existence, constitute the world as we know it. Thus, for example, a bridge, by being built, brings the banks of the river into a relationship, and similarly, brings the settlements, transport and communications infrastructure and economies of those two banks into a relation with one another.³⁷

Buildings thus form nodes between which networks of relationships unfold. Each building is, as I have noted, in principal publicly available (even if entry to its interior may be restricted) as a node (a landmark) for such relationships. Heidegger suggests that our experience of the built environment as a set of publicly available landmarks that form nodes in relational networks, shows us that space – our concept of a neutral, measurable medium – is derived from a more fundamental relational spatiality.³⁸ Space is the arbitrary value, or measure, accorded to a given relation: from the bridge to the hospital, for example, is a relation that can be assigned the values '1 kilometre', '15 minutes walking', '5 minutes driving', 'a short way', or 'too far' depending on one's situation and the measure chosen. The abstract space that we measure in centimetres, metres and kilometres is, thus, only possible due to the prior relational spatiality that comprises our experience of the built environment.

The built environment is thus constitutive of a shared spatiality in which it is not so much that space – understood as a neutral, measured medium – is shared, but that the relations established by buildings which orient experiences of the built environment always already admit of the possibility that there is an other sharing the same buildings (as landmarks from which relational networks unfold) and, thus, the same spatiality. This sharing thus establishes a general condition of heterogeneity: of coexistence. And since coexistence implies a plurality (since one does not *coexist* with that which is the same, one simply *is* that which is the same) the shared spatiality established by buildings implies a fundamental principle of alterity in the built environment. Destroying buildings is thus the destruction of that which – in and through constituting shared spatiality – comprises the condition of possibility of heterogeneity. At stake in urbicide, the destruction of the buildings in and around which communities live their lives, is thus the destruction of the conditions of possibility of heterogeneity. Urbicide then is the destruction of buildings not for what

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell, revised edn. (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 347–65. For an interpretation of Heidegger's points regarding space and spatiality see: Maria Vilella-Petit, 'Heidegger's Conception of Space', in Christopher Macann (ed.), *Critical Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 134–57.

³⁷ Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', pp. 354–6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 357–8.

they individually represent (military target, cultural heritage, conceptual metaphor) but as that which is the condition of possibility of heterogeneous existence.

Excursus: urbicide and ‘the city’

There are two obvious critiques of the concept of urbicide as I have defined it which are worth addressing at this point. Firstly, it is possible to argue that whilst cities such as Mostar or Sarajevo can be seen to be instances of plurality or heterogeneity, other instances of destruction of the built environment could be said to comprise destruction of homogenous enclaves. Such a critique is of course sociologically correct in noting the manner in which cities (or sections of cities) have historically been homogenised (through force or otherwise). However, such a critique fails to separate the historical and empirical fact of homogeneity from the existential principle of publicness that characterises the buildings that compose the built environment. That is to say, just as I have noted a difference between the restriction of access to a building and the possibility of that building being a public node (or landmark) in a network of relationships, so it is important to draw a distinction between the ever present possibility of sharing the built environment with others that the public nature of buildings entails (and hence the possibility of heterogeneity), and the manner in which, historically, this possibility either fails to materialise or is actively discouraged. In other words, historical homogeneity of a city or part of a city does not in any way invalidate the notion that buildings are constitutive of a spatiality that is, in principle, public. Moreover, insofar as homogeneity waxes and wanes, it is important to note that it is precisely this principle of publicness that accounts for the manner in which any homogeneity must work hard to avoid surrendering its gains and ultimately will have to accept the return of plurality.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it is possible to argue that destruction of buildings is not confined to supposedly ‘urban’ contexts. That is, villages and farms are destroyed in contexts such as the 1992–95 Bosnian war, the Russian invasion of Chechnya (and Afghanistan before) and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Destruction of such buildings (defined by advocates of this critique as being ‘rural’ in character) cannot be said to comprise the destruction of ‘the urban’ lest that concept lose all specificity. Thus the concept of urbicide could be said to exclude, by virtue of having been defined in relation to ‘the urban’, certain important cases in which buildings are destroyed.

Such a critique is predicated on the notion that the destruction of buildings occurs in rural as well as urban contexts and, thus, that the term ‘urbicide’ unnecessarily restricts the analysis of such destruction. In response to such a critique it is possible to note that identifying that quality which is common to all experiences which might, by virtue of occurring in the shared spaces constituted by the built environment, be called ‘urban’ is, indeed, a problematic venture. Indeed, in urban sociology there have been various attempts to divine the defining characteristics of ‘the urban’ which have yielded mixed results.³⁹ In general these accounts have noted the manner in

³⁹ See the following surveys of these attempts: Peter Saunders, *Social Theory and the Urban Question*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1986); Mike Savage and Alan Warde, *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1993); and Richard Dewey, ‘The Rural-Urban Continuum: Real but Relatively Unimportant’, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 66:1 (July 1960), pp. 60–6.

which 'the urban' is usually defined in relation to 'the rural': the former associated with 'the city' and the latter with 'the country'.⁴⁰ And yet in reality such a distinction is somewhat fictive since, empirically, the distinction between city and country comprises a continuum rather than a binary dualism.⁴¹ Indeed, as Savage and Warde note, urban and rural do not exist separately, but in admixture.⁴² It is this impossibility of separating urban from rural that led Dewey to conclude that the rural–urban continuum is 'real but unimportant'.⁴³

It is important to note, however, that despite arguing that the rural–urban continuum is unimportant, Dewey nevertheless regards this continuum as real.⁴⁴ This suggests that whilst it may be difficult to offer a concept of 'the urban' that is useful for sociological analysis, the notion of 'the urban' has some purchase in naming a certain type of experience (or existential quality). I would contend that the core of such an experience is the heterogeneity whose condition of possibility is the shared space constituted by buildings. 'Urbanity' then is a plurality or heterogeneity experienced in the shared spaces that are constituted by buildings. It is possible then to speak of an experience or existential quality identifiable as 'urban' and yet not locatable in a geographico-demographic manner. That is to say, 'urbanity' cannot necessarily be confined to the city. 'The urban' thus becomes, if formalised in philosophical terms, *coexistence in and through the shared spaces constituted by the built environment*. The built environment is still fundamental to such a definition and thus urbicide remains, at its core, the destruction of buildings in order to destroy a certain existential quality that inheres in the spaces such buildings constitute.

Such a definition, of course broadens urbicide beyond the destruction of the city. This is not a problem, unless we cling to the stereotypical definition of the rural–urban continuum that defines one as within the city limits and the other as without such a boundary. Indeed, such a broadening of the possibilities of the urban resonate with commentaries on the urbanisation of life under globalisation. As Richard Skeates notes, the urban experience in the era of globalisation cannot be easily identified with the city as it has traditionally been conceived.⁴⁵ This problem arises due to the disappearance of easily recognisable boundaries for the city. Indeed, the globalised sprawl of the twenty-first century, with its multiple networks of production, seems to defy any such easy categorisation. And yet it is possible to speak of the 'urban' experience that such sprawl entails.

Whilst it thus becomes difficult to talk of urbicide as destruction of the city alone, however, responding to this critique of urbicide allows a sharpening of focus. After all, why should the destruction of villages across Bosnia and Chechnya or West Bank and Gaza refugee camps be excluded from the concept of urbicide by virtue of falling outside some narrow notion of the correspondence of the urban and the city. Thus the logic of urbicide should not be taken to be restricted to the destruction of the city alone. As such then, it might be objected that the 'urban' has been removed from urbicide. Such problems arise in the specification of all concepts: why, for example, should the *genus*, which (along with the epithet *-cide*) is one of the lexico-conceptual

⁴⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country And The City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴¹ Dewey, 'The Rural-Urban Continuum'.

⁴² Savage & Warde, *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity*, p. 109.

⁴³ Dewey, 'The Rural-Urban Continuum', p. 66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Richard Skeates, 'The Infinite City', *City*, 8 (1997), pp. 6–20.

constituents of genocide, be restricted to ‘race, nationality, ethnicity or religion’? I would prefer to argue, therefore, that it is necessary to note that the understanding of ‘urban’ implied in my account of the logics of urbicide is very specific. So long as ‘urban’ is taken to refer to ‘co-existence in and through the shared spaces constituted by the built environment’, then urbicide is a viable concept for identifying the manner in which the destruction of the built environment is a distinctive form of political violence.

Heterogeneity: being-with-others, alterity and community

Urbicide, then, is the destruction of heterogeneity *qua* coexistence in and through the shared spaces constituted by the built environment. Analysis of such destruction – insofar as it is an analysis of the destruction of coexistence – thus goes to the heart of what French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has referred to as a ‘co-existential analytic’.⁴⁶ Critically developing the implicit (though undeveloped) potential of Martin Heidegger’s ontological schema in *Being and Time*, Nancy argues that Being is never singular and/or alone but is always constituted in and through being-with-others.⁴⁷ Nancy, notes that much of Western philosophy neglects this dimension of the study of Being; instead developing ontological schemas in which beings are (in a manner similar to the Cartesian *cogito*) primarily autonomous (sovereign) and related to others only in a secondary manner. Such ontological schemas build a picture of existence that starts with an isolated individual self and then poses the question of the existence both of the material world and other beings within that world. In contrast Nancy argues that ‘there is no “self” except by virtue of a “with”, which, in fact, structures it’.⁴⁸ A closer examination of this understanding of existence as always already a co-existence will help to clarify the nature of the heterogeneity at stake in urbicide.

Nancy argues that all Being is a Being-with. In order to demonstrate this point, Nancy turns to examine the possibility of ‘being-alone’.⁴⁹ Nancy notes that even the possibility of being-alone is framed in terms of a relation. That is to say, being-alone is a particular mode of being-with: a separation from an other defined precisely as a standing apart from, or existing in the absence of, others. It might be possible to assert that such a separation is possible: that the realisation of an individual existence

⁴⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 94.

⁴⁷ Nancy’s co-existential analytic, developed in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Lisa Garbus, Peter Connor, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and *Being Singular Plural*, represents a critical development of the notion of ‘being-with’ that Heidegger outlines in Chapter 4 of Division 1 of *Being and Time* (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 149–68). Heidegger notes that existence is public and, hence, always a being-with. It is this notion of publicness that I have drawn upon in the elaboration of urbicide. However, it is also important to note, however, that despite its implicit presence in *Being and Time*, Heidegger chose not to develop the theme of being-with. Indeed, had this theme been developed Heidegger’s philosophy (and presumably his politics) might have taken a wholly different turn. In this sense, Nancy’s work is not an exegesis, but an examination of the consequences for post-Heideggerian thought of taking the path that Heidegger himself chose not to explore.

⁴⁸ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 94.

⁴⁹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 3.

might allow the subject to enclose itself and thus divide itself from its others. And yet even this enclosing, insofar as it is a closure *from* others, is a relation. To be properly alone (or as Nancy puts it to 'be alone being alone') requires that this relation established by the enclosure of the subject be enclosed itself.⁵⁰ For Nancy, this contradiction at the heart of ontology is a critical insight into both the nature of Being and the failures of Western philosophy. Western philosophy – or the metaphysics of presence – can be said to have consistently denied the manner in which the constitution of the subject is always already a separation of that subject from its others.⁵¹ Thus, the crucially constitutive role of otherness is disavowed.

However, if we think of existence in the built environment as existence in a fundamentally public domain, it becomes clear that we cannot think of such existence without conceding the constitutive presence of alterity. Focusing on the destruction of the built environment thus allows us insight into the manner in which all Being is a Being-with. Nancy argues that such Being-with is coextensive with what he refers to as 'community'. If community is a being-in-common, then community is the name of that experience of having something in common with others, or of being-with-others. 'Community' is thus the name we can give to the experience of existence in the public, shared spatialities of the built environment. Whether or not we encounter specific others in this shared spatiality, the constitutive possibility of alterity defines the experience of the built environment as an experience of community, being-in-common (with-others).

However, this remains an abstract ontological schema. Although it provides a powerful critique of the metaphysics of presence and indicates how the analysis of urbicide uncovers the fundamentally coexistential nature of being, it does not say much about the nature of the heterogeneity that is destroyed in urbicide. It is worth, therefore, sketching out the nature of the heterogeneity at stake in urbicide. Difference is typically construed as the presence of (groups of) subjects that have demonstrable dissimilarities. These dissimilarities are taken to be attributable to cultural, social, or biological factors that are prior to the coexistence of such (groups of) subjects. The clearest example of such thinking is the understanding of ethnic difference as a salient marker of the dissimilarity of two groups. Ethnicity is, in many accounts, taken to be a cultural and social difference that pre-exists the coexistence of any groups in particular circumstances. Thus Serbs have always been Serbs regardless of whether they coexist with either Croats or Bosniacs. However, Nancy's schema – and my interpretation of it in the context of urbicide – challenge such understandings.

If Being is constitutively a Being-with, any Being is not preconstituted prior to the encounter with difference, but is actually elaborated in the context of such an encounter. This is to say, following William Connolly, that there is no identity without difference, no self without other.⁵² All such identities are elaborated by drawing boundaries between what is the same and what is different. That is to say, all such identities are established through the constitution of elaborate networks of

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵¹ The notion of the 'metaphysics of presence' can be found in a number of the writings of Jacques Derrida. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edn. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁵² William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

identity\difference. Such an understanding of identity\difference conceives of being-with-others as what Foucault refers to as 'agonistic'.⁵³ Agonism according to Foucault is the continual provocation of difference. Whilst agonism is etymologically associated with struggle, we should not construe this provocation in a violent sense. Rather, in our everyday lives insofar as a sense of identity is only established in and through the elaboration of a dividing line between self and other, identity and difference, there is a daily need to re-enact such boundaries. This is the daily provocation of difference: the provocation to elaborate the boundary between self and other in order to state what self and other might be.

The heterogeneity at stake in urbicide is precisely this agonism. That is to say, the heterogeneity is the general constitutive nature of being-with. This agonism can manifest itself in a variety of ways and specific differences will be targeted in particular contexts. However, urbicide is wider in scope than the targeting of particular differences. Urbicidal violence targets the provocation of difference – an agonism arising out of the public spatiality of the built environment – in itself. Urbicide is thus a ceaseless toil to disavow the constitutivity of alterity. Whilst this account of urbicide characterises the violence as a general assault on heterogeneity or community, or the openness of being to being-with, it provides a more powerful analytic tool than an account which takes urbicide to be the targeting of a specific group. It allows us to note that urbicide is a politics of exclusion aimed at establishing the fiction of a being-without-others. As such it enables us to see that the political stakes of urbicide are wider than the exclusion – or eradication – of any specific group. I will briefly, therefore, sketch out the characteristics of this politics of exclusion that lies at the heart of urbicide.

Urbicide and the politics of exclusion

Urbicide is the transformation of agonistic heterogeneity into antagonistic enclaves of homogeneity. Indeed, examination of the consequences of urbicide for the built environment will show zones of separation, constituted through demolition, intended to mark out the new boundaries of separation which will establish such enclaves. Such a project of constitution of enclaves where there was antagonistic coexistence, is the characteristic of a politics of exclusion. Such a politics is predicated upon what Connolly has referred to as onto-politics: the assertion of a specific vision of *onta*, that which exists.⁵⁴ Such assertions are always political insofar as they assert the value of one perceived form of being, by deeming it the authentic form of being, over other forms. The transformation of agonism into antagonism comprises the territorialisation of such onto-politics. An onto-politics cannot admit of difference since it cannot admit that there are different visions of what exists. And as such, a territorial zone is carved out within which all other forms of being are eradicated or exiled. Carving out such a zone naturalises the disavowal of being-with that characterises

⁵³ Michel Foucault, 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 208–26.

⁵⁴ William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralisation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 1.

urbicide; it naturalises the idea that a given form of Being exists outside of any relation to otherness and, hence, that this form of Being is authentic insofar as it does not rely on some form of relationality to define itself.

The politics of urbicide are thus a politics of exclusion. In the case of the 1992–95 Bosnian war such a politics of exclusion is manifested in the politics of ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism is an ontopolitics predicated upon the notion of ethnic separateness. Ethnic difference is taken to be prior to the extant, ethnically heterogeneous state of affairs. Moreover, ethnic difference is taken to militate against such heterogeneity since ethnicity and territory are closely linked, the former drawing upon notions of historical attachment to the latter. Ethnic heterogeneity is thus seen as a perversion of the territorial separateness implied in this vision of ethnicity.⁵⁵ Ethnic nationalism thus deploys urbicide to eradicate the possibility of difference inherent in the public, shared spatiality of the built environment. This program is two-fold, the eradication of difference, followed by the consolidation of homogeneity.

Urbicide and the anthropocentric political imagination

At the beginning of this argument, I noted that a focus upon the destruction of the built environment required a contestation of the anthropocentric imaginary that has defined understandings of political violence in contexts such as the 1992–95 Bosnian war. I noted that such an anthropocentric imaginary was understandable and yet responsible for treating material elements of experience as a secondary, equipmental supplement to the lives of individual subjects. Whilst it would be callous to suggest that concern with the plight of individual human subjects in distress due to persecution of one form or another should not concern us, we should not allow such concern to dominate the conceptual schemas which guide scholarly inquiry into the nature of political violence. To allow anthropocentric concerns to dominate such scholarship is to perpetuate the metaphysics of presence and their pre-social individual as the onto-epistemological predicate of studies of political violence. Such an onto-epistemology takes the harm done to the individual – or the group from which they derive some consolidation of their identity – as primary, and all other forms of violence as secondary.

And yet, it is surely questionable whether such anthropocentrism is sustainable in the face of the outline of the heterogeneous agonism at stake in urbicide that I have presented. Given that being-with is constitutive of Being, and that such being-with is constituted by the shared, public spatialities of the built environment, destruction of the built environment is of fundamental importance to Being. The destruction of the built environment disavows a constitutive element of identity – its relation with alterity. In contrast to the vision of exponents of the politics of exclusion, the disavowal of heterogeneity does not return a subject to its original, pre-social essence, rather it constitutes an homogeneous enclave in and through the crippling distortion of being-with. If this is the case, attention to the individual subject or the group to

⁵⁵ On the territorial separateness at the core of ethnic-nationalist understandings of identity see David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

which it belongs fails to understand the constitutive nature of being-with. Such a failure is genuinely troubling insofar as it fails to recognise the potential crisis of reconstruction that the anthropocentric imaginary faces. To assume that protection of subjects is enough, that protected subjects can simply go back to life amid the ruins is a failure of perception. For those ruins are testament to the rewriting of the networks of identity/difference that the disavowal of agnostic heterogeneity at the heart of the destruction of buildings enacts. Houses cannot simply be rebuilt if the very terrain of community has been reorganised into antagonistic enclaves.

Thus, if scholarly enquiry into political violence, is, for the most part, an enquiry into the politics of exclusion, urbicide demonstrates the necessity of thinking beyond the anthropocentric frame in order to understand the mechanisms through which such exclusion is achieved. Thinking beyond the anthropocentric frame, moreover, does not (as I noted in my introduction) mean abandoning humanity to its fate in favour of a curator's attention to material culture. Indeed, if the focus of much anthropocentric scholarship concerning political violence is the effect of such violence upon plurality, then urbicide demonstrates the impossibility of understanding the destruction of plurality/heterogeneity without considering violence against the non-human (the built environment in this case) as a form of destruction in its own right (rather than one that is ancillary to the destruction of humans). One might thus follow Heidegger and argue that my argument for thinking beyond anthropocentrism through a consideration of the destruction of the built environment as a form of political violence in its own right is necessary precisely because current forms of thinking regarding political violence do not set the value of *anthropos* (whose life is always constituted in and around all of the things that make up his/her world) high enough.

Conclusion

Whilst it is common to embark upon investigation of the nature of political violence out of due concern for individuals facing death or persecution, an exclusively anthropocentric focus fails to get to grips with the issues raised by destruction of objects it regards as secondary equipmental supplements to the lives of individual subjects. Moreover, in failing to get to grips with the issue of the disavowal of heterogeneity revealed by consideration of urbicide, anthropocentric understandings can lead to the enactment of political solutions that effectively perpetuate the politics of exclusion. Anthropocentrism, thus, is not simply concern for humanity. Indeed, the examination of urbicide presented above can be said to have the coexistential condition of humanity as its principal concern. Rather anthropocentrism comprises a conceptual horizon which takes the pre-social individual as its principle subject. For the anthropocentric imaginary sociality and materiality are, therefore, secondary aspects of being. The principal crimes against humanity for the anthropocentric imaginary are, thus, the persecution of an individual, alone or as part of a group who share the same characteristics, on the grounds of their identity.

Given the urbanisation of warfare, and the prevalence of urbicide, it seems a failure of imagination to continue our investigations into political violence from within an anthropocentric imaginary. Indeed, if the contemporary era is one of rapid

urbanisation and the increasing interconnection that is sometimes referred to as globalisation, the question of coexistence is of particular salience for our era. Given the problems that the anthropocentric imaginary has in addressing the politics of exclusion that attacks the conditions of possibility of such coexistence, it would seem to be a poor tool for examination of the violences that confront us in the contemporary era.