'On edge?': studies in precarious urbanisms

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the following *Geoforum* special issue on the theme of 'Precarious Urbanisms'. Weaving into brief discussion of 'precariousness' and 'precarity', referencing the insights of Judith Butler, the paper reflects upon a distinctive move – characterising all of the eight papers comprising the special issue – whereby the entangled relations between precariousness and precarity play out in creating states and feelings of 'on-edgeness'. This phrase encompasses the sense of peoples living 'on the edge', pushed to socio-spatial margins that may be literally peripheral, on the fringes of densely-populated (urban) sites of human inhabitation and activity, or more messily interstitial, found in the nooks, crannies and decaying or impermanent infrastructures of cities. Additionally, however, the phrase suggests the sense of peoples living 'on edge' – anxiously, fearfully, precariously – and whose 'psychic topographies', to borrow another term from Butler, may be mentally stressed and strained to and beyond breaking-points. As such, this special issue bridges across from classic (political-economic) work on urban precarity to concerns addressed in the orbit of 'mental health geographies', tackling the making and possible unmaking of precariousness as an injurious way of being-in-the-world. Reference is made throughout this introduction to the other papers contributing to the special issue.

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1. A blog, a conference session and precarious urbanisms

> "Precarity seems to define the contemporary structure of feeling. From the migrant crisis, to climate change, to intensifying austerity, the precarity that has long been a recognised feature of labour economies is expanding into new arenas. … In London there are some obvious 'precarious urbanisms' such as sites of dereliction or forced eviction. But there are also geographies of precarity which are less immediately apparent. Urban phenomenon like pop-up culture and property guardianship try to put a positive spin on precarious conditions, rebranding insecure and unpredictable access to work, leisure and domestic space as 'ephemeral' and 'flexible'. These precarious geographies are transforming the urban fabric and, in particular, its spatiotemporality; producing a city typified by flux, flexibility and uncertainty." (Harris, 2016, no pagination)

The above quote, from a blog by Ella Harris,[1] vividly encapsulates a picture of what she terms 'precarious urbanisms' in Western contexts, structurally bound into the changing circumstances of urban economy, politics and society, but also as lived, felt and maybe

[1] We will provide the first names of our contributors, and of other authors excepting a few only named in passing, the first time that they are mentioned, but not again thereafter.

contested. These ideas are particularly picked up in the paper below, authored by Harris with Mel Nowicki and Katherine Brickell (Harris *et al*, 2019; also Harris and Nowicki, 2018). Reading this blog was a decisive moment in the thinking of the guest-editors about the *Geoforum* special issue that we are here introducing – with the same title as this editorial paper – precisely because it anticipated how we were starting to understand certain articulations of precarity, as a broadly political-economic trajectory of urban structuration, and precariousness, as a more phenomenologically-grounded way of living, experiencing and being-in the world. More narrowly, the blog identifies substantive subject-matters covered in this special issue, to do with pop-ups (Harris *et al*, 2019), property guardianship (Vasudevan and Ferreri, 2019) and evictions (Lancione, 2019), as well as speaking of ephemerality, insecurity and uncertainty in a manner anticipating all the other contributions.

The guest-editors, together with Zoé Codeluppi, initially convened a two-module conference session with the title of 'On edge in the city' – one module specifically on the 'politics' and the other on the 'tactics' of 'precarious urban lives' – for the Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) held in London during late-August/early-September 2016. It is worth repeating a statement of the initial vision that informed our convening of this event, since it clarifies a pathway into studying precarious urbanisms marked by interests in 'mental health' (loosely psychological questions) and 'marginalised urban social groups' (loosely sociological questions):

> "Recent work on mobility, care, mental health and homelessness has promoted a performative, practice-oriented understanding of the urban everyday for psychologically vulnerable persons in precarious life situations. This perspective addresses, on the one hand, the logics and effects of polices aiming to govern these urban lives and, on the other, the situated urban practices of persons with serious health or affective problems, but suggests a focus beyond a simple binary of structural control and agentic resistance. … Concerned with these recent developments in studies of precarious urban lives, our session aims to identify convergences and divergences between conceptual framings, fieldwork methodologies and empirical findings across recent studies of different marginalised urban social groups." (Söderstöm *et al*, 2016, no pagination)

This statement retains its value as a framing for the present special issue,[2] which – we are delighted to say – brings a rich ensemble of empirical findings to the table, from a variety of different Global North urban contexts (in France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Switzerland and the UK [England and Scotland]) and with respect to a variety of different peoples and places surviving precariously within these contexts. It offers an intriguing collage of fieldwork methodologies, all seeking sensitively and ethically to get close to the

[2] Eight papers were presented at the event (Darling, 2016; Dawson *et al*, 2016; Duff, 2016; Klausner and Bieler, 2016; Lancione, 2016; Rosa, 2016; Söderström, 2016; Waite, 2016), five of which have now been substantially revised and updated for this special issue. The presenters of the other three papers were unfortunately unable to contribute. We sought an additional three papers, from scholars who we also knew to be working on relevant subject-matters, including the author of the blog that so inspired us.

grain of living 'on (the) edge', and with a notable use of deeply-embedded, critical-ethnographical encounters – quite possibly on the move (adopting 'go-alongs' of different stripes) – with their precarious urban research subjects. There is also conceptual variety on show, more explicit in some papers than in others, but always alert to how precarity is made, a processual becoming rather than a timeless structural property, and to how precariousness amounts to what might be cast as 'a fragile assemblage of fragility', contingently spun together from filaments of thought, feeling, practice and things (human and non-human, material and virtual). Michele Lancione, in his contribution, particularly advances such a processual account, distinguishing different stages in the 'making' – the 'pre-makings', the 'in-makings', the 'un-makings' and the 're-makings' – of precarious housing spaces for the Roma in Bucharest (Lancione, 2019). A conceptual presence in all the papers, meanwhile, is Judith Butler and her remarkable insights – feminist, critical-theoretic, Foucauldian and psychoanalytic – into the problematics of precarity and precariousness. Since her provocations also inspired our own conference session and this special issue, we devote a few paragraphs to what we quarry from Butler as a spur to studying precarious urbanisms.

2. Precarity and precariousness: distributions, allocations and living 'on the edge'

> "… Butler uses precarity and precaritisation in a somewhat different, and potentially more ambitious way, to encompass not only the insecurities arising from changing labour conditions but as a way to register the diverse "modes of 'unliveability'" (Butler, 2012, p.12) that scar the contemporary scene … ." (Lloyd, M., 2015, p.216)

The terms in scope here derive from 'precarious', meaning "in a dangerous state because of not being safe or not being held in place firmly",[3] which, tellingly, immediately suggests something geographical about not being securely 'placed' in the world, reinforced by akin phrases such as 'on a slippery slope', 'on thin ice', 'hazardous' or even 'groundless',[4] all suggesting an uncertain footing or mooring with respect to the 'environment' in which the precarious object is (supposed to be) set. Arguably, such a geographical sensibility traverses how all eight of the following papers advance their respective studies. 'Precarity' itself has come to index the insecurity arising for so many peoples and places because of recent transformations in the global capitalist order, particularly under the crushing demands of neo-liberalism – ratcheted up with the austerity policies of many national administrations post the 2008 Financial Crash – and most obviously with respect to the twin assaults on labour (its flexibilisation, casualisation and, in some cases, redundancy) and public welfare support (its privatisation, contractualisation and, in some cases, abolition). Such precarity has disfigured countless regions and cities across the globe, restructuring the attachments of peoples and places in ways often rendering local life-worlds precarious, insecure, uncertain, unsafe and dangerous, affecting both longer-term residents and in-migrants (especially but not only if 'undocumented). Geographers

[3] According to: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/precarious.
[4] Collecting together phrases/terms from various on-line dictionaries.

have written about precarity in this vein (eg. Ettlinger, 2007; Lewis *et al*, 2015; Waite, 2009; Strauss, 2018; Tyner, 2015), and in so doing have oscillated between viewing it as either a distinctive state of socio-spatial (dis)organisation occurring under neoliberalism, as implied directly above, or a more "generalised societal malaise" (Waite, 2009, p.413; see Strauss, 2018, p.624) occurring in many time-spaces of human history. At the same time, there has been oscillation between a more constrained political-economic account, emphasising the dynamics of capital, class and state, and a more expansive social-cultural account, beginning to fold into the picture the vagaries of human emotions and what Harris *et al* (2019) ingeniously frame as 'structures of feeling'.[5]

The interventions of Butler are indispensable reference-points here, since she works through – and to an extent has prompted – the kinds of oscillations surfacing in the geographical literature. For instance, Butler "makes a careful distinction between 'precariousness' – the corporeal vulnerability shared by all mortals including the privileged, and 'precarity' – the particular vulnerability imposed on the poor, the disenfranchised, and those endangered by war or natural disaster" (Watson, 2012, no pagination; also Rosa, 2019). Butler's Ur-text *Precarious Life* (Butler, 2004) responds to a time-space conjuncture, specifically 9/11 and its aftermath of US vengefulness, but she is less preoccupied by precarity as neoliberalism's attacks on labour, notwithstanding occasional mentions of 'disposable' or 'dispensable' workforces (Lloyd, M., 2015, p.216). Rather, she opens by writing as follows: "That we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another, are all reasons for both fear and grief" (Butler, 2004, p.xii) – thereby entraining 'us' *all*, humans, when and wherever, as leading precarious lives in which insecurities, dangers and maybe termination are forever present. All of us share this condition of being open to assaults from outside, from others who may be neighbours or strangers, in which regard Butler depicts us as fleshy bodies/selves inescapably caught in an 'ecstatic' mode of living 'besides oneself', corporeally and sensorially forever open – and vulnerable – to whatever the world throws at us (negatively *or* positively).[6] This shared precarity – or precariousness, or vulnerability – becomes the lodestar for a moving call to find ways of mourning or grieving that avoid translating into retribution, violence and boundary-demarcating against a perceived adversary (an enemy, a despised 'other'), an argument now explored by 'peace geographers' (notably Woon, 2014) and also, we feel, operating more diffusely to influence contributions to this special issue (see also Waite *et al*, 2014).

Butler does not then lapse into an imprecise universalism, however, for, as she also insists

[5] Harris *et al* (2019) build from how Ben Anderson (2014) conjoins this classic concept derived from Raymond Williams's cultural-materialist Marxism with insights from a non-representational human geography alert to the 'political' workings of affect, itself a manoeuvre introduced by Nigel Thrift when adopting Williams's "almost/not quite concept" into his own non-representationalist theorising of 'spatial formations' (Thrift, 1996, esp. pp.258-263).
[6] We owe our description here – and also other aspects of this editorial – to the stimulating reading of Butler provided by Moya Lloyd (Lloyd, M., 2015).

at the outset of *Precarious Lives*, "[t]here are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others" (Butler, 2004, p.xii). Hence, "precarity," as the distribution of greater precariousness, "signals a politically generated condition of heightened risk, jeopardy and threat for specific populations," and is thereby the concept "used by [Butler] to distinguish between primary vulnerability, the ontological condition of being given over to others shared by all,[7] and concrete particular, historical conditions of insecurity and liability faced by some" (Lloyd, M., 2015, p.218). As Butler explains in an essay where abuses of labour do feature, such insecurities feed into, and perhaps may also be fed by, "the diverse "modes of 'unliveability'" (Butler, 2012, p.12) that scar the contemporary scene … ." (Lloyd, M., 2015, p.216). 'Unliveability' suggests circumstances where the lives to be lived are extremely hard, almost if not entirely unendurable, because of the intense, quite possibly relentless, pressures clawing at both bodies and minds, creating situations of what, in another conceptual vocabulary, might be termed the 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998) of humans reduced to the status of non-humans.[8] There are 'diverse modes of unliveability', indicating different ways in which such precarity – such heightened precariousness – may be composed and imposed, with the further implication that precariousness comprises an uneven surface, pockmarked by peaks of precarity and troughs of relative 'comfort', across which situations of vulnerability or unliveability are variably distributed or allocated, accidentally or purposefully.

While precariousness is indeed shared by all, therefore, precarity is unevenly distributed, picking out particular peoples in particular places through the variable patterning – sometimes deliberately designed – of economic resources, policy interventions, social interactions and cultural stereotypings. Putting matters thus recalls older claims about the sociologies/geographies of inequality and injustice: the traditions of 'welfare geography' after David M. Smith, now carried forward in the political cartographies of Danny Dorling (eg. Dorling, 2015, 2018; Dorling and Thomas, 2016; Philo, 1993, 2014; Smith, D. 1977, 1979), and those of 'radical geography' forensically analysing the uneven impress of capital, state and ideology (eg. Harvey, 1973, 2015, esp. Pt.2, 2017, esp. Chaps.7 & 8; Smith, N., 1984). The partitioning of space at diverse scales into centres and margins, from global metropoles and peripheries to the scissoring apart of 'city rich' and 'city poor', remains pivotal, even as scholars with post-structural sensibilities

[7] Or, in Butler's terms, precariousness, or vulnerability, as already explained.

[8] There are parallel trajectories in the writings of Butler and Agamben, since both debate the processes that effectively *dis*qualify certain humans (in certain situations) from being regarded as viable political actors or 'speaking subjects'. In discussions that also reach across to Arendt (on 'appearance') and Habermas (on the 'public sphere'), Butler argues that "[t]he public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subject appear as viable actors" (Butler, 2004, p.xvii). She continues, "[d]issent is quelled, in parts, through threatening the speaking subject with an uninhabitable identification" (Butler, 2004, p.xix). Such themes become increasingly important in some of her more recent writings (esp. Butler, 2015).

envisage matters more relationally, seeing less the partitions *per se* and more the spiralling relations, flows and frictions – material and 'imaginative', economic and cultural, financial and technological, geopolitical and geo-post-political – that assemble (and sometimes disassemble) formations of centrality and marginality. The urban and its tentacular 'explosions', alongside stories of cities 'imploding' in crises now as much environmental as economic, are also fundamental to these critical inquiries (eg. Brenner, 2014, 2019; Massey, 2010).

At the same time, Butler's geography of precarity speaks to another long-standing concern of social, urban and rural geographers for peoples and places 'on the margins' (Lancione, 2016) or *on the edge*, to use a standard phrase that functions metaphorically and materially, invoking a state of marginality to the mainstream activities of a given society that may well have real, material spatial expression. As such, it conveys the sense of peoples living 'on the edge', pushed to socio-spatial margins that may be literally peripheral, set on the fringes of densely-populated (urban) sites of human inhabitation and activity, or perhaps more messily interstitial, crammed into the nooks, crannies and decaying or impermanent infrastructures of settlements (notably towns and cities). Simply to describe somewhere as 'on the edge' is to hint at being unbalanced, about to topple over the edge, and hence immediately echoes back those root meanings of precarious mentioned previously. There are countless versions of such edge-based depictions in and around the geographical literature: including occasional allusions to 'edgelands',[9] complementing multiple accounts of places variously cast as 'fringe', 'hidden', 'forgotten', 'neglected', 'abandoned', 'redundant', 'wasted' and the like, and occupied by those peoples variously cast as 'outsiders', 'deviants', 'strangers', 'scapegoats', '*homo sacrii*', 'abnormal' and the like.[10]

Darren McGarvey's *Poverty Safari* (McGarvey, 2017) offers a compelling journey into these 'edgy' locations, as here when describing his childhood in Pollok,[11] "a so-called deprived area on the southside of Glasgow [that] in the early-'90s scored high in the tables for social deprivation across Europe" (McGarvey, 2017, p.30):

> "Over the decades, the urban areas of Glasgow expanded and joined up, but Pollok existed on the edge of this and was still very much connected to its more rural past – at least aesthetically.

[9] The book *Edgelands* (Roberts and Farley, 2012) overlaps with a perspective on geographies of precarity, but also enrols an interest in forgotten or neglected 'wildernesses' where unplanned, unsanctioned, entanglements of humanity and nature proliferate on the edges of established urban centres of living and working.

[10] Alluding to a library's-worth of studies by geographers of older and more recent vintages. David Sibley's 1981 text *Outsiders in Urban Societies* (Sibley, 1981; also Sibley, 1995) remains a pioneering beacon in this respect, while long ago one of the present authors sought to encapsulate what such a geographical attention to 'otherness' and its places – including 'madness' – might signal for future critical scholarship (Philo, 1986).

[11] "In Pollok … there is an area called 'Old Pollok' which is closer to Pollok Park and is a noticeably nicer place to live. People aren't shy to remind you of the difference and make a social distinction between themselves and the area regarded as 'deprived'" (McGarvey, 2017, 41).

> …
> To the south of the river stood a long line of flat-roofed tenements, encased in grey, roughcast concrete, complete with blue verandas which doubled up as viewing platforms, clothes-horses and ashtrays. You won't be surprised to learn that dampness was an issue in the houses with flat roofs; rainfall, instead of trickling down a slope to a drainage system, would often just linger on the horizontal surface until it found a way into people's homes.
> …
> From this vantage-point you could see different phases of development that has taken place; some ongoing, some complete and others abandoned as the area continued to expand to meet the demands of population growth. But with every shiny new-build thrown up there was always some other structure falling down – often with people still living in it. It gave Pollok a messy air of incompletion." (McGarvey, 2017, 41, 42)

Pollok, as recounted here, was – and in many ways still is – a highly precarious place, a peak on Butler's surface of precariousness, a condensation of 'precarious urbanisms'. It also anticipates the precarious places met with throughout the papers in this special issue: the pop-up housing or soon-to-be-decanted council estates of inner London (Harris *et al*, 2019; Vasudevan and Ferreri, 2019), the deprived back streets and soup kitchens of Brixton (Johnson-Schlee, 2019), the Roma communities in social rentals or on the streets of Bucharest (Lancione, 2019), the 'makeshift settlements' of the Roma in Marseille and Turin (Rosa, 2019), the 'niches' uncertainly occupied by psychiatric patients in a deprived Berlin district (Bieler and Klausner, 2019), the diverse urban spaces encountered by psychiatric patients across Lausanne (Söderström, 2019), and the inner-city areas of Dundee where 'hate crimes' and 'micro-aggressions' against learning-disabled people occur or are feared to occur (Hall, 2019).

3. Psychic topographies and living 'on edge'

> "*Jellyfish* provides a bitter illustration of Judith Butler's 'Precarious Life', as expounded upon so powerfully in her 2004 book of the same name: Sarah's carer responsibilities, alongside school and a part-time job are unsustainable, whilst Karen is utterly incapable of adhering to welfare system requirements with such chronic mental health. Paying the rent and keeping the lights on is therefore a daily struggle.
> …
> This precariousness is also encapsulated in the film's location of Margate, a battleground of rising inequality." (Lloyd, W., 2019, no pagination)

The above passages, by film critic Wendy Lloyd and appearing in a blog on *The Psychologist* website, are prompted by the critically acclaimed British feature film, *Jellyfish*, written and directed by James Gardner and premiered in April 2018. The film is set in what Lloyd identifies as a location 'encapsulating' precariousness, Margate, a seaside town in the region known as Thanet, Kent, southeast England, UK, known as a particularly deprived corner of Britain (characterised as 'stuck in a cycle of poverty' by a BBC news report in August 2013). What most intrigues us about Lloyd's review, though, is the explicit cross-reference to Butler's thesis in *Precarious Life* (Butler, 2004), underlining the 'unsustainable – perhaps 'unliveable' – life led by the young protagonist, Sarah, and linking in with the chronic mental health problems faced by Sarah's mother, Karen. The connections between precariousness and mental (ill-)health hence begin to be

foregrounded here, inviting consideration of how precariousness entails both people living 'on the edge', in the geographical register addressed above, and people being acutely *on edge*, a psychological register wracked by the bitter reality of people living 'on edge' – anxiously, fearfully, precariously – enduring psychological states that may be mentally stressed and strained to and beyond breaking-points. In effect, therefore, a connection arises between geographical work on precariousness and precarity, as already identified, and work in the orbit of so-called 'mental health geographies' (Curtis, 2010; Parr, 2008; Wolch and Philo, 2000), notably that probing relationships between the city and mental distress from classic 'ecological studies' (eg. Faris and Dunham, 1939; Giggs, 1973) to more phenomenological explorations of urban psychosis (eg. Söderström *et al*, 2017).

Staying with Butler for a moment longer, though, it can be noted that she has consistently been interested in how conditions in the wider world acquire an 'inwardness' in the psychological states of individuals. One of her earlier texts is called *The Psychic Life of Power* (Butler, 1997), subtitled 'theories in subjection', and asks "[w]hat is the psychic form that power takes?" before stating the need to conjoin theories of power, after Foucault, with theories of the psyche, after Freud (Butler, 1997, pp.2-3). Following Foucault, she reflects on how power creates the discursive possibilities for "us" to think and feel "our existence" (Butler, 1997, p.2), but argues that how these possibilities then alight, as it were, in the psyches of individuals, bending them in particular ways for good or ill, still remains strangely opaque. While circumnavigating questions about how identifiable mental ill-health conditions – chronic mental health problems, depressions, psychoses and the like – may be produced, the classic epidemiological problematic as partially reformulated in this special issue by Ola Söderström (2019), Butler is nonetheless prepared to consider how what she terms "psychic topographies" (Butler, 1997, p.4) may be fostered, positively or negatively, by the discursive resources – the meanings or tropes – made available to given peoples in given circumstances.[12] Recalling Hegel's 'slave-master' dialectic, she inspects how the latter may internalise the 'power' of the former, so much so that the subjected person can be "passionately attached to his or her own subordination" (Butler, 1997, p.6). This formulation anticipates that broader framing of how individuals are vulnerable to whatever presses affectively upon them – from other peoples, things, words, gestures, whatever – recovered by Moya Lloyd (2015) as such a key Butlerian manoeuvre. Similarly, in *Precarious Lives*, Butler spotlights "shaming tactics which have a certain psychological terrorisation as their effect," adding that they work as well "by producing what will and will not count as a viable speaking subject and a reasonable opinion within the public domain" (Butler, 2004, p.xix).

Diverse forms of 'psychological terrorisation' arguably accompany – and become causally linked to – precarity, as is made plain by all the papers in this special issue. Such a claim

[12] Specifically at this point, Butler mentions how "melancholia [as itself a trope of thinking] participates in the mechanisms that it describes, producing psychic topographies that are clearly tropological" (Butler, 1994, p.4).

is foregrounded by Harris *et al* (2019) with their 'structures of feeling' proposal, suggesting that "atmospheres of precarity circulate around particular places and people, so that being 'on edge' involves (metaphorically) 'breathing' a local atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty".[13] Although not an angle central to the paper by Vasudevan and Ferreri (2019), they still reflect upon the insecurities felt by residents of temporary housing, always open to being moved on, and even by property guardians left feeling awkward and guilty as relatively privileged urban-dwellers with more choices over their mobilities. Sam Johnson-Schlee (2018) explores the local rationalities of conspiratorial 'political speech' at a Brixton soup kitchen, albeit a species of 'political speech' largely positioned as irrational – as pathological, a psychological malady – within the wider horizon of official discoursing, recalling exactly Butler's objections (see immediately above) to what gets debarred from the category of reasonable or viable opinion-stating.[14] Lancione (2019) writes of the Bucharest eviction of the Roma of Vulurilor 50 as "filled with a confused jumble of traumatised people and broken things," while Elisabetta Rosa (2019), displaying Butlerian influences throughout, sensitively reconstructs the care/self-care practices of Roma 'camp' inhabitants striving "to maintain a liveable life" in the face of extreme physical and psychological challenges.

The remaining three papers in the special issue even more obviously interface research on mental health geographies, including learning disability geographies (Philo and Metzel, 2005), with the themes of 'precarious urbanisms'. Patrick Bieler and Martina Klausner (2019) tackle the contested spaces of 'community psychiatric care' for people with diagnosed mental health problems, alert throughout – and with wonderfully storied individual 'cases' – to how precarious 'niches' are created as minor bulwarks in their "struggle to live a bearable life that unfolds in urban assemblages." Söderström (2019), working through different perspectives (geographers', linguists' and psychiatrists') on the affective dimensions of how people experiencing early-onset psychosis negotiate the city, explores how 'precarious encounters' (with peoples, objects, sounds) arise and are immediately managed – or not – through a diversity of micro-corporeal practices (themselves accumulating into a "choreography of precarity"). In related manner, including urban walks with research participants, Ed Hall and Ellie Bates (2019) trace how people with learning disabilities move through the spaces of inner Dundee – ones

[13] Harris *et al* explicitly acknowledge the influence here of the guest editors' own ideas, as contained in a briefing note for this special issue, but we would say that these authors have done much to elaborate and to deepen our initial speculations. Note that in the following paragraph, direct quotes from the papers in the special issue are not cited with page numbers, since the latter were not available at the time of drafting this editorial.

[14] Drawing on Fraser's feminist claims about 'recognition', Kate Driscoll Derickson (2016) underlines the need to *re*state the importance of those who might be deemed the 'non-recognised': those rendered invisible by the authoritative words and practices of 'one's own culture' (where that culture may also transfer *inside* the academy and even into the hallways of critical urban scholarship). Johnson-Schlee's street-level conspiracy theorists playing cards around the Brixton soup kitchen are arguably the 'non-recognised' in both wider societal-state circles and those of the academy.

where 'hate crimes' and 'micro-aggressions' against them occur or are feared to occur – in such a way as to "produce senses of anxiety and precarity" but *also* "experiences of belonging."

In sum, then, this paper – and the following special issue – ventures the concept of *on-edgeness* as a condition of being-in-the-world that admixes being 'on edge', as a feeling, with living 'on the edge', as a state, thereby conjoining geography and psychology, or the social, the spatial and the psychic, in the study of 'precarious urbanisms' (or, indeed, of precarious locales wherever they might be found). If a phrase such as living 'on *the* edge' captures something of how precarities are structured, generating the assemblages that render peoples and places objectively precarious, then the phrase living '*on* edge' captures something else: namely, the propensity towards feeling 'on edge', with the people involved being enveloped by, imbibing, internalising and acting on the basis of local atmospheres of anxiety, uncertainty and unmoored-ness. Given that an enormous amount of current academic and policy effort now concentrates on well-being, on what makes for peoples and places that are seemingly calm, happy, thriving and mentally healthy (eg. Atkinson *et al*, 2012; Fleuret and Atkinson, 2007; Smith and Reid, 2018),[15] there is arguably a counter-need to continue with – and provocatively to reformulate – academic and campaigning work that focuses upon *ill*-being, on what leads to peoples and places that are instead edgy, unhappy, despairing and mentally unhealthy.

In an essay on 'mental illness and the mad/woman', Heather Hillsburg draws upon another of Butler's texts, *Frames of War* (Butler, 2009), where attention is paid to the 'frames' that demarcate what is seen and sayable – as opposed to what is rendered unseen and unsayable – and also to the necessity for such frames to be constantly reproduced, lest the frames 'break' and other possibilities, perhaps more sympathetic to the precarious, the anxious and the 'mad', creep into view and hearing. As Hillsburg elaborates:

> Within the continuous process of breaking from context in order to rearticulate their own parameters, these frames continuously change. Amid this ongoing process, we can catch brief glimpses of the people and places that have been obscured by the frame as it breaks from itself to re-form. In this case, the moments where the normative frame breaks and rearticulates, liminal or unreal subjects become visible, even if it is only momentarily. (Hillsburg, 2017, p.10)

It is in the spirit of allowing precarious peoples and places – otherwise left 'liminal or unreal' – to make an appearance and thereby to make a claim on *not* being so precarious, even if only momentarily, that the following special issue is offered.

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[15] There are powerful critiques of this 'happiness' move (Ahmed, 2010; also elements of Smith and Reid, 2018); and a parallel critique is that directed at the 'resilience' move (esp. MacKinnon and Derrickson, 2013).

referees for their insights that have certainly enhanced this special issue, and to all the contributors for their readiness to engage, fully, enthusiastically and collegially, at all stages in this publishing project.

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