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Sociology

Niche Sociality: Approaching Adversity in Everyday Life

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Abstract
How should sociologists understand the everyday lives of those living in adversity, coping with the experience of structural violence? In this article, focusing on the urban experience, we suggest a perspective on 'everyday life' that can encompass corporeal, mental, relational and social dimensions, which we term 'niche sociality'. First, we use Gibson's niches and affordances to enrich the post-representationalist understanding of human beings as embodied/cultural/environmentally embedded organisms. Second, we enrich Gibson's niches and affordances with theories for 'small-scale' sociality drawn from social practice theory and interaction ritual chains. Third, we illustrate the productivity of these ideas throughout the article, by grounding our conceptual work in empirical examples that analyse the everyday lives and mental life of migrant workers in Shanghai. Niche sociality, we argue, is a way of framing the experience of the everyday, a perspective that could – perhaps should – provoke novel ecosocial studies of adversity.

Keywords
adversity, affordance, everyday, mental, migrants, niche, practices, Shanghai, sociality, urban

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Introduction

There is a disconnect between the experience of everyday city life and our conceptual repertoire for capturing it. As President of the International Sociological Association, Sztompka (2008: 24) argued for a shift towards a new 'third' sociology of the everyday, but complained that 'current studies fasten upon the simplest and most typical of human experiences, bent on unravelling their subtle collective or interpersonal dimensions and internal mechanisms. Most of these books are descriptive.' However, he singled out the concept of 'interaction ritual chains' (Collins, 2004), discussed in detail later, as one of the few attempts at serious theory. By 2015, little had changed: writing as part of a special issue of *Sociology* focused on the everyday, Back (2015: 821) argues that our ability to understand the mundane and ordinary should start from Goffman, 'arguably the greatest 20th century sociologist of everyday life', but surprisingly ignores his entire conceptual repertoire in favour of his method – 'an eye for detail and attentiveness to the seemingly unimportant' (Back, 2015: 820) – which Back uses to good effect in his rich and personal evocation of life in a South London housing estate. Similarly, in their introduction to the same special issue, the editors explicitly celebrate the wide and eclectic display of methods used in their collection, but emphasise the descriptive rather than the conceptual in their summary of the substance of the everyday (Neal and Murji, 2015). In all these pieces, while the everyday is described and often set alongside the manifestation of larger social structures, class, gender and so forth, the conceptual mechanisms necessary to understand the ways in which each co-creates the other are not explicated, but merely presumed. Nowhere is this more problematic than when it comes to linking the question of everyday life with some of the central concerns of sociology with injustice and inequity, and it is these which are our focus: how to grasp the nature and the corporeal and cerebral consequences of the everyday lives of those experiencing adversity.

Our focus on these questions arises from our programme of research on urban mental health, and in particular on the physical and mental consequences of the adversity that many experience in urban situations, from poverty, inadequate housing, polluted environments, social exclusion, racism and all the other dimensions of structural violence (Farmer, 1996; Galtung and Höivik, 1971). Epidemiological studies (e.g. Fett et al., 2019) have consistently shown that urban life, especially in the 'Global North', predisposes people to poor mental health. Mental health, more widely, seems to be strongly stratified along dimensions of inequality, migration and other adversities (World Health Organization, 2014). Yet we still lack an understanding of the *mechanisms* or pathways through which urban and social life relate to mental health. We need to go beyond the epidemiological strategy of correlating more and more factors with smaller and smaller effects, in favour of thinking through the mechanisms involved in the lived experience of the urban (Illari and Williamson, 2012; Manning, 2019). This article arose out of the wish to make sense of our own recent ethnographic research in Shanghai on the mental health experiences of rural-to-urban migrants.[1] The empirical materials and examples we draw on in this article are therefore drawn from a year-long ethnography in Shanghai.[2] This involved extensive immersion in the life of urban migrant workers in two locations: Tongli Road in Jiuting, a suburban area with a high density of older, more established first wave migrant factory workers; and the Huangpu District, near to the Bund/Nanjing

Road, a smart inner-city area of shops and cafes employing younger and more aspirational second wave migrant workers. This research was part of a collaborative research project, directed by two of the authors of this article (Manning and Rose), with empirical details reported elsewhere (Fitzgerald et al., 2019).[3] Empirical materials and data were made freely available for analysis between the researchers in the project, including the third author, Birk.[4]

Existing research showed that, in general, migrant workers had poorer than average mental health, and suffered multi-dimensional social exclusion (Li and Rose, 2017). Our research aimed to 'dig deeper' than standard survey data, to uncover the mechanisms connecting urban life and mental health in Shanghai (Li et al., 2019). What are the experiences of migrant workers in Shanghai? Our ethnographic explorations of this deceptively simple question, however, led us to multiple empirical puzzles, which, we argue, generated the need for new conceptual *gazes*, rather than just more detailed descriptive assemblages (Savage, 2009).

To exemplify this, we will draw briefly on an example taken from our research, in this case among people living in Tongli Road. This is an area far from the centre of old Shanghai, largely inhabited by rural migrants working in small local factories, living in old and rather decrepit dormitory blocks built around a lively shopping street with many small stores and a large market for fresh meat, fish and vegetables, also run by migrants (Amin and Richaud, 2020; Richaud and Amin, 2019, 2020). Those who inhabited this locale were not only subject to the multiple stresses of migrants in China, but also to the consequences of a political decision during the course of our project that imposed some brute material interventions, which fundamentally transformed their already precarious lives. Yet we did not find evidence of an increase in poor mental health among our participants. None of them had attended the sessions available at the local health centre for those experiencing mental distress. Further, despite ubiquitous smartphone use, none of them seemed to have made use of the widely available on-line counselling and advice that has been a notable part of China's recent 'psycho-boom' (Yang, 2017; Zhang, 2020). No-one we spoke to or heard about took themselves to Shanghai's prestigious mental health centre for diagnosis and treatment, and we heard of no-one who had spent time in a Shanghai mental hospital. Rather, we were struck by the labour of endurance and self-adjustment undertaken by these people in their daily life, making and remaking their niches as they wrestled to shape ways of living in these less than promising urban settings. Terms like resilience seemed only to redescribe these findings, or – worse – to individualise them in terms of personal psychological characteristics. These counterintuitive findings spurred our need for conceptual development beyond description, for developing concepts that can move us closer to understand the niches in which people make their lives, and the forms of *niche sociality* that may exist therein. In the remainder of this article, we will move between empirical puzzles from our work in Shanghai, and the conceptual development of a *gaze* that, we hope, could help us solve them.

We believe that Goffman's concepts for analysing everyday social interaction – situations, face-work, front/backstage, rituals, passing, frames, self-talk, total institution, moral career and so on – provide a starting point for creating such a conceptual gaze. This is despite the fact that his own studies, often deliberately, largely eschew engagement with the larger socio-political contexts of institutions, stigmatisation, subjectification and so

forth, and the techniques, practices, apparatuses and ideologies that underpin the inequities in the everyday lives of those thrown into these situations, and the social suffering that is entailed (Tyler, 2018). What we can take from Goffman, in our view, is not merely a certain practice of description,[5] but also the concepts that can enable us to direct a kind of diagnostic gaze to 'situations' and the adversities that they embody. As Canguilhem argues, concepts are the core of all disciplines, and we borrow his idea of 'conceptual filiation' (Canguilhem, [1968] 1983: 184) for our uses of Goffman to better understand the everyday. We suggest a way of bringing his concepts back into play, framing them within our own idea of niche sociality, which itself derives from an ecological and corporeal reading of Chicagoan sociology (Crossley, 1995; Park, 1936) refined through JJ Gibson's concept of 'affordances' (Gibson, 1979).[6]

   In this article, we articulate our perspective on 'niche sociality' in two steps. In the first part of the article, we draw on the work of Gibson to argue for a way of conceptualising everyday life through the idea of affordances within human ecological niches, where niches are not fixed positions within a social system but historically shaped biological, material, semantic and symbolic modes or regimes of living in space and time. In this section, we will move from articulating some of Gibson's foundational concepts towards contemporary understandings of them, discussing especially the problem of 'social affordances' and their relations to mental health. Following from this, the second part of the article draws on elements from a number of social theories to help us think about niche sociality at a 'small scale': Collins (2004) and Goffman (1956, 1963, 1983, 2009) on the presentation of self in everyday life and interaction ritual chains, and practice theory as developed by Reckwitz (2002) and Shove et al. (2012). Throughout, we will discuss these theoretical movements in relation to examples drawn from our ethnography of migrant workers in Shanghai. Finally, the conclusion seeks to tie these together, and discuss *niche sociality* itself. We will argue that niche sociality is not so much a new concept or theory as a 'gaze', a way of seeing, of making some things visible; its strength, like other sensitising terms, is not in noticing things that have never been noticed before, but in seeing them and connecting them up in ways. Thus, niche sociality is a way of framing the experience of the everyday, which could – perhaps should – provoke novel ecosocial studies of the ways in which humans, located in their biological, material, symbolic and interpersonal everyday worlds, manage their everyday existence, even in conditions of great adversity.

Niches, Affordances and the Human World

There has been growing interest in many disciplines on the first two of our key framing concepts – the (ecological) niche and affordances – but much debate over the appropriate definitions, meanings and uses of each. While debates over the ecological niche go back to the early years of the 20th century (Gibson-Reinemer, 2015; Leibold, 1995; Whittaker et al., 1973), a recent citation study of the history of the concept of niche shows the growth and rapid disciplinary spread of the notion of niches since the 1980s (Pedruski et al., 2016). Social and human scientists have used the term in different ways, but its meaning is rarely explicated – like other terms that span everyday talk and technical language, it is sometimes assumed that its meaning is self-evident. However, with the

exception of Bister, Bieler, Klausner and colleagues (Bieler and Klausner, 2019; Bister, 2018; Bister et al., 2016), few have tried to set it to work on the questions that concern us. Our use of the idea of the niche is vitalistic: stepping aside from much academic wrangling, we will work with a conception of a human niche as a particular array or configuration of biological, material, interpersonal and symbolic forces that imply and support a particular biopsychosocial way of living for those who inhabit it.[7]

As is well known, James Gibson developed his idea of affordances in relation to perception, but in recent years it has been taken up in psychology, anthropology, computer design, education, architecture and urban design, neuroscience, robotics and material design. It has also been particularly influential for contemporary (post-)cognitive science, which increasingly looks beyond representationalist accounts of 'the brain', to an understanding of human beings as embodied organisms, shaped by (cultural) evolution and in ongoing active transactions with their environments (e.g. Gallagher, 2017). Some sociologists have taken up the idea in relation to human–technology interactions (Hutchby, 2003) and digital technologies more broadly (Rettie, 2009). For example, Bloomfield et al. (2010: 415) have argued for an understanding of technological objects as 'inextricably bound up with specific, historically situated modes of engagement and ways of life'. While their concern is with technological artefacts, ours is on the ways that Gibson's ideas can be fully 'socialised' in the analysis of the forms of human life afforded by ecological niches. In the following section, we draw on and develop the work of Costall and Dreier (Costall, 1995, 2012; Costall and Dreier, 2006) to explore the ways that Gibson's ideas about niches and affordances can be utilised in the conceptualisation of the spatial and temporal possibilities and constraints of situated everyday lives.

Gibson's Niches and Affordances[8]

For us, the key point in James Gibson's work is the intertwining of the notions of affordances and niches. Gibson's writings in the late 1960s and 1970s were strongly critical of approaches that saw visual perception predominantly in terms of mental representations: that visual experiences were due to *the brain* somehow creating representations of the outside world and that humans saw and acted in relation to these neurologically constructed representations (Gibson, 1979, 1982). Contrary to this, Gibson argued that to understand perception one should start, not from mental representations, but from the *environment* that furnishes the organism with different forms of information.

It is in the environment, Gibson (1966: see also Heft, 2017) argued, that information about the world exists, and perception is the process of picking this information up. This flips epistemological models of cognition upside down. Perception now becomes a question first, of how the organism picks up the information available in the environment, and the question of how the brain processes this information comes second.

This is where the notion of the *niche* comes in. The niche, Gibson notes, refers not to *where* an animal lives, but *how* it lives. A niche, he suggests, is a 'set of affordances' (Gibson, 1979: 128). It consists of the array of affordances that an animal, human or species co-constructs with their surroundings, physical and biological, as a direct and non-decomposable potential for living, for a way of life. The 'natural environment offers many ways of life, and different animals have different ways of life. The niche implies a

kind of animal, and the animal implies a kind of niche. Note the complementarity of the two' (Gibson, 1979: 128).

If niches are sets of affordances, that leaves us with the question of what affordances are. Much ink has been spilled over this concept. Gibson (1979: 127) himself says:

> the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.

Affordances offer things: steps are step-able, roads are drive-able, people are soci-able and so on. This idea drew heavily on gestalt psychology and one of its three founders, Kurt Koffka, who was a senior colleague of Gibson at Smith College. Koffka (1935) was the first to ascribe to a postbox the relational property of having a 'letter-mailing' demand character – an example much used by Gibson himself, for whom there is no 'phenomenal' postbox, no postbox as it appears for us in the mind:

> the real postbox (the *only* one) affords letter-mailing to a letter-writing human in a community with a postal system. This fact is perceived when the postbox is identified as such, and it is apprehended whether the postbox is in sight or out of sight. (Gibson, 1979: 139, emphasis in original)

While this is not his main focus, Gibson sometimes acknowledges the ways in which human interaction in specific situations may also be understood in terms of affordances:

> the richest and most elaborate affordances of the environment are provided by other people . . . infants learn almost immediately to distinguish them from plants and non-living things. When touched they touch back, when struck they strike back; in short, they interact with the observer and with one another. (Gibson, 1979: 75–76)

Harry Heft, whose commentaries we draw upon here (Heft, 2001), points out that Gibson's earlier book on *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Gibson, 1966) was even more widely focused on 'the distinctive character of hominid evolution – and the human econiche compared with that of other species' (Heft, 2017: 124). Heft points out that Gibson argued that language, rather than being some kind of representation of the world, was a sensitising guide to the affordances available from the surrounding world:

> When the child begins to communicate by speech, and to practice speaking, he starts on a line of development that makes his knowledge of the world forever different from what it would have been if he had remained a speechless animal. (Gibson, 1966: 280)

Knowledge of the world is shaped by speech, and hence by the meanings that language accords to our material milieu. Costall (1995: 470) puts this nicely: 'What, fundamentally, we attend to in our surroundings are not the shapes, colours and orientations of

surfaces [. . .] but rather the meaning of things for action [. . .] We can see [. . .] that something can be eaten or thrown.' For humans, then, affordances are intelligible in relation to the meanings accorded to the materiality and materials of the niche.

Crucially, this highlights the normative character of human niches and their affordances, in that a niche entails sets of correct or proper practices, rather than simply those that are the most expedient. Indeed, when it comes to the interpersonal aspects of affordances, Gibson was clearly alive to their importance. Immediately after defining affordances in his seminal work from 1979 and pointing to the ways that the 'different objects of the environment have different affordances for manipulation' he extends this to other living beings: 'The other animals afford [. . .] a rich and complex set of interactions [. . .] What other persons afford, comprises the whole realm of social significance for human beings' (Gibson, 1979: 128).

Nonetheless, Gibson's conceptualisation and portrayal of the human world is very thin. It is too thin a conceptualisation of the social, for example, to help us understand our empirical puzzles from Shanghai. Thus, in our work we observed an ongoing card game between stall holders in Tongli Road (we will return to this example in greater detail later in the article); a game that arose and took place as local factories were being demolished. The stall holders would walk to and from this card game, which seemed to afford them a level of mental support; at the most obvious level it alleviated their boredom, passing the time between occasional customers. In terms of niches and affordances, it affords 'playing' to people in a card-game-playing community (in this case, the stall owners). But, of course, this is a 'thin' understanding of the dynamics that are going on here. Gibson's work does not engage with the ways in which, for humans, niches are not fixed or stable but are actively maintained, and often reconstructed in the everyday practices of living, of which this card game is one example. Further, he does not really engage with the 'normative power' of affordances and how these are socially and historically configured. In an historically and socially situated niche, social affordances encourage or discourage certain types of conduct, are embraced or refused, and so on.

Most importantly for our argument, as Dokumaci (2020) has argued, while a niche may provide affordances of a 'typical' member of a species with a standard sensory and corporeal apparatus within a specific form of life, those normative affordances do not afford to those who are 'differently abled' – steps are not step-able for wheelchair users, public toilets do not afford urination or defaecation for those who are visually impaired. An understanding of these socially normative dimensions of affordances is crucial for our concern with the ways in which we humans inhabit and create our ways of life in urban settings, and how some are constrained, distressed, disadvantaged and socially excluded by them. In other words – it is crucial to understand the card game, not just as 'simple' affordances of playing a game, but also what is demanded of persons such that they can 'play the game'. This particular card game affords not just the act of playing a game to those who understand the rules of game playing, can see, manipulate and interpret the cards and so forth; the various social and emotional elements of the card game – of alleviating boredom, of providing mutual support – are actively constructed and maintained by social interactions occurring within shifting social and structural situations. It is, that is to say, a 'social affordance'. How, then, should we conceptualise such 'social affordances'?

Social Affordances

It is because human niches always entail couplings between humans and other humans (that is to say sociality), and because these couplings never exist in a vacuum devoid of culture, history or power, that we need to extend Gibson's work to consider the social aspects of affordances. We can start with Erik Rietveld's concept of 'a rich landscape of affordances' elaborated in three ways: in terms of social interaction and emotions (Rietveld et al., 2013), second in terms of the norms of socio-cultural practice (Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014) and third in terms of skilled intentionality (Van Dijk and Rietveld, 2017). Rietveld argues that there has been a split in ecological psychology between a majority who have focused on affordances offered by the material environment, and a minority who have examined social coordination. He tries to combine them, arguing that the 'human eco-niche' is socio-material through and through, and proposes a 'skilled intentionality' framework (SIF) through which people are able to coordinate multiple affordances simultaneously, both material and social:

> Skilled Intentionality is defined as coordinating with multiple affordances simultaneously in a concrete situation. Individuals . . . can have access to a part of the landscape in so far as they have the skills to act on it. A skilled individual engages with, and continuously develops within a part of the landscape he or she cares about, which is lived as the 'field of relevant affordances'. (Van Dijk and Rietveld, 2017: 8)

The claim, that this approach 'situates both social coordination and affordance perception within the human form of life and its rich landscape of affordances' (Van Dijk and Rietveld, 2017: 1) is broadly useful to those wishing to develop, like us, a gaze of niche sociality. However, most of the examples used to flesh out this idea of the lived experience of the 'possibilities of everyday organising' are reminiscent of Gibson's postbox that affords mailing letters – for example having coffee with a friend in a coffee bar entails the skilled individual negotiating the spaces and layout of the place and those who inhabit it, engaging with the smiles of a waiter offering the affordance of ordering coffee, other people offering the affordance of glancing at, not to mention the cup affording grasping and so forth (see also the discussion in Heft, 2020). But urban forms of life, in all their complicatedness, surely require a more complex account of embodied sociality and its normativity, especially if we are to address our questions concerning mental health.

Rietveld and colleagues go some way towards this, drawing on Costall and Dreier's (2006) conception of 'canonical affordances'. This stresses the fact that:

> affordances are situated not just in the 'current' behaviour setting, but also in a more encompassing, shared and historically developed constellation – such affordances exist as they persist in shared and social practices . . . canonical affordances are part of what we might call a wider 'standing practice'; they are relatively persistent material aspects of the practices in our shared socio-cultural environment, depending on an entire community of people, yet on no individual in particular. (Van Dijk and Rietveld, 2017: 3)

As Costall and Dreier (2006: 11) put it, the task for the novice in relation to 'canonical affordances' is not to find their own special way to attune to them, but to learn the intended function of an object from other people and objects in their shared practices:

'We . . . learn more about both people and things by studying them as worldly, not just as in the world, but as incorporated into practices in the world.'

Sanneke De Haan, Rietveld and colleagues from psychiatry and neuroscience have made one of the few attempts to use a framework of social affordances in relation to mental health. They distinguish between the *landscape* and the *field* of affordances. The landscape of affordances consists of all those affordances available to a 'form of life' (De Haan et al., 2013: 7) and the *field* of affordances: 'the relevant possibilities for action that a particular *individual* is responsive to in a concrete situation, depending on the individual's abilities and concerns' (De Haan et al., 2013: 7, emphasis in original). They exemplify this via obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), a psychiatric disorder characterised by repetitive behaviours – checking, washing hands or similar – often described by the individual concerned as an attempt to reduce anxiety: for example, a person diagnosed with OCD who is worried about having been contaminated with germs might wash their hands multiple times in an attempt to reduce the anxiety. De Haan and colleagues (2013: 8) suggest that the field of affordances, for people with OCD, becomes 'extremely narrowed down to just the immediate affordance of what HAS to be done NOW [. . .] before any other relevant affordance may announce itself, completing the compulsion has first priority'. And they suggest that 'at least certain kinds of psychiatric disorders may be described by changes or dysfunction in affordance-responsiveness, including responsiveness to social affordances' (Rietveld et al., 2013: 436).

However, it is crucial to see a psychiatric disorder as not just an entity that disrupts the person's ability to properly attune themselves to pre-given affordances. We need to understand that a psychiatric diagnosis arises from a discrepancy between *canonical* affordances – institutionalised, normative and sedimented ways of perceiving and acting – and forms of life and modes of 'cognition' that depart from these, that is to say a non-normative mutuality between organism and environment. The social affordances available in the world enable and delimit the forms of life that become classified as psychiatric disorders. To see psychiatric disorders such as OCD as disruptive of the relationship between organism and environment continues to separate organism from environment, and then to consider only the *organism's ability to engage with the environment* – that is to say, how the organism affects the environment – and not to also consider how *the environment (and its affordances) may affect the organism*, enabling or undermining the capacity to live a certain form of life. It is also crucial to recognise that emotions such as 'anxiety' are not individual mental states but themselves embedded and embodied, flowing across and between humans and their milieu. Indeed, it is the mutual attunement, or lack of attunement, among human beings and affordances that give rise to the feelings and desires intrinsic to human forms of life; to grasp these one needs to recognise the ways in which lived experience is not merely 'psychological', but a thoroughly material matter of the flows of hormones, cytokines, inflammations, epigenetic processes of gene activation in the brain and the gut and much more.[9] We will return to this point below, not least because of its key significance for those with lived experience of mental distress.

As will have become evident, in the above discussions of affordances, there is a distinct absence of consideration of what one might crudely refer to as 'power' – that is to say the ways in which affordances for particular forms of life are differentially distributed across any society, and the ways in which affordances themselves, in their

'normativity', demand or require a certain way of conducting oneself in order to 'attune' to them. Attunement to affordances within the manifold practices in the world is a highly normative manner. In the case of drinking coffee or posting letters, this normativity is a matter of shared conventions within a particular 'culture'. But in the case of mental health, mental distress, and adversity more widely considered, this normativity is *not* just a matter of shared social and cultural conventions, but of power and constraint. Failing to 'attune correctly' for whatever reason can have very significant consequences. Dokumaci's (2020) anthropology of 'disability worlds' mentioned earlier begins to address this issue, in showing how the complementarity between organism and environment may 'rupture' – some affordances may be perceivable but not *doable*, for example in the case of people with arthritis struggling to dress according to social norms, which requires that they button their shirt. A particular niche does not merely afford, but also imposes and constrains certain ways of being human, certain regimes of living, and is sometimes explicitly designed to do just that (Collier and Lakoff, 2007).[10]

Social Affordances in Tongli Road

Let us return to an example that we have already briefly introduced: the card game we observed in Tongli Road. Specifically, in the food market of Tongli Road, the stall holders, who made their livelihood selling groceries and provisions to the migrant workers, had recently set up a continuous card game, into which members could come and go in between serving the customers who now came to buy their provisions in the market. These games seemed to us a way of enlivening and passing 'dead time'. The card game, we would argue, was a complex social affordance insofar as it allowed the stall holders various courses of action: alleviate boredom, feeling uplifted. It afforded *jingshen jituo* (mental support) for the stall holders. Crucially, this card game is also an example of how social affordances are embedded within, and arising out of, local histories.

Part of Tongli Road's local history is this: after our choice of this site for our fieldwork, but prior to the fieldwork commencing, the city authorities had demolished many small illegal factories that provided employment for most of the migrants who lived around Tongli Road.[11] The inhabitants of Tongli Road understood this rationale, and many sympathised with it – upward mobility was, of course, central to their own reasons for migrating to Shanghai. The demolitions were not met with widespread protest or even much individual anger. It was, nonetheless, a major disruption to the niches that those who migrated to the area had created for themselves, not just affecting their finances, but impacting on their daily routines, their habits of working, shopping and leisure time, their encounters with one another and much more. Those long attuned to the affordances for living offered by factories, their spatial configuration, machines, timetables and the like now confronted only heaps of abandoned rubble, affording little but scavenging. And not just for the worker: for the market traders, the proprietors of small shops, restaurants and massage parlours, myriad affordances for social interaction, economic livelihood and local housing, food and services consumption, had been abruptly dislocated.

What this example shows is that social affordances, as Rietveld and colleagues note, are not just specific to a particular and simplistic, bodily perceptual situation (such as

drinking coffee) but are embedded more widely within worldly practices that are formed through historical processes (see also Heft, 2020). It is in this light of the destruction and demolition of the usual and shared social affordances, that the card game must be understood. The continuous card game arguably *afforded* mental support, but this affordance existed only in the context of evident economic malaise as customers dwindled away from the food market. This social affordance is intelligible only within a wider social and historical context and attending to it reveals the ongoing construction and reconstruction of *niche socialities*.

The Niche and the Social World

The arguments that we have considered so far have been useful in helping us consider the opportunities and possibilities afforded by particular niches; with the notion of affordances, we can understand, to some extent, the wider consequences of the demolitions and the reactions to them, that had entangled our fieldwork. These ideas show us that affordances *are embedded* within wider histories and worldly practices, but they are weaker in addressing the ways that affordances become socially *shaped*, and thus come to differ, and differentiate, among and between those inhabiting different situations, making their lives within different niches.

   For example, it is a standard finding in epidemiological research that mental health is consistently correlated with socio-economic status (SES). However socio-economic status is a thoroughly artificial category, including some 'variables' and excluding others (notably race and gender, not to mention geographical location). People do not experience socio-economic status in general, but the effects of such inequality in their daily lives through a variation in affordances: material (food and shelter), financial, educational (schools and universities), employment (jobs), infrastructural (physical mobility) and personal (friends). Whether or not categories such as SES do good service for social epidemiology, which is debatable (Dowd et al., 2009; Galea and Link, 2013), we need to understand how these affordances manifest for those making their lives in particular niches. We need a way of unpacking these lived experiences of 'adversity' – which are simultaneously temporal, spatial, biosocial, psychological, neurological, material, semantic and interpersonal – which together compose specific niche socialities, the ways they are differentially distributed and how they are subjectively manifested. We can find some clues to, and elements of, such an analysis in 'practice theory'.

Social Practices

Proponents of practice theory suggest that it can solve a number of pressing problems of understanding human beings and their social worlds (Hui et al., 2016). They claim to adopt a 'flat ontology' that transcends or sidesteps the classical divide between macro- and micro-sociologies, and also reject the notion that there are some underlying fundamental causes that are manifested in different observable situations (Schatzki, 2016).[12] Reckwitz (2002) argues that, unlike other forms of social and cultural theory that distinguish body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure/process, intentions and agents, practices integrate all these. Reckwitz (2002: 249–250) defines a practice as:

a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements.

Practice theory draws our attention to shared forms of behaviour made possible by the affordances of material configurations of space, time and objects to hand, as well as what Collins (2010) terms 'tacit knowledges'. If we accept a delineation between the general concept of affordances and specific instances of canonical affordances, then practice theory may help us understand and analyse which particular affordances have become canonical – that is to say normative within particular niches – when, where and how. Which possibilities are precluded and for whom – how, for example, at a certain time and place, the installation of spikes on flat surfaces became routine, so they no longer afford sleeping for rough sleepers? How does a particular 'design for living', as in the layout of a housing estate, the availability of certain kinds of shops or the provision of transport facilities, become consciously deployed or pragmatically emerges to afford or constrain a certain form of life? Practice theory, that is to say, can help analyse which forms of sociality are created, enabled, imposed, regulated or normalised, within a particular niche.

Elizabeth Shove has compressed the complexities of rival practice theories into a simple model consisting of three elements: materials, meanings and competencies (Shove et al., 2012). *Materials* are things, tangible physical entities, the stuff of which objects are made, technologies, infrastructures, tools, the body itself. *Meanings* are ideas, aspirations, symbols, emotions/moods, tasks, projects, beliefs. *Competencies* are skill, know-how, techniques, practical consciousness, performance. A practice, she suggests, is 'a composite patchwork of variously skilled, variously committed performances enacted and reproduced by beginners and old-hands alike' (Shove et al., 2012: 71). Practices change not only through the presence or absence of the three elements, but more importantly the links between them. We can turn to an example from our second fieldwork site to see how this model helps our analysis.

The Huangpu District in Shanghai is more affluent than Tongli Road, and is largely inhabited by 'second generation migrants' who are mostly young, and more focused on the practices of 'success' than the rituals of comfort (Ash, 2016). They preferred the excitement of cafe life to work in factories, as they imbued this with hope and possibility that customers might include the rich and famous, or at least the evidently successful. However, the lives of these young migrants were typified by frequent changes of job in the hopes of better prospects, interspersed with regular visits home when plans failed to work out, and despite their dreams, in reality their niches were highly precarious, with constant struggles to maintain their ways of living, and constant changes and breaks in employment. Many of these people would spend their time in the local urban bookshops, which were tolerant of young people spending long periods sitting in the aisles reading, but not buying, self-help and business books. These bookstores were the source of young

workers' knowledge of the ways and means of success as they struggled to find a pathway to 'making it' and becoming the next successful entrepreneur. This form of (niche) sociality is made comprehensible by practice theory. We could consider the material arrangements – books, bookshops, aisles and so on – the aspirations of these young workers, and the practised routines that were tolerated by the bookshop staff. What, then, does this add to our previous notions of (social) affordances? As we have shown, affordances typically designate the relation between *a single organism* and its environment (even if this environment is thought of in historical and social terms). Thinking this through practice theory allows us to think about how affordances are, sometimes, accessible to *particular groups* of people. In this case, the creation of such a niche within urban bookshops affords lounging and longing for success but only for particular people and only *as part of* a complex social practice, also dependent on the availability of particular frames of meaning.

But practice theory gets us only so far and runs aground on familiar problems. Thus, the many examples Shove gives are all of a highly individual type: car driving, cooking, Nordic walking, writing, cycling, punk rock, daily showering, docking ships, typewriting, food freezing, self-weighing/obesity, air-conditioning. She only briefly invokes an ecological reference to understanding how practices wax and wane in 'niches of possibility' (Shove et al., 2012: 65) and gestures to the ways that 'individual practices "make" the environment that others inhabit' (Shove et al., 2012: 108); for example higher population densities in cities enable the growth and change of practices, as do the increasingly fluid connections available to us all through info/social media. But while she briefly suggests that one might separate individual practice from wider regimes and landscapes of practices to understand larger sweeps of socio-technical change, such as food freezing, or personal hydration – for example the use of portable plastic water bottles (cf. Hawkins et al., 2015) – such regimes and landscapes are not systematically analysed.

Indeed, despite the major focus on the material and on personal skills, practice theories such as Shove's never discuss the *affordances* of material objects, even though affordances would fit well within this practice framework. Further, even without resorting to the hierarchical ontology of macro- and micro- we can see that these practices do not just 'emerge' but take shape within wider networks, suffused by differentials of power and strategies for the management of conduct for particular ends. Daily showering is the outcome of explicit attempts to instil hygienic practices in individuals, through exhortations from authorities ranging from those charged with the management of public health to those seeking to maximise market opportunities for their products. A practice such as drinking water from a plastic bottle is shaped, regulated, promoted, normalised and amplified by marketing, and imposed by those responsible for removing water fountains or charging excessively for a glass of tap water. The organisation of domestic affairs such as cooking and cleaning has been made and remade by dynamics of power, authority and inequity as well as by the conscious shaping and marketing of material goods such as refrigerators or washing machines that reconfigure affordances in the home.[13] Examples of the embedding of inequities in social practices, and the differential availability of affordances to those differentiated by age, gender, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability and so forth could be multiplied.

Nevertheless this (re)conceptualisation of various routines of everyday lives as social practices enables Shove to propose a new approach to issues such as health. For example, 'public policies routinely take individuals to be the source of change; but what if people are better understood as the carriers of practice? The question then is whether policy makers can intervene in the dynamics of social practice' (Shove et al., 2012: 137): 'policymakers should hunt down negative elements, and design new elements. Policies would be directed not at bad behaviours but "bad" elements' (Shove et al., 2012: 147; see also Shove, 2010). More generally, in the pursuit of change, Shove suggests we should consider the links between the three elements/practices, and *contexts* (for example, why cycling works so well in Amsterdam), *history* (particularly in terms of changes in what is taken for granted/normal) and the possibilities of moving whole bundles and complexes of practices. But at this point the usefulness of the practice approach seems to break down. How is history to be described, let alone analysed, without grasping the dynamics of power and contestation? And what is to be understood by contexts beyond simplistic gestures? And what of the third element in Shove's basic diagram – meanings. In this somewhat heterogeneous category, she includes elements that are crucial in relation to mental health notably emotions and moods. Yet these are conspicuous by their absence in the examples worked through and it is not clear how they are to be identified, conceptualised and incorporated.

Interaction Rituals

As we have seen, the examples usually given by social practice theorists focus on human interactions with 'non-human things' (Shove and Pantzar, 2005). People, in twos, threes or small groups rarely feature. The interactions of the encounter, the social situation, are almost invisible. Yet these are the circumstances in which people typically live out their personal lives. To conceptualise these, we can draw upon the work of the pre-eminent sociological analyst of the situation – Erving Goffman. It is true, as Tyler (2018) argues, that Goffman – seemingly deliberately – brackets off the wider frames that emplace his studies of face-to-face encounters, and the mechanisms, patterns and sequences to be found in the 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1983). Yet the conceptual repertoire that he provides for the study of those encounters remains unrivalled. As he put it in his introduction to the series of essays published in *Interaction Ritual*, his focus begins with 'Not, then, men and their moments. Rather moments and their men' (Goffman, 1967: 3). Emirbayer (1997: 296) takes this as 'an epigraph for [his] entire manifesto' for a relational sociology.

As we noted earlier, Sztompka (2008) identified Randall Collins as one of the few sociologists to develop a serious theory of everyday life. He has developed Goffman's analysis of small-scale interaction through what he terms 'interaction ritual chains' (Collins, 2004). The word 'ritual' might suggest that interactions enact a set of shared symbolic practices external to and determining on individuals. However, this is a theory of situations, and – in a way that resonates with Gibson on affordances – the way people are attuned to them ('entrained'). As Collins (2004: 3–4) puts it, 'It is a theory of momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters . . . The individual is a

moving precipitate across situations.' Collins (2004: 17) takes the term ritual from Goffman, who writes:

> I use the term 'ritual' because this activity, however informal and secular, represents a way in which the individual must guard and design the symbolic implications of his acts while in the immediate presence of an object that has a special value for him. (Goffman, 1956; quoted from Goffman, 1967: 57)

Collins identifies five elements in Goffman's work that he can use for his theory: situational copresence, focused interaction, social solidarity, sacred objects and moral uneasiness. Goffman, he argues, provides us with 'a sociology of gatherings':

> of crowds, assemblies, congregations, audiences. Through Goffman's eyes, we can see that these gatherings can also be quite small scale: a couple of acquaintances stopping to talk, or merely nodding in passing, or even strangers avoiding each other's glance on the street; or, at the intermediate level, a small group eating and drinking around a table. . . . society is above all an embodied activity. (Collins, 2004: 34)

Collins proposes that in interaction participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other's bodily micro-rhythms and emotions through 'a fine-grained flow of micro-events that build up in patterns of split seconds and ebb away in longer periods of minutes, hours, and days'. These give rise to 'outcomes of solidarity, symbolism, and individual emotional energy' (Collins, 2004: 47). The attunement of people to these experiences is at the heart of this model, and – as Collins exemplifies in extended studies of markets, sex, status and tobacco use – is here central to and constitutive of social interaction.

The significance of Collins's contribution to the sociology of the emotions is well recognised (Bericat, 2016; Turner, 2007).[14] His own classification of emotions distinguishes an immediate, often transient, emotion state generated in cycles of interaction and attuned entrainment, from a longer-term emotional tone he terms EE ('emotional energy'), and a feeling of attachment (or of course hostility) to others. Thus, at a funeral the immediate emotion is sadness and loss, but the longer outcome is to produce or reinforce the emotional tone of positive group solidarity. Similarly, a party may be experienced as transient friendliness or humour, while the longer-term outcome is the consolidation of group membership. Emotional energy is:

> a continuum, ranging from a high end of confidence, enthusiasm, good self-feelings; down through a middle range of bland normalcy; and to a low end of depression, lack of initiative, and negative self-feelings. . . . at the low end of the emotional energy continuum one is not attracted to the group; one is drained or depressed by it; one wants to avoid it. One does not have a good self in that group. (Collins, 2004: 108)

As we have said, Collins uses Goffman as his core foundation. And Goffman himself had considerable affinity with ecological psychology. He discusses Von Uexküll's ([1934] 2010) ideas about the 'umwelt' in his study of trust (Goffman, 1971) and references ecological psychology through Roger Barker's work on situated behaviour in his Presidential Address

on 'the interaction order' to the American Sociological Association, just months before his death (Goffman, 1983). While neither Goffman nor Collins refers to Gibson's ideas, the Collins model seems to be compatible with many aspects of the approaches we have reviewed, such as the skilled navigation of social affordances. It is compatible with Gibson's terminology of niches and affordances, as interaction niches that furnish emotional states and tones for people. We suggest that in combination, Gibson, Shove and Collins provide a coherent and productive way of conceptualising niche sociality. On the one hand, it redresses the absence of any sustained conception of sociality in the work of Gibson and those who have developed his approach. On the other, it provides the sustained conceptualisation of niches and their affordances that is currently absent from small-scale sociology.

Let us return to Tongli Road. As we have mentioned, Tongli Road underwent a series of demolitions upsetting the already precarious lives of the migrant workers who inhabited those places. The local people there, some of whom believed that such destruction was the price of progress, were left with some simple choices – return to their villages, move to another area of the city where migrant labour was still in demand or simply stay where they were and 'make do'.

This 'making do' was of particular interest to us, in wanting to understand, beyond the broad categories and generalisations of psychiatric epidemiology, how certain types of material, biosocial, corporeal interpersonal and social experience are manifested in distress and ailments of bodies and minds. How do those migrants, experiencing what clearly seems, to an outsider, to be significant adversity, manage their everyday lives, and what in those everyday lives exacerbates, or mitigates, mental distress? How do they cope with the experience of 'stress', which many have argued is one of the key pathways leading from adversity to poor mental health (Lazarus, 2013; McEwen, 2012; World Health Organization, 2014)? Of course, the psychiatric and neurobiological literature on stress is largely written in English, and the pathways that link this everyday term to a hormonal response (the 'fight or flight' response), to corporeal and neurobiological changes, is also largely in the English language. Nonetheless, most languages have words for the hassles experienced in managing the activities of everyday life. In Chinese, the nearest equivalent is the term *yali*, or pressure, and people often speak about this in a direct bodily and material way as 'heart pressure'.

While some might frame the lack of 'symptoms' of poor mental health among the migrant communities in Tongli Road despite the 'destructions' in terms of individual psychological traits ('resilience' as opposed to 'vulnerability'), we suggest that what was crucial was the creation of novel interaction ritual chains to manage the negative consequences of disruption and re-establish a stable form of life. As our colleagues put it,

> our ethnographic material called for a theorization of *yali* made ordinary or, more precisely, of forms of distress and ill-being such as low moods, worries, doubts, or anxiety managed in such ways that they become absorbed within everyday rituals of living. Rather than giving in to despair or engaging in resistance . . . the residents of Tongli Road have been able to draw on self, sociality, and place in ways that can be read as practices of situated endurance. (Richaud and Amin, 2020: 78)[15]

What, then, were these practices and rituals of situated endurance? A first example of the active reconstruction of niches, and the remaking of attunements to transformed social

affordances, concerned the reshaping of the spaces, times and relations of consumption. Despite the radical reduction in the number of inhabitants available to become customers, almost all the small shops and businesses in Tongli Road opened up every day, re-creating the kind of street-level social interaction this typically afforded, even though there might be whole days that went past with no real customers. Even though these shopkeepers adopted a rhetoric of self-responsibilisation for their circumstances, and grudgingly accepted the rationality of state clearances on the grounds of 'progress', they nevertheless kept their shops open. They spoke of the capacity of their inner self to deal with *yali* – 'eating bitterness' (*chi ku*). What was on the face of it economic irrationality was explained to us as a way of dealing with abrupt change through a 'labour of endurance', a continuity of the emotionally satisfying ritual of the 'daily round' with its exchange of greetings, smiles and jokes, which did not just relieve some of the boredom of commercial life without customers, but also provided a sense of security and well-being in the face of the crushing of the dreams of financial success in the move to the city, and what seemed to be a bleak and somewhat hopeless future.

These examples illustrate the way in which the everyday management of subjectivity in adversity was achieved without the intervention of the strategies and technologies of 'therapeutic governance' in China, through the active reconstruction of niches, either through the creation of new affordances (the card game interaction ritual, to substitute for the interaction rituals in the busy market that we had seen in earlier site visits), or the repurposing of existing affordances (the ritual opening of shops to sustain previously valued interactions as a way of passing time, and as a way of dealing with *yali*).[16]

Conclusion – Niche Sociality in Urban Shanghai

We began with an observation that the sociology of everyday life was stronger on methods than concepts. Our view is that disciplines are conceptual at their heart, and without concepts methodological sensitivity remains at the level of description. We suggested that everyday life was better understood through Goffman's rich legacy of concepts, rather than merely adopting his sensitivity to everyday interactions. To grasp what we were finding in our ethnography of Shanghai migrant workers, we adopted a strategy of seeking 'conceptual filiations' between those used by Goffman's work and those that can be developed from Gibson to better understand the everyday as niche sociality.

In this article we have combined attention to the materiality of ecological niches with a focus on interaction and emotions to produce a novel set of conceptual mechanisms for understanding everyday city life, and the way in which mental life emerges across urban space: dwellings, factories, markets, shops, cafes, bookshops.

To return to our vitalistic definition of the niche from the beginning of this article, if the *niche* is a particular configuration of material, biological, interpersonal and symbolic forces, then the 'gaze' of *niche sociality* seeks to analyse the affordances, social practices and interaction ritual chains that these particular configurations constitute, enable and constrain. We hope it can provoke novel ecosocial studies of the ways in which humans, located in their material, symbolic and interpersonal everyday worlds, manage their everyday existence, even in conditions of great adversity.

Our argument for niche sociality is very close to a recent call for the renewal and use of symbolic interactionism by Fine and Tavory (2019) through detailed ethnography focused on small social groups; what Fine (2012) calls 'tiny publics'. Fine and Tavory (2019: 459, emphases in original) argue for a renewed emphasis on 'a set of core concepts that are emerging as central to such an approach: *affordances*, *situational webs*, *group commitment*, *embeddedness*, *disruption*, and, consequentially, the need to theorize *oppression and privilege*'. In another way, we are also treading the path suggested by Hacking (2004) in his essay on Foucault and Goffman, where he suggests the complementarity of their work: Goffman providing the means for understanding the detailed management of the activities of everyday life, together with Foucault's microphysics of power with its focus on the organisation of spaces, gazes and routines of judgement and normalisation.

A significant implication of this argument for the examples we have discussed is that policy initiatives in urban settings, including public health initiatives,[17] need to be developed in the knowledge of the different ways in which people construct the niches, both material and meaningful, that they need, and the different ways they perceive the affordances they can embrace. This is not just to try to avoid the many examples in public life whereby the everyday lives of 'subversive citizens' (Barnes and Prior, 2009), like gyroscopes, spin off in the 'wrong direction' rather than that envisaged by the policy maker, but that interventions should positively go with the grain of the actual practices, rituals and emotions into which individuals are recruited or, rather, recruit themselves, and through which individuals live their lives.

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Notes

1. Technically those still holding a rural residence permit (*hukou*) (Li and Rose, 2017).
2. Conducted by Lisa Richaud and Ash Amin, alongside Nick Manning (project lead), Nikolas Rose, Des Fitzgerald and Jessie Li.
3. This work was funded 2016–2019 by ESRC-NSFC Newton Fund Award ES/N010892/1.
4. Rasmus Birk was at King's 2018–2020 as an international postdoctoral fellow funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark, grant number 8023-00013B.
5. In her illuminating discussion of *Stigma*, Tyler (2018) is very critical of Goffman's abstraction of his source material from its context, and his practice of what Love (2013) terms 'thin description'. But this does not characterise other works, notably *Asylums*; his conceptual apparatus is not delimited by his own uses of it.

6. A note on dualism, which is an issue much debated in relation to Gibson. We aim to eschew interactionist dualism, but distinctions of mind and body, person and environment, nature and culture frequently invade the writing even of those who expressly try to overcome them. In this article, we do not directly address this issue. We take an *irrealist* approach to emphasise the worldmaking involved in the creation of concepts (Goodman, 1978). We hope to create concepts that, however philosophically impure, can do work for us, and can be *productive* for future enquiries into our shared social worlds.

7. Our use bears a close relation to that of Gerry Kearns and Simon Reid-Henry in their excellent article on vital geographies (Kearns and Reid-Henry, 2009).

8. One reviewer of this article suggested that there was little that Gibson's ideas of niches and affordances added to Bourdieu's (1990, 2005) 'sociological' notion of habitus. While some have explored this connection (Choi, 2017), there are very significant differences, both in the formulation of the concept and its potential use. Bourdieu's 'fields' are not material, biological, symbolic niches, constantly created and recreated in the activities of living, and they do not locate individuals in materially constrained forms of biosocial life, as is entailed in the idea of ecological niches. Ecological niches are not fixed positions within fields, they are created and recreated in the business of living, and this is crucial when it comes to conceptualising the experience of living in adversity. Consider, for example, those in poverty managing their lives in a pandemic or those displaced by war and conflict and trying to create or recreate a life for themselves in a refugee camp, or as a migrant in a new urban environment.

9. This is the domain that Costall and others consider to be critical in 'second-person neuroscience' (Schilbach et al., 2013).

10. Michel Foucault's approach to the microphysics of power might help us grasp the forms of conduct, and indeed the types of subjectification, that are embedded within, and constrained by, the particular organisation of various material and intersubjective spaces constituted by affordances, both those that are canonical, and those that vary across niches (Foucault, 1977; Gordon, 1987). Affordances play their part in strategies for fabricating 'the soul' of the citizen. That, however, is for another article.

11. The policy justification was the aim of moving the economy up the value chain towards higher quality and higher value-added production. There is no need to invoke any macro–micro distinction here, this change of strategy for governing economic life, and for reshaping the subjectivity of economic actors, developed in particular centres of calculation and was disseminated through the webs of the Communist Party of China and its various regional and local agents.

12. Compare this, for example, with the argument that SES is the 'fundamental cause' of the differential experience of disease (Link and Phelan, 1995; Phelan and Link, 2013).

13. As it happens, Shove does discuss the introduction of refrigerators into the home and their consequences for domesticity, but does not consider the implications for the highly gendered and inequitable nature of domestic practices, let alone the unequal distribution of such expensive appliances across population groups Shove (2016: 242–248).

14. Collins's approach differs both from 'affect theory' (Blackman, 2012; Gregg et al., 2010; Massumi, 2015; Thrift, 2008) and from the theory of emotions proposed by Ekman (1999); Ekman and Davidson (1994). It fits better with the position argued in 'behavioural ecology': 'the behavioral ecology view of facial displays (BECV) reconceives our "facial expressions of emotion" as social tools that serve as lead signs to contingent action in social negotiation' (Crivelli and Fridlund, 2018: 388).

15. Our ethnographic work in Shanghai, and its implications for 'urban mental health', is discussed in more detail in articles by our colleagues (Amin and Richaud, 2020; Richaud and Amin, 2019, 2020); they draw particularly on Simpson's (2013) notion of 'ecologies of experience'.

16. These observations echo the findings of Bieler and Klausner (2019) in their Berlin study of 'Niching in cities under pressure'. Their study context was the rapid gentrification of Berlin, and the problems this generated for ways in which community psychiatric patients struggled to create or preserve the emotional warmth of what we are calling interaction rituals, to '*tame the urban*' and '*arrange the urban*' (Bieler and Klausner, 2019: 203, emphases in original) in an effort to manage the many resources of urban life, and to assert control over their lives. In their study, 'The notion of niching . . . helps us analyse the changing conditions as affordances to which people respond in different and often contradictory ways' (Bieler and Klausner, 2019: 207).
17. Not least for COVID-19.

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