

Editors' Introduction: On Margins and Junctures

Richard Kirk¹
University of California, Los Angeles
Department of Geography

Derrick Behm²
University of California, Los Angeles
Department of Urban Planning

On Margins and Junctures

bell hooks wrote that marginality is “a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance . . . a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives . . . It offers one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (1989: 20). To understand the margins as sites of radical possibility rather than as spaces of mere deprivation is to recognize their centrality at moments of political decision—junctures when futures are actively made, foreclosed, or redirected. Marginalized communities are rarely peripheral to crisis. They encounter its effects first, often long before those effects register as “problems” within dominant policy or academic discourse. Whether through displacement, environmental exposure, policing, or institutional abandonment, the margins surely function as warning systems of broader structural failure (Wong, 2020). Yet, they are also sites where crisis is contested via situated forms of knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Sandercock, 1998; Seydel & Huning, 2022; Jirón, 2019; Ortiz, et al., 2025) and collective practice (Healey, 2003; Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019) which routinely exceed the categories of governance, planning, and otherwise professional expertise. From tenant organizing that reframes housing as a collective right rather than a market good to disability justice movements that expose the violence embedded

¹ Contact: rkirk1013@g.ucla.edu Bio: Richard Kirk is Co-Managing Editor of the Critical Planning Journal. He is a community-engaged researcher whose work addresses questions of displacement, redevelopment, and the shifting role of the state in producing and managing urban inequality.

² Contact: derrickbehmjosa@g.ucla.edu Bio: Derrick Behm is Co-Managing Editor of the Critical Planning Journal. Their research focuses on community development, social infrastructures, and disability/queer inclusion in planning.

in “neutral” design standards, marginalized actors generate political imaginaries and strategies which work to unsettle how urban problems are defined and, indeed, who is authorized to solve them (Kirk & Behm, 2024). This volume is grounded in that insight. We are interested in how perspectives rooted in the margins intervene in socio-political junctures across urban contexts—locally, nationally, and transnationally—and how these interventions reorient the terrain on which more just urban futures might be pursued.

Margins and junctures are not discrete conditions but mutually constitutive sites where social contradictions intensify and demand response. Junctures are not simply moments of crisis imposed from above; they are produced through long histories of struggle, neglect, and extraction that converge into points where the prevailing status quo becomes untenable. At such moments, alternatives must be articulated—sometimes through organized resistance, sometimes through practices of care and mutual aid, sometimes through refusal, and sometimes through speculative acts of re-imagination that refuse the limits of what is deemed politically feasible (Huq, 2020; Muñoz, 2009; Miraftab, 2020; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019).

Volume 28 of *Critical Planning Journal* emerges amid a dense convergence of such junctures: the escalation of authoritarian governance and state violence alongside the criminalization of dissent; deepening housing precarity and environmental injustice as routine features of urban management; renewed repression on university campuses paired with resurgent student organizing; and the normalization of austerity as a governing logic across public institutions tasked with managing social life. These are not isolated crises. We contend that they are interconnected expressions of urban restructuring that demand analytic tools capable of tracing how power operates across scales, and political orientations that move beyond diagnosis toward accountability and transformation. As editors for this volume, we wanted more than just marginalized representation and empowerment. We seek to elicit the transformative knowledge, experience, and power that already exists and thrives in the margins—the “radical possibilities”—because in our own marginality, we understand all too well how elusive, subaltern forces provoke and threaten the norms upon which the bourgeoisie depend to cling to their power. At these junctures, it is evident that the ruling class maintains a fragile status quo capable of being overturned and re-wrought into socio-spatially just futures.

The contributions assembled in this volume demonstrate just how scholarship rooted in the margins can illuminate the political, material, and affective pressures which shape our present junctures. Across the volume, authors show how the margins function simultaneously as sites of acute vulnerability and of world-building. They reveal how violence (e.g., infrastructural, bureaucratic, spectacular) is rendered ordinary via the doctrines of planning, instruments of finance, and the routines of institutions. At the same time, they foreground how alternative

social relations are practiced and defended in spaces often dismissed as marginal: in libraries, housing struggles, accessibility audits, creative practice, and collective organizing. Taken together, these works insist that critical urban scholarship cannot remain detached from the conditions it analyzes. It must remain accountable to those who live at the sharpest edges of contemporary urban restructuring, where the consequences of political decisions are most immediate and where the possibilities for different urban futures are being actively forged.

We open with **Ananya Roy, Hannah Appel,** and **Kian Goh's** critical commentary on the making of the university as a "liberated zone" in a time of ascendant fascism. Their intervention reframes the university not as a neutral institution but as a contested terrain where repression, solidarity, and radical pedagogy collide—an especially urgent theme in the wake of campus encampments and student mobilizations across the United States.

Articles such as "How Lobbying Rewrote Land Value Capture in Mexico City's 2017 Constitution" by **Demetrio Gutierrez Flores** and "Spatial Imaginaries and Propertied Realities: Understanding How Property and Highway Planning Are Tangled up in Urban Planning's Whiteness Problem" by **Lilith Winkler-Schor** foreground the political-economic and racialized structures that organize contemporary urban life. Taken together, they show how fiscal tools, planning doctrines, and infrastructural regimes reproduce uneven development and shore up propertied power, even as community actors resist and reimagine these systems.

Other contributions turn toward the everyday practices, bodies, and spaces through which marginality is lived. *Accessibility Auditing: Four Case Studies* by **Alexa Vaughn** and "Beyond the Desk: Librarians as Keepers of Public Space" by **Jordan Wynne, Dustyn Frye, Ana Arreguin Gomez,** and **Cristy Portlock** highlight, respectively, how deaf/disabled communities navigate built environments shaped by exclusionary design logics, and how librarians and libraries have become crucial social connectors for marginalized urban residents. Our creative submissions—**Chad Unger's** "Interloper," a photographic meditation on urban space and the unhoused crisis in Los Angeles, and an **anonymous submitter's** "Writing and Witnessing," a piece reflecting on ICE raids and the intimacies of state terror—extend concerns into the realms of narrative, embodiment, and political "witnessing."

This volume also features two incisive book reviews: one by **Ben Barsotti Scott** on Lindsey Dillon's *Toxic City*, a searing account of redevelopment and environmental injustice in San Francisco, and another by **Tamika Butler** on Megan Kimble's *City Limits*, which investigates inequality and infrastructural politics across the United States. Complementing these is an interview conducted by **Rohan Lalla** with Los Angeles Tenants Union co-founder Tracy Rosenthal, whose reflections on organizing, mutual aid, and tenant power offer an on-the-ground perspective on abolitionist housing politics in the age of austerity.

Finally, we include a focused reflection on our public event, *Living with Landlords: Rights, Struggles, and Possibilities*, held at the Skid Row History Museum and Archive in partnership with the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy and the Los Angeles Poverty Department. Nearly 100 people gathered join the conversation with our panelists **Chelsea Kirk** (Rent Brigade), **Kenia Alcocer** (Unión de Vecinos), **Takao Suzuki** (Little Tokyo Service Center), **Chris Tyler** (LA Tenants Union Downtown Local), and **Alexander Ferrer** (Strategic Actions for a Just Economy/UCLA). Their insights reveal how organizing, public scholarship, and community-based knowledge actively reshape the conditions under which urban futures are imagined and contested.

Collectively, these contributions demonstrate that margins and junctures are not abstract theoretical constructs, but lived and contested spaces—sites where new solidarities emerge, where critique becomes a collective practice, and where alternative urban possibilities take shape.

As always, CPJ could not remain functional were it not for our team of reviewers, editorial staff, and the support of the UCLA Department of Urban Planning. While our collaboration with them sparked further critical inquiry into connecting discourse with practice, we are especially indebted to the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy for enabling our opportunities to engage with community activists—those who not only share our core mission in advancing criticality and social justice, but who also exist at the margins, who seize pivotal, junctural moments as opportunities to deliver justice. Surrounded by these agents of change, we are filled with hope that the future of planning is unapologetically radical.

References

- Hamraie, A., & Fritsch, K. (2019). Crip technoscience manifesto. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 5(1): 1-34.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.
- Healey, P. (2003). Collaborative planning in perspective. *Planning Theory*, 2(2): 101-123.
- hooks, B. (1989). *Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness*. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, (36), 15-23.
- Huq, E. (2020). Seeing the insurgent in transformative planning practices. *Planning Theory*, 19(4): 371-391.

- Jirón, P. (2019). Ignoring everyday dwelling in Santiago de Chile or how situated knowledges unveil the crisis in contemporary urbanism. Paper presented at: Encuentros con Donna Haraway: Enredando ecologías, conocimientos, parentescos, Bogota, Colombia, 8 August.
- Kirk, R. & Behm, D. (2024). Contesting elite capture: Repositioning insurgent planning for mass movements. *Human Geography*, 17(3), 347–352.
- Miraftab, F. (2020). Insurgency and juxtacity in the age of urban divides. *Urban Forum*, 31(3): 433–441.
- Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. NYU Press.
- Ortiz, C., Travlou, P., Siqueira, M., & Testori, G. (2025). Decolonising urban knowledge(s): an ordinary imperative in extraordinary times. *City*, 29(3–4), 485–501.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work : Dreaming disability justice* (1st ed.). Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Sandercock, L. (1998). *Making the invisible visible : a multicultural planning history*. University of California Press.
- Seydel, H., & Huning, S. (2022). Mobilising situated local knowledge for participatory urban planning through storytelling. *Urban Planning*, 7(3), 242-253.
- Wong, A. (2020, April 14). Message from the future: Disabled Oracle Society. *Disability Visibility Project*.