Don't Talk to Strangers
The Theory and Practice of Urban Dehumanization

By:

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The concept of dehumanization is conventionally presented as an afterthought to extreme and often morally disconcerting events in history, i.e. the Jewish Holocaust, African slavery, and Child pornography, amongst others. It has the impression of being a distant phenomenon that one only ascribes to "worst case scenarios". On the other hand, refusing to ask directions from a man in shabby clothes does not seem like a form of dehumanization; it is considered common sense. A lady who, being refused a small amount of money, curses a man for his greed and indifference is not seen as dehumanizing; she is considered to be asserting a perceived right. Far from being exceptional or remote all these form, in a sarcastic way, examples of what shall here be discussed as dehumanization in the context of urban society. Abstraction and control are endowments of urban life. The urban world harbors a plethora of masked strangers who interact through the coded language of categorization. Categorization is the process wherein one sorts out people, places, or things by their outstanding features and then places them in a general classification that defines a certain group. Such a process is a tool for survival in the highly diversified environment of the urban. An undisputable by-product of this is dehumanization. This study makes an assertion that dehumanization, when treated as a concept that needs to be scientifically defined, becomes constrained.

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1. Introduction

The concept of *dehumanization* is conventionally presented as an afterthought to extreme and often morally disconcerting events in history, i.e. the Jewish Holocaust, African slavery, and Child pornography, amongst others. It has the impression of being a distant phenomenon that one only ascribes to "worst case scenarios". On the other hand, refusing to ask directions from a man in shabby clothes does not seem like a form of dehumanization; it is considered common sense. A lady who, being refused a small amount of money, curses a man for his greed and indifference is not seen as dehumanizing; she is considered to be asserting a perceived right. Far from being exceptional or remote all these form, in a sarcastic way, examples of what shall here be discussed as *dehumanization* in the context of urban society.

Abstraction and control are endowments of urban life. The urban world harbors a plethora of masked strangers who interact through the coded language of categorization. Categorization is the process wherein one sorts out people, places, or things by their outstanding features and then places them in a general classification that defines a certain group.[1] Such a process is a tool for survival in the highly diversified environment of the urban. An undisputable by-product of this is *dehumanization.*

On the outset, this study makes an assertion that *dehumanization*, when treated as a concept that needs to be scientifically defined, becomes constrained. In a way, defining it would be *dehumanizing* it; rendering impotent the purpose of this study. As part of human reality, its meaning can never be fully grasped, just as one can never have full knowledge of the *other*.[2] To this extent, the article is less involved in defining dehumanization than showing snapshots of it in urban society. This however, does not mean that the reader will simply be given a narration of urban living; rather the study is involved with the analysis of how concepts reflect and are reflected in daily life. Moreover, it is dedicated to unearthing the (often subliminal) implications of ideas not only in the psychology of man but also in his perception of being. The latter is different from and, perhaps, more important than that of psychology for it necessarily entails a being-with-others.[3] Man's tendencies, fears, hopes, motivations, etc. all stem from this fundamental relationship with others; therefore, how he sees this relationship in contrast to himself determines a pattern of interaction between his being and those of others.

It is this pattern-forming tendency of society that brings this study to the following questions: *how does the dynamic between ideas and social relationship structures shape dehumanization in urban society*? Implicit in this question is that urban society, like any other society, employs stratification in order to exist; therefore this leads the study into a second question: *what role does the instigation of inter-strata personal relationships make in the presence of urban dehumanization?*

In this light, the study argues that *urban dehumanization is an amalgamation between social relationship structures and the alienating free-market value system; thus, a critical approach to current urban social norms suggests a necessity to forge genuine, inter-strata personal relationships.* This will be achieved by first providing a conceptual framework of

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[1] Wright (1971).

[2] Bergo (2006).

[3] This term can be traced to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Being-in-the-World*, which demonstrates the innateness of involvement that is attached to being. For brevity and fluidity, this concept is no longer elaborated in this study although it would provide more grounds for a theoretical analysis of social stratification. See Heidegger (1962).

urban dehumanization. It will involve a brief exposition of a scientific and a socio-anthropologic perspective. A combined essence of these two perspectives will be extracted through an analysis of the impact of the social relationships in the formation of the Poor Law and vice versa. The resulting *essence of dehumanization* will then be extracted from the structure of social relationships in urban society. This will be attained by pointing out the system of values and beliefs that is attached with capitalism, as remarkably unearthed by the phrase Max Weber coined as the *spirit of capitalism.*[4] As will be seen, these shall form the contents of the first chapter.

The second chapter of this study is an attempt to concretize the theoretical concept of *urban dehumanization*. As earlier mentioned, one can only be provided with a sense of *dehumanization* for it is beyond the scope of knowledge and understanding. Yet delving into the subject obligates this study to trace its outlines in actual experiences of engaging with today's street dwellers. To respond to this call, the author pushes the boundary of scientific research, and to some extent that of formal anthropological investigation, and goes into a more personal method of inquiry. In any case, the subject requires the approach to be fashioned as such for dehumanization is almost entirely a matter of social experience. Any attempts to sketch out social experience, therein, demands an immersion at the very least and assimilation at best. Consequently, this chapter sheds light on *who* society categorizes as "strangers to be avoided" and how this state of mind has come about. More importantly it will discuss the obvious permeation of the *spirit of capitalism* in this process of categorization in urban society. This chapter clears the way for an understanding of the role of genuine friendships in the stranger society that is characteristic of the urban world.

The final chapter then takes on the responsibility of not just elaborating the practicality and possibilities that forging genuine friendships offers, but also the contradictions that arise as its being subject to urban social structures. This part is intended to be a personalization of *urban dehumanization* by bringing out the experiences of the author in the Sunday Brunch Project- an initiative aimed at bringing together people from different backgrounds for a shared meal. As such, one will find that this part will contain paragraphs written in the first person (I), as the author's way of owning the difficulties and contradictions that she internally encountered as a middle-class, post-graduate student in Brussels. Although this deviates from the rules of formal article writing, it was deemed a necessary gamble in order to truthfully illuminate the idiosyncratic nature of *urban dehumanization*. With this in mind, the study will take the reader from a very abstract theoretical pedestal to a very candid, amusing, and morally controversial experience of an awareness of socially structured relationships.

2. Urban Dehumanization

Dehumanization is commonplace. It *has* existed in different forms of societies, even before the early Christians started rebuking upholders of the law for their disconnectedness with humanity. Today, one is constantly bombarded with the concept of dehumanization as seen in campaigns for human rights in Syria, Indonesia, and in The Democratic Republic of Congo to name a few. One is always encouraged to take part in restoring "humanity" in the most convenient way possible: online donations, petitions on social media (Facebook and Twitter), newsletter subscriptions, etc.

On the surface, this gargantuan effort to advertise inhumanity seems utterly necessary for the world to take action against violence and its legitimacy appears unquestionable;

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[4] Weber (2001).

however, it is precisely this clichéd characteristic of dehumanization that is problematic. This is because the way dehumanization as a concept is portrayed is always tailor-made according to contexts peculiar to certain societies at a certain point in time. As Albena Azmanova claims in her groundbreaking book, *The Scandal of* Reason, " Most often, when social issues become visible as problems of justice, the articulation of categories in which justice claims are voiced entails the silencing of other issues"[5]. Simply put, what is and is not an issue in society depends on what that society deems relevant. The author continues and says that political contestations "have an important feature: they are based on (often implicit) agreement about what particular issues are to be an object of contestation".[6] As such, public reasoning is based more on the "structure of social order within which identities emerge and confront one another".[7]

The statement above, however true, is not always realized without critical thinking because it is embedded in the mundaneness of daily living. As a result, what is "common knowledge" on "inhumanity" is actually what makes people lose sight of the *essence* of the *dehumanization* concept because the normative structure of social relationships is often overlooked. The question now is: What exactly does it mean to speak of *dehumanization* in an urban context? How does one recognize it when it is so commonplace especially in current urban society? Answers to these questions will be evident in this first chapter.

The goal of the first part of this study is to reveal the real *essence of dehumanization;* but it is equally, if not more crucial to also establish the uniqueness of what shall here be termed as *Urban Dehumanization.* It is important to determine this distinct form for two reasons: 1.) its apparent permeation in the moral fabric of urban society; and 2.) its geographic and cultural transcendence. Indeed, urban dehumanization is not a phenomenon peculiar to Western countries, China, or the Middle East where capitalism has been proclaimed to thrive. It has become a global fact. As such, *Urban Dehumanization,* contrary to present literature on it, cannot simply be defined in terms of what it is and what it is not. It is a concept that is historically embedded in the structure of social relationships; meaning, it is a product of social interaction throughout the history of man. As a result, this chapter cannot, at the onset, provide a clear-cut definition of the concept but it will, as Max Weber says, "be gradually put together out of the individual parts which are taken from historical reality to make it up".[8] Accomplishing this ambitious task first requires a brief narration of current literature on the concept of *dehumanization.*

2.1 Mainstream Theories

Numerous publications have been written in the name of theorizing *dehumanization* from different perspectives. The concept is widely popular when it comes to issues of race and ethnicity, gender, and religion;[9] where images of the Holocaust, cases of women and children in pornography, and snapshots of religious wars are all too familiar. Nick Haslam provides a comprehensive assessment of strands of theories in dehumanization in his work, *Dehumanization: An Integrative Review.* In this article, the author encapsulates the different theories on dehumanization and he points out common themes in the literature. He then synthesizes these mainstream perspectives into two main categories of *dehumanization* based

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[5] Azmanova, A. (2012) p. 11.
[6] Ibid p.12-13.
[7] Ibid. p13.
[8] Weber, M. (2001). p.13
[9] Haslam, N. (2006). p.252

on the denial of two "distinct senses of humanness: that which are Uniquely Human (UH) and that which are part of Human Nature (HN). [10] Simply put, Uniquely Human characteristics relate to socially acquired traits, while Human Nature points to features that are common to human beings regardless of cultural or historical variations. Characteristics that are UH include "language, higher order cognition, and refined emotion"- traits that are "acquired and subject to variation between people.[11] On the other hand, HN refers to qualities that pertain to "cognitive flexibility, emotionality, vital agency, and warmth, and are seen as shared and 'fundamental' nature that is embedded in the person". [12]

Given this distinction, Haslam then asserts that the denial of these two forms of humanness result in two forms of dehumanization. A denial of Human Uniqueness leads to a "sub-humanizing" of other human beings, while a denial of Human Nature corresponds to a "non-humanizing" of others.[13] The great difference is basically perception of other human beings as inferior (due to social class, race, or religion) and that of seeing other people as objects.

Although this provides a scientifically detailed, psychologically based, analyses of dehumanization, the specificity of Haslam's endeavor breeds exclusivity and lacks the binding quality that this study needs. What this scientific analysis of dehumanization does impart is a simple yet striking core feature of *dehumanization*: that of a *reduction of the human being*. The broadness of this fundamental quality of dehumanization is problematic for this now calls into question every aspect of daily life. Categorization is so innate in human beings such that initial contact with other people will always involve superficial judgments. Even the swift and harmless branding of a non-native as a "tourist" or Lance Armstrong as a champion (whose titles were revoked) are instances of reducing human beings to a classification. To base this study's claims on such a definition will lead to an eternal subjectivity. In order to acquire a sense of dehumanization that aptly fits this work, one needs to turn to an anthropological perspective as evident in the writings of Paulo Freire.

Freire, in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* defines dehumanization as "a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" and it is "the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors…"[14] He furthers this claim such that in any "situation A objectively exploits B, or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression…because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be human".[15] For Freire, therefore, dehumanization is to be found in the dynamics of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. He claims that "one of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription is an imposition of one individual's choice upon another…"[16] From this one can infer that dehumanization is also a human artifact; thus an unwavering definition of such a concept demands the recognition of social structures.

This then supports the claim made at the beginning of this chapter- that *dehumanization* is historically embedded in social relationship structures. At the same time it establishes that the *essence of urban dehumanization* with the fundamental characteristic of reduction. The question then is: How does the structure of social relationship reflect the kind of dehumanization towards the poor? What historically relevant phenomenon epitomizes the

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid. p. 256-257.
[12] Ibid (quotations from original document).
[13] Ibid. p.259.
[14] Freire. (1993)p. 44.
[15] Ibid.p.55.
[16] Freire. (1993). pp.46-47. Italics from original text.

social structures in *urban dehumanization?* The answers will be found within the English Poor Laws, whose motives provide this study with the subliminal perspective of human beings towards the poor. These perspectives will then form the foundation for explicating the subject of this study: *dehumanization in the context of the free-market value system.*

2.2   What's Law Got to Do with It?

Legislation and Medication are two public goods that embody dehumanization. The previous section established "reduction and categorization of the human being" as the core characteristic of dehumanization. Never has this characteristic been similarly evident than in the fields of Law and Medicine. The fact that lawyers and doctors are bound by the rule of objectivity is merely the tip of the iceberg. Of course other careers such as banking and social work require the same or even a greater amount of objectivity but it is the disciplines of Law and Medicine that are most historically indispensable and wherein ethical dilemmas are most pronounced. An illustration of this tendency to objectify will be shown here in order to arrive at what this study means by *urban dehumanization;* however, to use both disciplines for this would be an extensive and exhaustive effort. Such an attempt is too dear for this study; therefore as the subject of this article is obviously bounded by politics and society, the focus on law and, consequently, the English Poor Laws prove to be appropriate to illustrate how human beings have been reduced, generalized, and categorized.[17] It should be noted that this is in no way a critique of law; rather, it is used in this chapter as a demonstrative tool for dehumanization.

To provide this study with in depth social and cultural insights on the English Poor Laws, one must refer to Lynn Hollen Lees' *The Solidarity of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948.* This book not only narrates the 350-year evolution of the English and Welsh poor laws; it also delves into the origins of the Laws' legitimacy through an intricately woven analysis of statistical records and periodicals in English and Welsh towns, 17th to 19th century graphic art and literature, and current Poor Law theories.[18] Of particular interest to this article is the perception of society on the poor and the poor's perception of themselves as a part of society, which Lees resourcefully brings out.[19] It is precisely this societal and self- perception of the poor and its evolution that advances the fundamental characteristic of dehumanization into *historically manifest but structurally embedded social norms.* This assertion leads to the question: what was the prevalent perception of the poor and how did it evolve? At what grounds where the Elizabethan Poor Laws legitimized and how does this reflect society's depiction of who is considered poor?

Lees aptly points out that "The origins of the English poor laws lay in the intersection of humanist aspirations with rising economic hardship and state paranoia about the poor".[20] Keep in mind that 16th century England served as the birthplace and spawning ground of the Reformation, whose socio-political theories saw actualization in the 17th century particularly in the discussion of poverty.[21] The nightmare of social unrest, urged by poverty, was becoming a reality; it resulted in the development of a "complicated set of institutions... for

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[17] For purpose of brevity in this study, what is termed as *The Poor Laws* shall automatically refer to *The English Poor Laws.*
[18] Lees (1998) Introduction.
[19] The author is well aware that Lees' work is based on a study of the British society and that the poor's situation in this society may have been different elsewhere. The reader is reassured that the author only wishes to extract the manner in which the English Poor Laws contributed to perpetuating values relating to the poor.
[20] Ibid. p. 19.
[21] Ibid. Introduction.

the care of the poor".[22] Given this, one can see that even at the outset, the Poor Laws were never entirely inspired by empathy towards one's neighbors. Nor were they instigated by self-pity, as will be later discussed. Outreach was, as it is now, highly embellished by the prospect of an equally rewarding self-gain both for the status quo privileged and the protesting disadvantaged. It was (and still is in Western Europe) a matter of societal functioning. "Poverty was not only tolerated, it was expected, and by some even desired- for others", but it had to be controlled.[23]

To attain such supervision, local parishes bore the task of financing and evaluating whether the poor needed dole out money, job placement, or specific services.[24] Overseers usually met with applicants of aid after Sunday church in the parish vestry where rich and poor, religious and secular mingled. This became a weekly communal event of sifting people into categories with local residents serving to "monitor potential applicants" and to "control costs".[25] Since entitlement to aid was dependent on settlement, individuals in need of aid acquired settlement through apprenticeship in the parish or by "eventually being hired, by paying taxes, renting or owning local property", or "by holding local office".[26] Despite the apparent economic productivity brought about by these requirements, a big part of the "burden of funding" for aid was still borne by the parish community's alms.

The concern for poor relief became more problematic when the funding was passed on to the taxpayers. Coupled with mass migrations into towns, the once miniscule population in these places incurred more heterogeneity. Poverty, then, "demanded distinctions, differentiation between types and degrees of entitlement"; there were now levels of poverty wherein the "dependent poor became 'paupers'".[27] As taxpayers grew in power and the poor grew in number, local parishes were forced to create and restrict a set of *criteria* for welfare applicants; and this marked the beginning of a *conscious public idealization* of the poor as a societal variable.

The *publicized* aspect that the original Poor Laws invoked had two major implications. First, for decisions on aid to be undisputed, it required a collective resolution within the community, which had to be logged into local the local archive. A single person, no matter how high-ranking he or she may be, could not single-handedly make a legitimate decision, because, as Lees claims, "When overseers acted alone and without recording their actions, irregularities could occur".[28] Indeed, in a time when the public purse was tight, irregularities were a luxury that the government could not afford. In short, the governing body could not accommodate every claim for relief so they had to set standards, which were configured and written down in public deliberations. This now leads to the second and more important repercussion: osmosis of the *idea* of the poor as a category. The mere fact that ideas could hold their ground not so much as a result of their inherent logic (or lack thereof), but due to public validation and acceptance, paved the way for a shared and ingrained notion of *the poor*.

This now brings one to a realization that society is able to create "truths" through the continuous configuration of realistic, face-to- face experiences into compartmentalized organs serving to ensure the existence of that society. From such is derived the *essence of dehumanization* that this study seeks to illuminate. Here, dehumanization is not only treated as a mere reduction of a human being into a category; rather it is simultaneously

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[22] Ibid. p.21.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid. p. 25.
[25] Ibid. p.27.
[26] Ibid. p. 28.
[27] Ibid. p. 39.
[28] Ibid. p. 34.

distinguished as the communal act of doing so. More importantly, it is the *necessity* of this communal act of classification (for the survival of a society) that sets apart this provisional definition of dehumanization from the strands of literature that was mentioned earlier. Dehumanization, therefore, pertains less to the objectification of two differentiated groups against each other and more to a *structuring process* to which each member of a society actively and willingly contributes to.

On the other hand, society is not content with just reaching a legitimate consensus in formulating its norms; immortalization through pen and paper is required. So to return to the title of this section, the Poor Laws serve not just as illustrations of how people sought to catalogue other people and themselves; it has also provided an in-depth look on dehumanization as a socially binding process. Through its inscription in the law, the categorization of the poor became "official"; something that was virtually set in stone. Understanding law as a process of the creation of morally binding social contracts serves as the blueprint for seeing dehumanization as a socially constructed reality. Yet this still leaves the matter of urban dehumanization unattended. How did social arrangements with regards to the poor change when the concept of the *free-market* took over? Who were the classified "poor"? What perceptions of the" poor" and by the "poor" are visible today? These will be answered in the proceeding section.

2.3   Mo' Money, Mo' Problems: Dehumanization under Capitalism

It has now been established that societies have a "set of a code of signification in which claims are articulated- a general social syntax", and in modern society it is that of the free-market. [29] The most notable and almost irreversible shift that occurred with the absorption of capitalism in daily life was that shift from *governance by the government* to *governance by the free-market*. Let it be defined here that governance is the act of distributing the legitimate use of power to write and implement rules.[30] When the Poor Laws were first created in 16th Century England and Welsh, it was inspired by religious fervor (thanks to the Protestant ethics) and political insecurity. As a result, the laws were seen as state duties, which were at the same time a fulfillment of religious obligation, to attend to its less fortunate citizens. The revisions inscribed in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, however, revealed that the English community had begun to subscribe heavily to the belief of the capitalist value system. Legitimacy of the law in the first instance lay with the state, while it is obvious that when the amendments were accomplished it was the free-market that held social acceptance.

The first step towards expounding this shift in the legitimacy and the consequent view on poverty is to briefly provide the features of the capitalist system. This section will then proceed to discuss a feature of capitalism that is relevant to the subject of dehumanization: the commodification of labor. The concept of commodification will then be linked to Max Weber's renowned analysis of the "spirit of capitalism". To show where the poor are placed and how they are perceived in the free-market value system, this part shall bring out the spirit of capitalism as it is reflected in the 19th century amendment to the Poor Laws. The end result to be achieved in this section is to derive the previously discussed *essence of dehumanization* in urban society.

A succinct depiction of urban society can be found in a few lines of Alicia Keys' 21st century pop-song *New York*.

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[29] Azmanova (2012) p. 201.
[30] Azmanova. From author's lecture notes in State, Market, Society lecture (September 2012).

"On the Avenue
There ain't ever a curfew ladies work so hard…
Someone sleeps tonight
With a hunger far more than an empty fridge…
I'm going to make it by any means
I got a pocket full of dreams…
In New York
Concrete jungle where dreams are made of,
There's nothing you can't do…
These streets will make you feel brand new
Big lights will inspire you…"[31]

Although more reflective of current conditions, the song paints a picture of the hardships and deprivation that one sees in the city; but at the same time, it shows a degree of reassurance that one's diligence never goes unrewarded. There will always be opportunities for those who are industrious enough to look for them. Interestingly, this same theme is what Max Weber has termed "the spirit of capitalism". Abstention, self-discipline, organization, and efficiency, are the qualities emanated by the capitalist.[32] According to Weber, the capitalist's main goal is the constant pursuit of profit. Far from greed, this continuous reinvestment of capital to ensure the continuity of an enterprise requires painstaking self-restraint and planning.[33] Impulsion and spontaneity has little or no room in the capitalist success story. Stemming from the Protestant tradition of rationalism,[34] capitalism can be seen to have four main features that echo such philosophy: the constant pursuit of profit, the logic of privatization, the principle of competition, and the surplus value and consequential commodification of labor. Each shall now be briefly explained for the reader to have an overview of the machinery of capitalism.

The first goal of a capitalist is produce profit from selling a good or service. Profit constitutes whatever amount is left after deducting the expenses for manufacturing the good or service from the sale of the final product.[35] If this capitalist wants to sustain his enterprise, he need restrain himself from squandering profit and reinvest such amount into his business. If he does otherwise, other "hard-working" capitalists will eat out his share in and kick him out of the market, which brings to light the second feature: competition.

Capitalism believes in a *free market*; meaning, it is open for anyone who has the stomach for self-control and the ambition for "growth". The result of which is competition. Before one is able to compete in a certain market, he must first *own* most or all of the means of production.[36] This sense of ownership is what gives rise to the idea of privatization, where one has the right to make efficient use of his property (as long as his entitlement is *publicly* recorded). Now what happens to those who, due to unfortunate circumstances, have not been able to acquire economically substantial property? They now belong to the category of labor, which in the capitalist system is an element of production.

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[31] Keys, A. (2012).
[32] Weber, M. (2001) p.30.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid. p37.
[35] Sweezy (1970).
[36] Ibid.

This brings one to the feature that is most relevant to this study, that of the commodification of labor. Commodities are, in Karl Polanyi's terms, "empirically defined as objects produced for sale in the market".[37] Cars, tables, coffee beans, etc. are all commodities when following this definition. Yet capitalism also requires the contribution of a very important factor: labor. In fact it is through labor that a capitalist derives his profits by devaluing the cost of a person's time and effort. Consequentially, labor is also sold in the market, yet man (the source of labor) is not "produced" solely for the purpose of being sold.[38] The commodification of labor then entails this monetary valuation of human beings according to his or her capacity to contribute to the free-market system. But why should man complain when it is ingrained in him that work is a continuous duty, wherein he "exists for the sake of his business, instead of the reverse."[39]

The idea of always looking forward, striving towards future rewards quickly produced insurmountable growth as was evident in the rapid urbanization of the West. Given that the roots of urbanization stem from this spirit of capitalism, an urban society can then be equated to a capitalistic society. This entails not only the physical manifestations of capitalism, but more importantly, the framing of social interaction according to the values suitable to sustain the free-market system.

This face of urban society became ever more prominent at the height of industrialization. Farmlands were enclosed and used for the supply of raw materials for manufacturing. As a result, "in a society where the law proclaimed that property was king, the propertyless inevitably found themselves in a precarious position".[40] This caused massive displacement of subsistence farmers who then turned to the "growing" urban cities to sell their labor.[41] Urban society, then, came to be composed of "socially and culturally heterogeneous people".[42] This rapid urbanization coupled with diversification of culture resulted to formalization of social interaction. This is widely evident in the procedural change that the English Poor Laws underwent.

As mentioned in the previous section, the earlier process of identification of "worthy" recipients of aid was a matter of public consensus. This was logical at that time for everyone could serve witness to the poverty of people they knew. As the residents of towns became less homogenous, the now termed "business of aid" came to be a matter of statistics as they "supposedly brought certainty into a world of difficult choices and intractable problems".[43] Data collection became a prime tool in "dealing" with the poor and "the shape of destitution was described in terms of its increasing cost to the taxpayers".[44] As such, *what to do with the poor* became of primary importance rather than the individuality of the poor.

The impact of this shift on society's perception of the poor is also evident in the representations of poverty as Lees shows in the satirical prints of the time. She claims that "neither artists nor writers in early and mid-18th century Britain exiled the poor from the society they described or reduced them to shadows on the sidelines; much of the edge of their humor lay in the interaction and in awareness of ambiguities".[45] This means that although the poor were still subject to categorization, at least in 18th century England, they had a

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[37] Polanyi (2001) p. 75.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Weber (2001) p.32.
[40] Lees (1998) p.82.
[41] Ibid. p.83.
[42] Wright (1971) p.317.
[43] Lees (1998) p. 123.
[44] Ibid. p. 117.
[45] Ibid. p. 93.

constant presence in society. What caused the change, not only in perception but also in the relationship structure of society that resulted to the location of the poor outside the bounds of "daily life"?

The answer to this lies in the values elicited by the "spirit of capitalism". Discipline, productivity, efficiency are traits that applicants of relief lacked or possessed little of. Given this, the new Poor Law procedures for dealing with paupers often involved education and training to contribute to the economy and also for the mass production of new inventions.[46] Although the poor did not necessarily think of themselves as indolent and ignorant, the fact that they received some form of relief automatically warranted such adjectives to describe their "class".

The peculiarity of urban dehumanization is thus found in how society responds not just to the idea of productivity but also to the mere potentiality of it. The structure of urban social relationships is now configured to fit the mechanics of capitalism. In an urban society, "to be is to have" such that humanity becomes a "thing" that is exclusively possessed- a property that only the deserving has the right to own.[47] Consequentially, this logic has turned the perception of the poor, dehumanizing nonetheless, from a neighbor one always encountered to a distant *idea* that had to be managed into fruitful use or otherwise driven away from the free-market mechanism. Such is the aura in urban society, and such is the dehumanization of the urban poor. The next chapter will expound on this set-up of urban relationships by focusing on the categorization of the most visible form of poverty: street-dwelling.

3. Don't Talk to Strangers: Urban Relationship Norms and Street Dwelling

The previous chapter has delivered the meaning of what this study refers to as urban dehumanization. This meaning, derived from the merging of a scientific and socio-anthropologic perspectives, points to a reduction of human beings through the production of social norms. This chapter wishes to push this conceptualization forward into the actualities of urban dehumanization in today's society.[48] It aims to provide a theoretical backdrop of urban social relationships; and then to highlight this by focusing on street dwelling.

Accomplishing such endeavor entails expounding on depictions of relationships within urban society as specified by Rolland H. Wright and George Simmel. Concretization of such theories will be given through observations and casual interviews done by the author of this study in a five-month long process of getting to know the people. Details of this process will be given in the next chapter as it is deemed more appropriate in discussing the idea of inter-strata relationship-building. Be forewarned that these observations do not take after any formal scientific method of data collection; as it would jeopardize the goal that this study is dedicated to: breaking through abstractions. The information to be used has the sole purpose of giving this study a realistic snapshot.

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[46] Ibid. p.108.
[47] Freire (1993) pp 58-59.
[48] Although most of the sources used for this chapter are based on Western European and American cities, the image of urban society that will be painted here shows similarities to that of other "Western" and "Non-Western" urban places. This is due to the capacity of capitalism to create uniformities through the free flow of information.

3.1   From a Person to a Category

It is not surprising that categorization according to useful capacity is the main feature of urban dehumanization. This makes, as Polanyi states, an "emphasis on class" important. "The services to society performed by the landed, the middle, and the working classes shaped the whole social history of the nineteenth century".[49] Each person is organized into a group that has a specific role in society. The roles are in turn classified by the dominant ideology, in this case: capitalism.

Accompanying the said classifications are certain standards of interaction among individuals. In an urban society these interactions are triggered by the kind of categories that are formed. Rolland Wright describes the "urban world" as a society where it is possible "for a person…to spend a great deal of time…dealing with no one he knows personally or intimately, all the while receiving the necessary goods and services for his survival and comfort". As such, social relationships are categorical in nature and the tendency for the urban man is to objectify not only others but himself as well.[50]

The ironic effect of this classification is that man's relationships are based on abstractions yet he is very well aware of that fact. He "may recognize that these enacted categories do not express the unique totality of the persons engaged in them, but even if they do this is largely irrelevant".[51] To explain why this is so, one must again look at the values promoted by capitalism: productivity and efficiency. Getting to know a stranger personally is time-consuming. Not only that, but possibly even a great deal of emotional, psychological, and even physical effort to break through the method of abstraction and detachment which one has been accustomed to. As such urban social relationships are characterized by a degree of alienation.

So what then is the category of the poor? Where do they belong? Seen in light of the dehumanization of the urban poor, this practice of categorizing people as poor has to do with placing people in the category of "recipients of aid". This is highlighted in George Simmel's *The Poor*:

> The poor, as a sociological category, are not those who suffer specific deficiencies and deprivations, but those who receive assistance or should receive it according to social norms. Consequently, in this sense, poverty cannot be defined in itself as a quantitative sate, but only *in terms of the social reaction resulting from a specific situation*[.][52]

In a sense, the urban view on poverty itself is dehumanizing such that it fails to differentiate the individual from the category. A man of the working population who receives aid is classified as poor. Logically, his action of turning towards aid is due to a deficiency, be it in finance, physical disability, etc. If one takes deficiency as a basis for characterizing *who* is poor, then wealthy capitalists are also to be seen in want for urban men are always in "the process of becoming".[53] However, as earlier mentioned, even if the urban man or woman

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[49] Polanyi (2001) p.139.
[50] Wright (1971) pp.318-319.
[51] Ibid. p. 318.
[52] Simmel (1965) p.138 italics added.
[53] Wright (1971) p. 321.

realizes the totality of another person, this realization is often no longer relevant for his or her social disposition is ruled by a system dedicated to efficiency.

It is from here that one can see how, for the most part, the relationships formed by modern man are often fleeting and impersonal; the structure of this society deems it so. Dehumanization in this context is one of a constant and consistent aversion from personal contact. Note that this is not merely a collective imposition by society to man but man is actively involved in the fabrication of such structures. The fact is man actually supports the perpetuation of this arrangement of social relationships for he sees it as a part of his *being* in this urban society. It then becomes extremely difficult for him to recognize, more so to act upon, the realization of instances of dehumanization. It would be a self-exile from society. To illustrate this claim, this study focuses its lens on another feature of urban society-dehumanized street-dwellers.

3.2   Street Fighters

Street dwelling is the most clichéd depiction of urban poverty. Indeed, street-dwellers are dehumanized, in the sense that they are seen as both sub-human and non-human as a result of the previously discussed social construction of relationships. Yet if the topic of this study is urban dehumanization as a social fact that applies to all members in that society, why is there a need to limit this to the experience of street dwellers? The answer to this is simple: their experiences, as one will later realize, are not very distant from the rest of society. This part of the study aims to highlight the episodes of the life of people who live and make a living on the streets of Brussels[54]. This will then be used in the proceeding section to contrast the categorical prescription of urban social relationships pertaining to the street-dwellers in order to concretize the implications of urban dehumanization. The title of this section is taken from the personal character that the people emanated.

The Filipino word for street dwellers is *tambay (tambays in plural)*. Derived from the English phrase "stand-by", this colloquial term is used to describe a person who is "hanging out" or simply lingering until something or anything happens. Connoting a sense of laziness, *tambay*, is also used as a verb, which in English, epitomizes what street dwellers are occupied with: waiting.

Waiting forms a central part in the life of the street dwellers near the Gare Centrale de Brussels. What they wait for depends on the date, the person, the weather, money, etc., but they always remain at more or less the same spot. The frequency of their stay on a particular spot has gained them recognition from station patrol, the city police, shopkeepers, maintenance personnel, and other co-dwellers. Most of them live around the station-sidewalks and benches in the summer and move to station hallways in the winter; however, street-dwelling should not be equated to homelessness. Some of them are *tambays* who live in rented houses or tents. They come to the station at different times and for different reasons.

Re, for example, is a former Parisian detective who has been living in the streets for 20 years. He actually lives in Gent and he goes to the Gare Central at least twice a week for black-market work. Through contacts he has made among the people he constantly encounters at the station, he gets hired to do personal investigations upon the request of his client. Sporting a Stetson *casquette* and a loosely tied neck scarf, he is often seen at the Putterie exit of the station with his dog, Pepette. While waiting for his clients he shares a few

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[54] The area defined here is limited to that surround the Gare Central de Brussel. It includes both the train station itself and the places in close proximity to it.

conversations with the people he meets. Re is a witty guy who has the capacity to turn a heated argument into a punch-line.

Yet another "local" to the Gare Centrale *tambays* is Jan, who was born and raised in the Capital itself. Approximately six feet tall, this 33-year old man is a kid at heart. Once, on his birthday, he jumped into the fountain at the gardens in front of the Royal Library for a cool bath. One thing he is very fond of is the *coque swisse*, a raisin pastry with sugar glaze on top. Jan may seem happy-go-lucky but he can get very emotional especially when it comes to his family. When asked if his parents were still alive and if he had brothers and sisters, he became teary-eyed and simply said that they cut him off from their lives. Jan currently shares a tent with Ivo in a campsite near Schaarbeek, Brussels.

Ivo, on the other hand is a more levelheaded person, at least when he is not completely drunk. He was born and raised in Aalst, a province in the Flemish part of Belgium. When it comes to him and Jan, he often ends up acting like Jan's father; meaning he gets him out of trouble. This probably stems from the fact that he, like Jan and Re, is a father of four children. Divorced and eternally separated from his kids due to a restraining order, he finds unregistered work once in a while in sandwich bars. Other than that, he and Jan usually set up a small mat at the back of the Meridian Hotel, Brussels. The two of them, with Ivo's dog, Kenzo, wait for passers-by to drop a few coins.

Paula is also a familiar face at the Brussels Central station, although she does not come as often as the other guys mentioned. Being female, she once said that, "it takes twice the effort to survive on the streets so you have to be tough". [55] A 42- year old Portuguese, Paula has been living in Brussels for the past 6 years and she has been working in black ever since. Not homeless until her recent break-up with her boyfriend, one will always see her wandering around the station in a tank top and jeans with hip sneakers, carrying a small backpack, smoking a cigarette. Due to a lack of encounters with Paula, the researcher can only offer a top-layer description of her.

 Gi, Paco, Phil, and Alain are also street dwellers who the author got to know in the Gare Centrale; however, given the spontaneity of their presence, the author has had very little opportunity to speak with them. Didi, on the other hand, is one of the guys the author also spent particular time with. Due to polio, a condition that causes paralysis particularly on the lower body, Didi has lost the use of his legs since he was 12 years old. This 52-year-old man has the interesting skill of quickly learning a language. He can speak French, Dutch, Spanish, German, Greek, and he knows a little of the Portuguese and Arabic tongue. Didi was always to be seen at the station until the day he and Jan had a heated argument about respect. Jan claimed that Didi, just because he was in a wheelchair, did not have the right to boss people around without respect. This bitter exchange grew into a division that resulted to Didi's seemingly permanent absence at the Gare Centrale. It is interesting to note from this circumstance the importance of the values of participation and respect; values that are perceived to be absent from the description of the category "street dwellers".

Through the openness and generosity of these people, the study has exposed a personal side to those society depicts as street dwellers-a crucial attempt to place substance into hollow categories. The question is: how does urban dehumanization hinder people from seeing the deeper side of the typified stranger? What kind of reaction does a stranger society prescribe when one encounters the *tambay*? Observations of the reaction of passers-by to the street-dwellers mentioned offer a key to the answers.

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[55] Paula (2013). Interview conducted by the researcher.

3.3   The Eye Sees What the Mind Thinks

As demonstrated in the previous section, urban living necessitates action based on categories. Furthermore, this process of categorization "implies that *ideas* are the most important thing, not understanding the particular, because it is through ideas that understanding the particular comes".[56] In a way, urban man becomes adept at identifying general characteristics of groups and ascribing them to individuals, to be able to classify them.[57] For the urban man, it is important to be able to sort out people for him to elicit an appropriate categorical reaction. The fact that he lives in a "stranger society" makes him hesitant to reveal his true thoughts and emotions. This is obvious in the way society has prescribed ethics for public interaction. It is not unusual for a parent to warn his or her child not to talk to strangers for fear of assault. It is also visible in unspoken rules of decorum such as not shouting at the top of one's voice in religious places.

All of these examples, simple though they may be, are outcomes of an "urban state of mind". Such a state of mind is constructed by a "trial-and-error" kind of social interaction, wherein one learns what is safe, beneficial, or life threatening for him or his kin. This way, the desire to preserve one's self in an environment of strangers requires quick recognition of general characteristics of a group and an even faster ascription of those characteristics to an individual.

As such, the process of forming social ideas is one of intricate detail that involves various factors, but nonetheless geared towards the assurance of survival.[58] The process itself is not what interests this study; rather, it is the capacity of ideas to shape actions, particularly actions towards an individual as a part of a category. Precisely what hinders the natural affair of friendship-building with street-dwellers are the socially ascribed behavioral patterns of these people as a group. From outside the categorical box, the woman carrying a two-year-old girl, asking for change is no different from Ivo, Jan, Paula or Re. They are all *tambays*; therefore, the urban man will give a socially legitimate reaction appropriate for *tambays*. A range of reactions are seen, from giving change, food, or drinks to ignoring them or walking towards another direction are commonplace; although, once in a while, though, there are people who stop and have a short chat with the street dwellers. To the non-critical thinker, these are all part of being cautious. Why on earth would one talk to strangers? Has one not seen enough evidence of abduction, rape, pickpocketing, and random violent attacks on television? Point made.

What seems like common sense reactions to street-dwellers is precisely what is problematic. Although each person has his or her own reason for behaving in a certain way amongst street-dwellers, one cannot deny the influence of socially constructed categories. The next question now is how to break through these categories. Of course this would entail a conscious critical mindset that one should apply every day, but how does one act on this way of thinking? What concrete acts can one do to alter the paradigm in which society has based its survival on? More importantly, knowing all that has been said in this study: how does one go on with his or her "daily life"? The answer is terrifying: he or she does not. At the same time, it is also liberating because if by "daily life" one means a perpetuation of the social status quo, then without such a critical perspective, one is trapped in the eternal pit of mundane urban living. One is not really living, rather one simply follows rules.

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[56] Wright (1971) p.320.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Curtis (2013).

The final chapter of this study is dedicated to showing a concrete and practical means of counter-acting urban dehumanization by embarking on inter-strata friendships. It will show why it the most appropriate, though not the only, course of action to break through the categories in urban society. At the same time, the proceeding chapter will also discuss the difficulties and contradictions that involve this undertaking.

4. Personalizing Relationships

This last chapter is concerned with relationship building, not in a romantic or a client-professional sense, but that of sincere friendship. In an urban society that spurs alienation through categorization, one of the simplest ways to reconnect with humanity is through getting to know people; by talking to strangers. Note that from here, the tone of this study will shift from an objective third person narrator to an involved and subjective first person chronicler and second person addressee (the two complement each other in making direct points). As mentioned in the introduction, this defies formal writing standards, but it also resonates the point of this chapter. Of the two options, the second is a risk worth taking.

This part is an attempt to relay my experiences in initiating genuine friendships with the *tambays* at Gare Centrale de Brussel. Of particular importance here are the insights that I reached upon confrontation of the difficulties and apparent contradictions in the underlying philosophy of the project. As such, these will also be explained in light of the implications of urban dehumanization.

4.1   Counterstrike

Inhabitants of the urban world typically find themselves consumed with the idea of labor. You must get a degree for the sole reason of getting a job (assuming jobs are actually available); and then you have to arrange your life according to that job or those jobs (if you are so unlucky). Of course there are a growing number of people who take life more seriously, and who believe that a career is only one aspect of living. In fact there are a few people who try to go against this mainstream ideology centered on earning a living by travelling the world without money: they get by relying on human generosity, kindness. Turning to the ancient doctrine of barter and trade they exchange their skills for food, a place to sleep in, or transportation.[59]

Ingenious as it may sound, this task is not for the faint-hearted. As Neal Curtis, in his book, *Idiotism,* claims: "Any breakdown in the system of references and assignments can induce a profound feeling of anxiety".[60] Placed in the context set above, to go against the stream of a capitalist value system would mean a reconfiguration of almost everything you have grown accustomed to. Indeed, "nothing is more comforting than a set of teachings to which all though and action should refer".[61]

A less drastic, but nonetheless radical, example of a drive for remaking capitalistic structures is that initiated by Gustavo Esteva. His idea involves a school, the Universidad de la Tierra, wherein people, regardless of age, can get together and share their talents and skills. For example, a tailor who wanted to learn woodcarving would be matched with a wood sculptor "teacher". The point is to challenge the modern concept of educational institutions that are intrinsically "profit-centered" by providing a space where willing individuals could

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[59] Grusauskas (2013).
[60] Curtis (2013) p.22.
[61] Ibid. p.24.

learn for free.[62] A more interesting by-product of this set-up is the generation of friendships. As people come to gain knowledge, they also (either intentionally or unknowingly) develop a bond amongst each other- one that is little influenced by the pure pursuit of profit.

From this idea of generating friendships coupled with the curiosity in socially allocated public spaces, I initiated a Sunday Brunch Project involving the street-dwellers at the Gare Centrale de Brussel. Originally intended as a subject for a paper, *Creating Social Spaces,* this project is being continued up to present as part of a personal effort to establish genuine friendships.

Before details of the project are laid out, it is first essential to grasp what this study means by personal relationships. Once again, Wright provides an apt definition:

> A personal relationship is based on familiarity. Each participant is well known to the other and they share considerable experience unlike strangers who know little about each other beyond the category each fills. Being familiar with another requires that we consider him as a *unique* person, for the better we know someone, the more obvious it is how he differs from all others we know[.][63]

Using his logic of familiarity, we can deduce that personal relationships take time. Such is evident in the different levels of friendship. We have friends from whom we withhold certain intimate details our life because of a sense of uneasiness. This also brings out the clichéd feature of trust as the foundation of relationships. In order to be comfortable around a friend, you have to have a certain degree of trust in that's friend's ability to accept entirely, your being.

Apart from the features mentioned, a personal relationship is also "definitive"; "that is, each participant expresses a part of the identity of the other".[64] In casual terms, people who spend a lot of time together tend to "rub-off" each other; consciously or subconsciously sharing mannerisms, language, and certain habits. Whether it is good or bad habits that are exchanged is less important to this study than the possibility of enforcing a degree of change in an individual. The necessity to initiate and sustain personal relationships in urban society becomes apparent through this definitive characteristic. It leaves us open to change through a sense of sharing and participation in the life of another.

From this I formed the philosophy of the Sunday Brunch project, whose initial goal was to simply get people to sit down and talk while sharing a meal in a public place. The project began on the 23rd of February 2013 and, as mentioned, is currently ongoing.[65] Inspired by a combination of Gustavo Esteva's idea of friendship building, Paul Chatterton and Jenny Pickerill's, *Autonomous Geographies: Activism and Everyday Life in the Cities*, and Le Pain Quotidien's long-table set-up, the Sunday Brunch project aimed to be a get-together that was open to virtually anyone. What I wished to achieve was a constant, weekly event that was geared towards long-term interpersonal relationship that would break the bounds of urban space.[66]

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[62] Esteva (2004).
[63] Wright (1971) p.326.
[64] Ibid. p.327.
[65] Note that the timeframe as given on the paper, *Creating Social Spaces* is obviously shorter. For the purpose of this dissertation, experiences from the time the paper was written to the present are still included in the analysis.
[66] Indigne (2013).

The participants of the project varied in number -mostly people who lived in the station, my family and colleagues- but it formed a "core" group who were always present. Ivo, Jan, René, Frederick, and I would share sandwiches at the Panos (when the temperature was too low), at the open garden just outside the Putterie exit of the station, at the picnic tables at the Place de Albert, or at the back of the Meridian Hotel as shown in figures 1 and 2. [67] As part of that research, I observed interactions and gestures that came out during the meals. What was so relevant to me (and to the paper I eventually wrote) was the notion of active participation not only in terms of conversation-as it was hard to keep conversations going due mainly to language barriers- but also in the contribution to the meals themselves by providing drinks, utensils, and whatever food they had or could afford.

Figure 1: Panos Gare Centrale

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[67] The last two places were outside the scope of the report in *Creating Social Spaces*.

Figure 2: Putterie Square (censorship for consent of the person was not acquired)

It is exactly this potential for an alteration of perception that serves as a means to critically ponder the stranglehold of categorization in urban society. Of course this study recognizes that such an impact is subjective and that it may well depend on the openness of an individual to actually problematize such realities. In fact if the initial "encounter" is in any way perceived as harmful, then there is a greater chance that the significance of urban categorization will be strengthened; thus thwarting the effort to counter-act urban dehumanization. Yet these possibilities cannot simply be dismissed for they are deeply rooted in the being of urban man. Such will be highlighted in the following section through the personal thoughts and insights of the author.

4.2   Difficulties and Contradictions

Every proposal is accompanied by pitfalls and contradictions; this is innate in the breeding nature of ideas. With the intention of objectivity through and with subjectivity, this study brings out the difficulties that are attached to its proposed contradiction to urban dehumanization: the forging of personal relationships.

To start, there is an intrinsic contradiction of targeting primarily employed in the project. This innate characteristic of popular development programs is not easily avoided because there will always be a lack in time, funding, and manpower. As a result, I had to actually categorize people into "homeless", "student", "low-paid worker", etc. in order to find participants for the project.

Second, as established, the instinct of categorization as a means for self-preservation, though socially constructed, is built into the cognition of urban man such that he will not always be open to interacting with people he or she perceives as a threat. This is not only true

of inter-strata interactions but also of intra-strata relationships. An illustration of this is when I asked Ivo what he thought of the weekly brunch his response was

> It is a very nice idea but I feel that some people should not be there (pertaining to other street dwellers who just profit from the free food or who take advantage of other people). You have to be careful who you talk to and who you invite because not all are like us (Jan and myself).[68]

This implies that the marginalized, or the "oppressed" as Freire would say, may even be the most hesitant to break down existing urban social structure. This is may be less a case of ignorance as it is an anxiety based on uncertainty. Those who do not have much, have everything to lose.

Third, this endeavor of creating personal relationships with the goal of counter-acting urban dehumanization also has the potential to breed another form of dehumanization. There exists a great tendency to equally categorize and judge people who are not so keen to such ideas. Personally relating to people who are of different social strata can be perceived as an emotionally, physically, and mentally strenuous attempt because it requires constant screening of "built-in" thoughts and emotions. One example was when we (Ivo, Jan and I) were having brunch at their spot behind the Meridian Hotel, Brussels. A middle-aged man gave me a calling card and 2 euros. The old man said, "My place is open if you ever need a place to stay". I was shocked. Did he think I was homeless? This, however, turned into a quick joke as Ivo and Jan claimed that I stayed with them."

Now, I find nothing wrong with being categorized as homeless, but the fact that I felt an initial hostile reaction towards a categorization created an impulse to differentiate myself from the guys. Another example of this was when Panos employees reprimanded our group for occupying the dining area too long. I noticed that the employee was not talking to me but to the guys and in a sick way, I felt "safe"; safe that I, directly, was not being cast out. This mere thought is obviously an antithesis to the definitive feature of personal relationships. Moreover, as accounted for in the journals I kept for this study, there also exists an internal contradiction when I delved into a culture I was not accustomed to.

> Today there was almost a fight between two of the guys. Someone new wanted to join us but Ivo said this was a private picnic and the guy was furious. They were very close to a fistfight but Jan and Philippe calmed them down. I was so afraid not of getting into the fight but of the possible police sanctions had there been one. What was worse was I was more afraid of being questioned by the police than by chance that my friends could get locked up.[69]

Attached to this experience was a deep urge to correct such aggressive behavior whenever I saw it or heard a recounting of it. I could not help but think (at the least) and enunciate (at worse) that what they are doing (or did) was not "right". Of course I had neither the guts nor the conscience to say that to their faces so I would always use euphemisms like "Maybe it's better to stay calm next time" or in a joking manner "Try a little more water and a little less beer, it's good for the kidney". All of these, expressed or not, censored or unrestrained, are ideas of order and discipline that form a part of how I see myself and how I know the world. At the same time, it is also what restraints me from seeing people as *beings*.

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[68] Ivo (2013).
[69] Journal entry (19 May 2013).

The experiences mentioned point out how deeply embedded categorization is, not only in my subconscious, but more importantly in my sense of *being with others*. The outcome of which is a constant feeling of guilt and hypocrisy when I refuse to confront humanity. Even when I do confront the totality of a person, say in a simple act of introducing myself to someone asking for alms, it is often in fleeting circumstances and then I retreat to the comforts of the status quo. I admit that there are times when I would rather excuse myself from attending the brunch because it bears such restlessness. The mere thought of this, regardless of whether I did skip the brunch or not, always carries with it a sense of self-reproach.

Last, there remains a degree of temporariness despite the long-term goal of the Sunday Brunch project. This stems from the fact that I, the initiator, am a foreigner; thus a mere by-passer in Brussels when we consider the totality of time. Were the project done in the Philippines, my beloved country, my expectations and reactions would be entirely different. This is because the unfamiliarity of a place also serves as a motivation to try something out of the ordinary. It is okay if you happen to publicly humiliate yourself; no one knows you anyway. It takes much more determination and perseverance to make a change in our own home for we attach a certain amount of comfort and security in what we are accustomed to. To shake our environment would mean shaking our entire identity with it- a task that most of us are highly reluctant to pursue.[70]

Although these contradictions lay bare the weaknesses of building personal relationships as a means to counter-acting categorization; this practice still proves an important tool for a critical perspective on urban society: perturbation. The fact is, this overwhelming sense of uneasiness forces us to confront the mundane. More importantly the very knowledge of these contradictions generates a sense of responsibility towards further recognition of the totality of others.[71] Once we act upon a theory, we unknowingly inscribe it not only in our subconscious perceptions but in our entire system as a person-in our humanity. Given this, the act of creating meaningful and genuine friendships with those who are excluded in a capitalistic society proves to be an act that heightens awareness of urban dehumanization. In a way, the more we are faced with the problematic, the more we are unable to evade it.

5. Conclusion

We have thus far presented dehumanization in the context of urban society. Its essence was brought out in light of a feature of a reduction of the human being brought about by socially constructed patterns of relationships. From here, we derived the characteristic of urban dehumanization as a categorization based on free-market principles. It was particularly established that this kind of reduction of the human being is a result of the commodification of labor; which entailed that man be treated, in a mechanistic way, as an input to the engine of capitalism. The social roots of urban dehumanization were then found to lie in the values fostered by the "spirit of capitalism", which connotes a strong adherence to ascetic productivity.

This strong belief in the values of fruitfulness and efficiency was evident in the amendments made to the Elizabethan Poor Laws. The poor went from a classification of *who they were* to a categorization according to *how they should be dealt with*. Regardless of the specific need of an individual, the main objective of relief was to minimize costs and

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[70] Curtis (2013).
[71] Taylor (2012).

maximize output. Urban man then came to be characterized by the potentiality of his productivity. This meant that his contributions to society and not his being in totality had center stage.

As such, urban social relationships came to be patterned into a stranger society wherein categorizations became the basis of social interaction. The totality of persons is no longer visible, let alone acknowledged or discovered, for that would only be counter-productive. This lofty conceptualization was grounded through a contrasting of categorization and personalization, illustrated by *tambays* at the Gare Centrale whom I had come to know through the course of this article.

This study ends with the illustrations of the Sunday Brunch project: an attempt to create genuine personal relationships to counter the alienating value-system in urban society. This, coupled with the terse exposition of the personalities of Jan, Ivo, Gi, Alain, Didi, René, and Paula was a feeble attempt not solely to put a face to street dwellers, but to substantiate their person. Of course this illumination is also a form of imposition for it is formed from a perspective other than the people themselves. As Jan once commented on unwanted pictures that people took of them, it is an imposition that violates their person because it subjects them to other peoples' thoughts and perceptions. A subjugation that, as Jan says, "*Ça m énerve*! (It gets on my nerves!)", for it is without consent; however, this is an inherent contradiction in the experience of urban living. For in order to address a phenomenon, we have to do so in the language of that phenomenon: in this case imposition and abstraction. As such, this last chapter also needed to highlight the inherent contradictions both in the entity of the project and within my experiences.

In the end, we found that urban dehumanization is not merely a concept that can be described in a scientific sense; that is in a quantifiable tangible manner. In the same way, attempts to counteract it will never yield guaranteed, unblemished results. These attempts can only serve as initiatives of change in the present structure of social relationships that is built on assurance and complacency. The monotony of which, has caused us to overlook life and the living. To this we return to the question of this necessity for forging personal, inter-strata relationships: what do we as part of urban society stand to gain from this? What benefit does it give urban society?

The answer is simply the realization of our shared humanity. The audacity to trust the untrustworthy and to befriend the stranger can only be an ability to see the beauty of and in anxiety, for it is only through this deep sense of unknowingness that we see the value of people. Through this disquieting, as I myself have experienced, we can be able to: 1.) realize the urge to categorize and control; 2.) expand the way we see things in order to accommodate the personal; 3.) create in urban society an honest sense of connectedness and responsibility for others. This effort is more mind boggling and time consuming than giving a street person 50 cents, but it is also more profoundly life-altering. In a way, this perturbation opens up a new dimension into the survival instinct of society: one based on meaningful friendship and love. In the process we might lose the entitlements accorded to the social class we are ascribed to, but we gain back a minute sense of our humanity by reclaiming this connectedness with others. Without the need to map out, regulate, organize, and prescribe, we actually learn to *live with others* instead of living *among others*. This, rather than the inordinately controlled and penetratingly alienating urban life is perhaps a change worth striving for.

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