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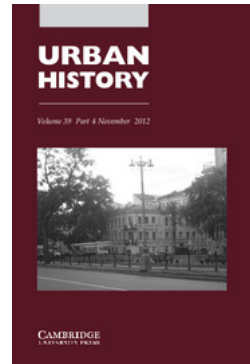
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Introduction: governmentality, house numbering and the spatial history of the modern city

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ABSTRACT: This special section of *Urban History* explores the spatial histories of urban house numbering and the calculative rationalities of government since the Enlightenment. More than a mere footnote to the history of postal communications, the house number was first introduced as an inscriptive device to serve a wide range of governmental purposes, from military conscription and the quartering of soldiers to census-taking and the policing of urban populations. The spatial practice of house numbering can therefore be seen as a 'political technology' that was developed to reorganize urban space according to the dictates of numerical calculation. The articles in this special section examine the historical emergence of house numbering, and related practices, in different geographical circumstances, illustrating the spatial strategies of governmentality and the tactics of resistance that shaped the spatial organization of the modern city.

We live in the era of a governmentality discovered in the eighteenth century. Governmentalization of the state is a particularly contorted phenomenon, since if the problems of governmentality and the techniques of government have really become the only political stake and the only real space of political struggle and contestation, the governmentalization of the state has nonetheless been what has allowed the state to survive . . . So, if you like, the survival and limits of the state should be understood on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality.¹

During the mid-eighteenth century, a series of new 'techniques of government' were devised to reconfigure the modern city as a governable space of calculability. Among the most significant of these spatial practices were the numbering of houses and assignment of street addresses, since they have played an integral role in the spatial organization of the urban streetscape and the routinization of everyday urban life, particularly in

¹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (New York, 2007), 109.

European and North American cities.² It is commonly assumed that house numbering is simply a footnote to the history of postal communications; however, when one actually investigates the historical emergence of house numbering in different historical and geographic contexts, it becomes evident that far more was at stake than the delivery of mail. In continental Europe, the numbering of houses was first introduced as a technique of spatial identification to serve the needs of police, military, census, and tax administration.³ Although there is evidence that 68 houses were numbered on the Pont Notre Dame in Paris as early as the fifteenth century, and buildings in the social housing complex known as the 'Fuggerei' in Augsburg were assigned Gothic numerals by 1519, it was not until the eighteenth century that house numbering was widely embraced as a *political technology* of urban government.⁴

In 1749, for instance, the French police lieutenant François-Jacques Guillaute proposed the numbering of houses in Paris as a means of facilitating the surveillance of the population, yet his proposal was not adopted.⁵ It was only in 1779 that a private almanac and directory publisher introduced house numbering in Paris, over a decade after a royal proclamation had decreed that all cities and towns in France should number their buildings to enable the billeting of soldiers.⁶ The introduction of house numbering in Prussia occurred even earlier, when governmental officials authorized the numbering of buildings in 1737 to create a legible terrain for military purposes. In Madrid, by contrast, the practice of house numbering was adopted in the early 1750s and was likely associated with

² D. Garrioch, 'House names, shop signs and social organization in Western European cities, 1500–1900', *Urban History*, 21 (1994), 20–48; P. Joyce, 'Maps, numbers and the city: knowing the governed', in P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), 20–61; A. Tantner, *Ordnung der Häuser, Beschreibung der Seelen: Hausnummerierung und Seelenkonskription in der Habsburgermonarchie* (Innsbruck, 2007); A. Tantner, 'Addressing the houses: the introduction of house numbering in Europe', *Histoire & Mesure*, 24 (2009), 7–30; R. Rose-Redwood, 'Indexing the great ledger of the community: urban house numbering, city directories, and the production of spatial legibility', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 34 (2008), 286–310. To supplement this scholarship, one of the current authors has created a 'Gallery of House Numbers' as an online resource that documents the history of house-numbering practices in different cities (see <http://housenumbers.tantner.net>). For a more general discussion of state power and the production of legible spaces, see J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

³ Tantner, 'Addressing the houses'.

⁴ For a discussion of the notion of 'political technology' in relation to modern governmentality, see M. Foucault, 'The political technology of individuals', in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst, 1988), 145–62; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*; also, see H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1983); M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London, 1999); U. Bröckling, S. Krasman and T. Lemke (eds.), *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges* (New York, 2011).

⁵ M. Guillaute, *Mémoire sur la reformation de la police en France: soumis au roi en 1749*, ed. J. Seznez (Paris, 1974).

⁶ Paris was originally exempt from this royal decree because soldiers lived in barracks rather than among the populace at large. J. Pronteau, *Les numérotages des maisons de Paris du XV^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 1966).

the *visita general* to allow for a spatially precise mechanism of tax collection, and the numbering of houses was first initiated in the Italian city of Trieste in 1754 during a census with the aim of guaranteeing the safety of commerce.

Similar governmental techniques of spatial identification were being discussed as part of police reforms in other urban contexts as well. Yet, many cities did not adopt the practice of house numbering until the latter half of the eighteenth century. For example, although there is evidence of house numbering in London during the early eighteenth century, the city's first set of house-numbering regulations were not passed until the 1760s. Similarly, Vienna's first house-numbering plan dates to the early 1770s and was part of the introduction of street addressing in the western provinces of the Habsburg monarchy as part of the so-called 'conscription of souls', which referred to a census in preparation for a new military recruitment system. At the time, house numbers were referred to as 'conscription numbers' and were intended to provide the state authorities with access to the inhabitants and resources of each individual residence; not surprisingly, this measure provoked considerable resistance in some quarters.

One example of resistance to the introduction of house numbering occurred in the Bohemian town of Litomyšl, presumably in the dark of night on 3 December 1770, when the numbers that had just been painted on the walls of 14 houses were 'smeared with mud' and 'scratched out with an iron stuff'. House numbers were to be used as a political technology to locate the spatial whereabouts of adult men who were fit for military service; the numbering of houses was therefore a mechanism of rendering each house and its occupants 'visible' in the registers of military administration. Scratching off the number from the houses, then, was an attempt to subvert the calculative rationalities of government. Another case of early resistance to house numbering can be found in the Moravian town of Jihlava. A campaign to affix numbers to the town's houses was conducted by census-takers on 29 April 1771. However, during the following night, it was reported that some 'unknown evil-doers' had thrown 'filth' upon the number 1 that was attached to the wall of the Capuchin monastery, which had become absolutely unrecognizable as a result. Similar acts of resistance took place in Hungary when house numbering was embraced as a strategy of military conscription in 1784. In this latter case, the nobles themselves opposed the numbering of buildings and succeeded in overturning the policy in 1790, when house numbers were removed from the buildings to the sound of military music and heavy artillery fire.⁷

Another major turning point in the history of house numbering was its diffusion to many cities in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands in the aftermath of the French Revolution, again to facilitate the billeting of

⁷ Tantner, *Ordnung der Häuser, Beschreibung der Seelen*.

soldiers. There is also some indication that the British imposed a system of house numbering in New York when they occupied the city during the American Revolution.⁸ After the Revolution, cities and towns throughout the newly independent United States began to adopt the practices of house numbering and street addressing less for military purposes than to facilitate the circulation of capital and commodities as well as to provide a system of spatial identification for governmental administration.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several calculative techniques were designed to systematize the manner in which houses were numbered, and the city of Philadelphia played a particularly important role in such developments. For instance, the general rule of separating odd and even numbers on opposite sides of each street appears to have been first devised in Philadelphia when the first federal census was conducted in 1790. This odd/even system was quickly adopted by other cities, such as New York and Paris, in 1793 and 1805, respectively. Moreover, in 1856, Philadelphia was also the first city to adopt a 'decimal' system of house numbering, whereby 100 house numbers were provided for each city block. The decimal system solved a problem that had long plagued government administrators: when buildings were constructed or demolished, this often led to the renumbering of many houses along a street, whereas the decimal system allowed the city authorities to renumber buildings on a block-by-block basis, thereby rationalizing the urban landscape as a space of governmental intervention.⁹

Along with census-taking and map-making, the practice of street addressing can be seen as a 'technology of power' that was of primary importance to the rise of what Michel Foucault has called modern 'governmentality', which had 'as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security'.¹⁰ As Foucault suggests, the eighteenth century witnessed a proliferation of political technologies that enabled the production of governmental knowledges of 'population', and he argues that the spatial mechanisms of governmentality first arose in the urban milieu and were only later extended to the territory at large.¹¹ Our primary contention is that the calculative techniques of house numbering and street addressing were

⁸ *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York, 1878), vii.

⁹ Rose-Redwood, 'Indexing the great ledger of the community'.

¹⁰ M. Foucault, 'Governmentality', in C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago, 1991), 102.

¹¹ For a discussion of what Foucault calls the 'urbanization of the territory', which refers to the way in which calculative techniques of socio-spatial ordering historically emerged in the city and later provided a model for 'arranging things so that the territory is organized like a town', see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 336. Also, an insightful analysis of the political technologies of territory is provided in M. Hannah, 'Calculable territory and the West German census boycott movements of the 1980s', *Political Geography*, 28 (2009), 66–75; S. Elden, 'Land, terrain, territory', *Progress in Human Geography*, 34 (2010), 799–817; J. Crampton, 'Cartographic calculations of territory', *Progress in Human Geography*, 35 (2011), 92–103; R. Rose-Redwood, 'With numbers in place: security, territory, and the production of calculable space', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 102 (2012), 295–319.

key strategies employed in the spatial reorganization of many European and North American cities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a political technology, the house number was part of a governmental apparatus that designated the 'household' as one of the basic spatial units linking the government of the individual with the regulation of the population as a whole.¹²

As the above account suggests, the rationale for introducing house numbering as a technique of spatial governmentality has varied considerably depending on the historical and geographic context, so we must be attentive to local contingencies and cautious against succumbing to reductionistic generalizations. The aim of this special section of *Urban History* is to contribute to a critical spatial history of the role that street and house numbering have historically played in the organization of urban space as a strategy of modern governmentality.¹³ Each of the contributors has sought to emphasize the historical specificity of how these calculative techniques were introduced in different geographical locales rather than applying a one-size-fits-all theoretical framework upon the history of house numbering in the modern city.

Marco Cicchini's article examines the historical emergence of house numbering as a socio-spatial ordering device in eighteenth-century Geneva, and he argues that it was part of a broader set of police reforms which were informed by a new 'regime of visibility'. Although the practice of house numbering was utilized to produce a space of 'urban transparency', Cicchini shows how this administrative tool also encountered popular resistance. Similarly, Reuben Rose-Redwood explores the spatial contradictions and temporal instabilities of 'calculable space' in his article on the history of house numbering in New York City. He also demonstrates that despite numerous attempts by the local authorities to rationalize Manhattan's house-numbering regulations since

¹² For a discussion of the household as a spatial unit of government in US legal history, see C. Shamas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville, 2002). There is also a growing body of scholarship on the 'home' as a significant spatial category of social life; a concise overview of this research area can be found in A. Blunt and R. Dowling, *Home* (New York, 2006). Although such works provide considerable insights into the social production of 'home' as part of a broader set of place-making practices, the role of house numbering as a means of rendering the space of the home 'legible', and thereby amenable to governmental intervention, remains largely unexplored within this body of literature. Although Foucault does not provide a detailed genealogy of house numbering *per se*, his account of 'the problem of the series' highlights the mechanisms through which the 'indefinite series' of mobile and static elements (such as carts and houses, respectively) have been monitored and regulated through political technologies of calculation since the eighteenth century. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 20. Additionally, Foucault explicitly mentions the way in which 'individuals were made visible' by localizing each to a house in M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (New York, 2003), 251.

¹³ The critical project of a 'spatial history' is elaborated in S. Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (London, 2001); for a somewhat different conception of spatial history, see P. Carter, *The Road to Botany: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Minneapolis, 2010).

the eighteenth century, the enforcement of such laws proved to be a major challenge to city officials, suggesting that we must not only consider the history of legal regulation but also how the letter of the law was, or was not, put into practice in the city's streets.

In fact, Richard Harris and Robert Lewis go so far as to argue that 'numbers didn't count' in the context of colonial Bombay and Calcutta. Given the logistical complexities of imposing a comprehensive house-numbering system in colonial India, they argue that based upon the existing archival evidence, 'the British did not establish a systematic and unambiguous system of street addresses in Bombay and Calcutta'. Despite the recent interest in the role that 'number' has played in the colonial imagination,¹⁴ very little critical scholarship has considered the use of house numbering as a spatial mechanism of colonial governmentality. Harris and Lewis's study, therefore, provides a useful starting point for a more extensive analysis of the geo-locational regimes employed, or *not* employed, in different colonial contexts.

The final article in this special section broadens the discussion by illustrating how the practice of house numbering is one among many systems of identification that rely upon the use of 'number' as a spatial ordering device. One example of such a numerical coding system that is closely related to the numbering of houses is the spatial practice of *street numbering*, which entails the use of numerical identifiers as the basis of a street-naming system.¹⁵ Street numbering is generally associated with North American traditions of urban planning, yet Jani Vuolteenaho offers a fascinating discussion of the history of street numbering in Europe. He makes a compelling case that the 'relative absence' of street numbering in European cities is largely the result of a culture of nation-building that viewed street nomenclature as a medium through which national identity should be inscribed into the fabric of a city's cultural landscape.

House numbering and street addressing have become part of the taken-for-granted order of urban life in much of the industrial and post-industrial world. It is all the more important to acknowledge that such 'minutiae' of everyday life are both historically and geographically contingent. Many cities in the Global South, for instance, do not have standardized house-numbering systems, and rural communities in the Global North only began adopting city-style street addressing practices in the 1980s to facilitate emergency response management.¹⁶ When viewed from a

¹⁴ A. Appadurai, 'Number in the colonial imagination', in A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996), 114–35.

¹⁵ L. Baldwin and M. Grimaud, 'Washington, Montana, the Dakotas – and Massachusetts: a comparative approach to street naming', *Names*, 37 (1989), 115–38; F. Hamlin, 'Numbers in placenames', *Names*, 47 (1999), 233–42.

¹⁶ C. Farvacque-Vitkovic, L. Godin, H. Leroux, F. Verdet and R. Chavez, *Street Addressing and the Management of Cities* (Washington, DC, 2005); M. Curry, D. Phillips and P. Regan, 'Emergency response systems and the creeping legibility of people and places', *The Information Society*, 20 (2004), 357–69; Rose-Redwood, 'With numbers in place'.

comparative geographical perspective, the practice of house numbering actually appears more as the exception rather than the rule, which further highlights the need to examine critically the historical specificity of introducing this particular device of urban spatial organization within different geographical milieux. The contributions included here are a small step toward fulfilling this 'need to both historicize space and spatialize history'.¹⁷

¹⁷ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, 3.