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Urban studies, critical theory, radical politics
Eight theses for Peter Marcuse
Kanishka Goonewardena

The celebration of Peter Marcuse’s 80th birthday at the Right to the City conference in the fall of 2008 provided a poignant moment to reflect on the circumstances under which urban studies, critical theory and radical politics have come together so instructively in his own life and work. An adequate consideration of these involves not only the personal and political dimensions of his exemplary career, but also the world-historical forces that triangulated radical thought, revolutionary politics and metropolitan life in the 20th century. Their trans-Atlantic trajectories—from the revolutionary conjunctures between the world wars through military–Keynesian restorations of capital to the uneven globalization of neoliberal imperialisms—raise a challenging question concerning the legacies and possibilities of critical urban theory. How has urban studies learned from and contributed to critical theory, in response to the demands of radical politics? In this paper, I reflect on the relevance of the Frankfurt School and Henri Lefebvre in particular for drawing a balance sheet on critical urban theory following the experiences of modernism and postmodernism, while suggesting that its future now rests on the delivery of a radical politics based on a revolutionary conception the Right to the City—one capable of doing justice to the utopian moments alive in an Age of Empire and a Planet of Slums.

“‘He sat there all day in the little shop where he made his living, and studied the Talmud. When a customer came in, he looked up unwillingly and said, ‘Is there not another shop you could go to?’” This was the story Erich Fromm told about his great-grandfather, Seligmann Fromm...” (Wiggershaus, 1994 [1986], p. 52)

‘Wiggershaus’s Teutonic thoroughness [in The Frankfurt School] does marvelous justice to his materials. He has even dug out Erich Fromm’s great-grandfather.... If one wanted to find an image for the Frankfurt School, one might well find it there.’ (Eagleton, 2003, p. 78)

‘There is a story I like to tell about Marcuse’s involvement in UCSD.... Back in the late ’60s, the emergent black student organization, in alliance with the Chicano student organization, decided to campaign to create a new college at UCSD, ... the Lumumba–Zapata College.... At one point in a rather protracted campaign, we decided to occupy the registrar’s office. I said I would ask Herbert about his possible participation in the takeover. I explained to him that we would have to break a window in order to gain entrance. In other words, we risked being charged with breaking and entering and trespassing. If he were the first person to enter the building, we were less likely to be arrested.... Without a moment’s hesitation, Herbert agreed: “Of course, I’ll do it.” There was no question in his mind. At that time he was about seventy-five years old. He was the first person to walk into the

1. Peter Marcuse

‘Expose, Propagate, and Resist’, Peter Fulham 2008; and in the

These epigraphs—Walter Benjamin’s dialectical philosophy and ‘personal–political’ notes sardonically juxtaposed with the aloofness of modernist philosophy from, say, politics: an attempt to give some justice at least to the once identified colleague Herbert Marcuse, and interview with the late Alva Davis, herself a daughter of Adorno and Marcuse—well, however, a Frankfurt School inspired and inspired one that runs in circles. Hence the question: who is he? To the extent the possibilities of our approach, we are confronted with the two circumstances of first and last instances of failed fascism, which stand along with many others in his parents’ genealogy of contradictions of the family, unlike many others he may well assert... as a German in Berlin, but he is also the exemplary partisan of a critical theory in the

Thanks no doubt
registry's office.’ (Angela Davis, interview with J. James (Davis, 1998, p. 317))

1. Peter Marcuse = radical urban praxis

‘Expose, Propose, Politicize!’ (Marcuse, 2008; and in this issue)

These epigraphs flash before us what Walter Benjamin would have called a dialectical image of 20th-century critical theory—a fitting backdrop to my first ‘personal-political’ thesis. Terry Eagleton notes sardonically in the second of them the sloveness of much contemporary radical philosophy from everyday life, which is to say, politics; an accusation often directed with some justice at Theodor Adorno, the critic once identified by his Frankfurt School colleague Herbert Marcuse in a memorable interview with the BBC as a ‘genius’. Angela Davis, herself a former student of both Adorno and Marcuse, reveals, in the third, however, a Frankfurt School more politically inspired and inspiring, which is very much the one that runs in the veins of Peter Marcuse. Hence the question: how did he become who he is? To the extent that the legacies and possibilities of radical urban theory may be approached by way of a biographical question, none could be more poignant than this. For Peter Marcuse made his own history, but not just as he pleased. In his life and work, two circumstances were determinant in the first and last instance: the German experiences of failed socialism and triumphant fascism, which sent him across the Atlantic along with much of the Frankfurt School of his parents’ generation; and the alienating contradictions of American society where his family, unlike many of their fellow travelers, decided to settle down. Without these adventures he may well have become an octogenarian in Berlin, but then we would not have recognized him for who he is: the most exemplary partisan of radical politics and artisan of critical theory in the field of urban planning, thanks no doubt to his unique upbringing in the spirit of the Frankfurt School, before emerging in his own right as an exemplary intellectual as well as the ethical conscience of his own chosen field of study. In Peter Marcuse’s case, we are also in the company of a man whose illustrious father was a participant in the German revolution of 1918, before going to study with Martin Heidegger at Freiburg University in 1928, the year he was born in Berlin. Herbert Marcuse fled Germany in 1933 with his family, heeding the warning of things about to happen there from the philosopher of being himself, to become some three decades later in the USA the legendary philosophical inspiration of the New Left in the New World. The relationship between critical theory and urban studies therefore assumes both biographical and substantive form in Peter Marcuse—who cannot be thought apart from a fateful but scarcely fortuitous union with radical urban praxis.

2. Urbanism + revolution = urban revolution

‘To encompass both [Andre Breton and Le Corbusier—that would mean drawing the spirit of contemporary France like a bow, with which knowledge shoots the moment in the heart.’ (Benjamin, 1999, p. 459)

The occasion of Peter Marcuse’s 80th birthday naturally invites us to reflect on the circumstances under which urban studies, critical theory and radical politics have come together so coherently in his oeuvre. For an adequate consideration of these involves not only the personal and political dimensions of his career, but also the world-historical forces that triangulated radical thought, revolutionary politics and metropolitan life in the 20th century. Their transatlantic trajectories—from the revolutionary conjunctures between the two world wars through military-Keynesian and arguably state-socialist restorations of capital to the uneven globalization of neoliberal imperialisms—now
provide the essential politico-historical vectors to make sense of radical conceptions and politics of the city. The immediate context into which he was born—the defeat of socialism and the rise of fascism—was preceded by one that proved even more decisive for the formation of the Frankfurt School as much as critical urban theory. This was the conjuncture, framed by the two world wars, of modernism. As Perry Anderson noted in a memorable debate with Marshall Berman on the meaning of modernity, it consisted of three basic coordinates: the formal novelty of radical aesthetic practices variously opposed to the academism of the status quo as much as bourgeois society (expressionism, constructivism, surrealism, cubism); the new forces of production ushered in by the second industrial revolution (automobile, airplane, telephone); and, above all, the actuality of revolution (Bolshevik, Spartacist, anarchist) (Anderson, 1984, pp. 96–113; see also Berman, 1982). It is this explosive fusion of aesthetics, technology and politics—especially in Germany, Italy, France and during the instructive early years of the Soviet Union—that still animates Walter Benjamin’s famous ‘artwork essay’ as much as his ‘theses on the philosophy of history’. The constructivist optimism of these texts stands as a valuable corrective to perceptions acquired by the work of his Frankfurt School colleagues as ‘negative’ or ‘pessimistic’. If the early Frankfurt School is better understood as a dialectical mediation of critique and utopia with recourse to the imaginaries and technologies of revolutionary art, then it is to this art that properly modernist architecture and urban planning surely belong—as ably recounted in Anatole Kopp’s Town and Revolution, a book that strongly influenced Henri Lefebvre’s pioneering work on space. Radical urban theory begins at this extraordinary moment of modernism, by experimenting with the roles of architecture and urban planning in revolutionizing the totality of society. As such, it should be well worth the effort to reconstruct its revolutionary constructivism in some critical detail, which is barely registered in extraordinarily reductive repudiations of modernism in celebrated texts of postmodern urbanism—ranging from iconoclastic classics such as Learning from Las Vegas by Robert Venturi et al. to the more humdrum success of Richard Florida’s The Rise of the Creative Class and Leoni Sandercock’s Towards Cosmopolis. For such liberal-populist blockbusters on diversity offer little hope for radical urban theory, beyond small fortunes to be made by marketing a certain urban chic or the occasional amendment of North American planning by-laws to accommodate a mosque or temple in the ‘mongrel’ suburb. Radically different ideals were worshipped to be sure by the architects and planners surveyed by Kopp and their profound appreciation of the fundamental relationship between society and space belonged to what we may call a sequence of ‘urban events’ (à la Alain Badiou)—the Paris Commune, the battles of Stalingrad and Algiers, the ‘events’ of Paris 1968, etc.—that led the Situationists as much as Lefebvre to insist on ‘a different space for a different life’. Insofar as no theory is possible without practice, there exists therefore no such thing as the legacy of radical urban theory without the real or imaginary proximity of revolution and its urban praxis.

3. Modernization = modernism – revolution

‘History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries brought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungovernment zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites, which shake the public with the same.’ (Burke, 1968 [1790], p. 247)

Whatever happened to the revolution of modernism? Radical urban theory could do worse than to approach this question through architecture and urban planning, by returning to an even more famous question posed by Le Corbusier: ‘Architecture or Revolution?’ He responded polemically to his own rhetoric: the words of Totalitarianism are published in The City—avoided’ (Corbusier, 1932).

The message of modernism as an urban plan for Europe, without revolution. It is important to consider the moment modernism in Frankfurt arose as well as the circumstances ripe for a radical political space and society. The rise of modernism on this historic ground was born of the auspices of its relation to technology and its relation with that of the utopian. It was condoned in the slogan: ‘Architecture as history’ (to know, however, is not to know, to enjoy both space and time, not because modernism is a virtue of the virtues of a Hayekianism) or generalizing ‘building, dwelling, thinking’ (a transcendental trinity) and using capitalism after the consolidation of Comintern era on all sides of the world and extinguishing the realist model of modernism identified in The Totalitarian State and Diirigism (state capitalism). Yet our run-off from modernism planning essentially terrevolutionary city and state sentence in the book of Hall’s ‘intellect, style and design’ (Comintern, 1936) and the error of modernism is what Hall (1996 [1992]) calls a concept of modernism in Cosmopolis, a brutal dictator.
his own rhetorical question in the famous last words of *Towards a New Architecture* published in 1923: ‘Revolution can be avoided’ (Corbusier, 1986 [1923], p. 289). The message of course was that architecture and urban planning could resolve the crisis of Europe, without having to go through revolution. It is important to recall that this question arose in the very heat of the moment of modernism in Europe, at a time when objective as well as subjective conditions seemed ripe for a radical transformation of both space and society in the Old World. Indeed, on this historic occasion more than a handful of artists, architects and planners—under the auspices of its unique conjunction of art, technology and politics—aligned their vocation with that of the revolution. Their thinking was condensed not into a question but a slogan: ‘Architecture and Revolution!’ As we know, however, the attempt to revolutionize both space and society miscarried; but not because modernism was led by some Occidental affliction called ‘reason’, unaware of the virtues of laissez-faire (Friedrich von Hayek) or *gelassenheit* (Heidegger) in the ‘building, dwelling, thinking’ of commodity form; on the contrary, it is precisely the transatlantic triumph of military–Keynesian capitalism after the Second World War and the consolidation of state socialism in the Comintern era after Lenin that exhausted and extinguished the revolutionary energies of modernism— ushering in modernization, in a triumphant union of what Lefebvre identified in *The Urban Revolution* as neo-dirigisme (state) and neo-liberalism (market). Yet our run-of-the mill textbook on urban planning essentially misrecognizes this counter-revolutionary turn of events. The first sentence in the Le Corbusier chapter of Peter Hall’s ‘intellectual’ history of urban planning and design (‘City of Towers’) attributes the error of modernism to the form-giver’s ‘evil’ (Hall, 1996 [1988], p. 204). To the extent that a concept of modernism may be found at all in *Cosmopolis*, its central tendency appears to Sandercock as nothing but totalitarian: a brutal dictatorship of reason’s will to power, indistinct in form from the unreason of fascism. James Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*, though a class above *Cities and Cosmopolis* in conceptual sophistication and historical erudition, ultimately passes a similar verdict on modernism. His telling subtitle, *How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, locates its critique in a venerable tradition stretching from Edmund Burke through Hayek to Jane Jacobs—as noted in a perceptive review by conservative political philosopher John Gray (1998). The role assigned to modernist architects and urban planners in the worldviews propounded by these liberal–postmodern texts remains structurally identical to the one ascribed to Al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists by the liberal–democratic cosmology of the White House. An Axis of Evil runs here too, not from Pyongyang through Damascus to Caracas, but from Hegel’s Absolute Spirit via modernist architects and planners to Hitler’s Auschwitz and Stalin’s Gulags, effectively equating modernism with madness. Was Michel Foucault himself not mad then to focus on the transition from the Ancient Regime to the modern world rather than on Le Corbusier or Ludwig Hilberseimer in his great studies on madness? In any case, the trouble with the category of evil conjured by avowedly anti-modernist critics here is clear: just as it could not deal with the ‘why do they hate us?’ question tossed up by President George W. Bush’s speechwriters, so it fails to offer students of the city a useful account of what went wrong with modernism. More historical and materialist concepts can do better than proposing the tautology: ‘evil people—architects, planners, terrorists—do evil things’. They do render the fate of modernism differently from received postmodern opinion, indeed in a more dialectical and redemptive light. For in full postmodernity, nothing dominates the dominant discourses of urbanism more than the ideology of modernization, especially if postmodernism, as Fredric Jameson theorized it on the first page of his pathbreaking work on the subject, ‘is what you have when the
modernization process is complete" (1990, p. 1). So the difference between modernism and modernization assumes an immense import for us, and the essence of it can be represented, with reference to Anderson’s periodization, in a formula: MODERNIZATION = MODERNISM – REVOLUTION.

4. Americanism + Fordism = counterrevolution

‘Dialectical reason is, when set against the dominant mode of reason, unreason.’
(Adorno, 1978 [1944-46], p. 72)

The passage of architecture, urban planning and much else from modernism to modernization in the age of what Antonio Gramsci aptly called ‘Americanism and Fordism’, in other words, cannot be understood without reference to the waning of the prospects of revolution in the West. The latter cannot be adequately explained by the lack of common sense on the part of modernists, in spite of Scott’s attempt to do precisely that, with a spirited rendition of the Greek concept of metis, as if such good sense is a privilege accorded by history solely to the victims of modernism—and to scholars like himself (Scott, 1998, pp. 309-341). Nor can it be attributed to a congenital defect of the Enlightenment, as Sandrock’s passing references to the evils of ‘reason’ embodied by planners and architects seem to suggest. The Enlightenment, which Jacques Derrida has defended with passion against conservative tendencies, surely deserves a more nuanced postmodern treatment, as the modernist Adorno for one demonstrated by dialectical example, notwithstanding the superficial readings of The Dialectic of Enlightenment abundant in urban studies and planning. So does history, as any reader of Sankar Muthu’s Enlightenment Against Empire must appreciate. If the highly influential publication in New York of Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock’s The International Style by the Museum of

Modern Art in 1932—following their watershed architectural exhibition held a year before CIAM’s Charter of Athens—dates the death of modernism and the birth of modernization in the realm of urbanism, rather than the misleading timing suggested by Charles Jencks in Postmodern Architecture that takes its cue from the spectacle of Pruitt-Igoe’s demolition at 3:32 p.m. on 15 July 1972 in St Louis, then a few factors suggest themselves for consideration in relation to the question: how did the revolution go astray? Foremost here is class struggle, among other struggles, already operating at urban, national and global scales, which assumed the dominant form of inter-imperialist rivalry between the two world wars contemporaneous with modernism, ushering in powerful forms of nationalism, which consolidated corresponding structures of the capitalist state—fascist and Keynesian, above all. All these forces arrayed against the withering away of the state, without which the ideals of revolutionary modernism could not be actualized, were veritably inter-national and lay well beyond the spontaneous control of avant-garde architects or planners. Some of them remained true to their purpose in practice better than others, no doubt about it; yet we have to look beyond the good and evil of their own characters at the more decisive logics of capital and state to account for the transition from modernism to modernization. I submit therefore that the politics of this fateful historical mutation of space is best seen not from the seemingly diverse perspectives of those who sought to demonstrate that a ‘revolution could be avoided’, ranging from the functionalism of the Charter of Athens (1933) to the populism of Learning from Las Vegas (1972), but from a standpoint located in the revolutionary future that was promised but nowhere produced by modernism. This is the least that urban theory can still learn from the utopian methods of the Frankfurt School. From that perspective, the crucial line to be drawn in the sand of architecture and urban planning through the last century runs not between what are often customarily referred to as

‘modernism’ and modernization but between those who seek revolution could be avoided, ranging from the functionalism of the Charter of Athens (1933) to the populism of Learning from Las Vegas (1972), but from a standpoint located in the revolutionary future that was promised but nowhere produced by modernism. This is the least that urban theory can still learn from the utopian methods of the Frankfurt School. From that perspective, the crucial line to be drawn in the sand of architecture and urban planning through the last century runs not between what are often customarily referred to as

5. Postmodernism

‘Revolutionaries are not only revolutionaries but also counterrevolutionaries.”

Both Benjamin and Adorno were among the most insightful Northerners to treat the juxtaposition of the two poles, as a misrecognition of the development of new techniques of representation active in late capitalism. Many of the new aesthetic techniques capitalist 'utopias' of the image, and particularly the Dialectics of Enlightenment, which create social utopias not of building but of space—while le...
‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’; it runs between those who found out how a ‘revolution could be avoided’ and those who fought for ‘architecture and revolution’. For it is the former who embraced so readily the ideology of modernization—the episteme of development—and ushered in the reifications of technology and efficiency that have since been regnant in the production of space, not only in the overdeveloped West, but also in the former socialist and still underdeveloped countries long compelled to follow the advanced capitalist world very much on its own economic and imperialist terms of combined and uneven development. While it remains to be seen if the subaltern classes of China or India will offer a break from their rule, the political-economic nature of what appears here to be a deplorable but inevitable triumph of instrumental reason is in fact better theorized in classical Marxist terms: that is, as an outcome of the conceit of liberating humanity by the development of only the forces of production, while safeguarding or indeed spreading on a planetary scale the actually existing relations of production—instead of freeing them from their capitalist forms (Fordist or post-Fordist), and with them, the totality of social relations.

5. Postmodernism = revolutionary reaction

‘Revolutions revolutionize counterrevolutionaries.’ (Debray, 1967)

Both Benjamin and Lefebvre—two of the most insightful Marxist students of the city—certainly saw bourgeois urbanism in this light, as a mismatch between the deployments of new technology and those utopian yearnings active in the social imaginary. Benjamin scholar Susan Buck-Morss identifies capitalist ‘urban “renewal” projects’ in The Dialectics of Seeing as a classic example of reification’, because they ‘attempted to create social utopia by changing the arrangement of buildings and streets—objects in space—while leaving social relationships intact’ (1989, p. 89). In the first volume of Critique of Everyday Life, Lefebvre noted how similar reifications of ‘progress’ also affected state socialism:

‘It is ludicrous to define socialism solely by the development of productive forces. Economic statistics cannot answer the question: “What is socialism?” Men do not fight and die for tons of steel, or for tanks or atomic bombs. They aspire to be happy, not to produce.’ (Lefebvre, 1991 [1947/1958], p. 48)

Their critiques of the ideology of modernization stand worlds apart, however, from those offered by a whole series of anti-modernist manifestos of more or less postmodern urbanism, beginning famously with Jane Jacobs’s devastating attack on urban planners, soon followed by libertarian celebrations of Los Angeles by Reynier Banham and Las Vegas by Robert Venturi as the new postmodern ideal of laissez-faire metropolitan form. The postmodern contribution to urban theory rests largely on elaborations of difference, occasionally with explicit reference to the concept of différence proposed by Derrida and his poststructuralist students harboring a considerable diversity of theoretical and political sensibilities. Here the critical emphasis usually falls on the socially constructed if not historically contingent nature of our social and especially cultural identities, and therefore the political possibility of also questioning them, in order to deconstruct in particular those ‘markers’ such as race, gender and sexuality that demarcate lines of domination in the realm of social relations. Debates on the relationship of such politics to struggles against capitalism—between Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and others—have in fact contributed some of the most original insights into radical urban theory in the last two decades. Yet for the bulk of what passes for postmodern thought in urban planning, the agenda of difference has little to do with deconstruction as such; the inspiration for it,
if it can be called that, comes rather from liberal-populist valorizations of ethnic-cultural identity, more often than not aligned with state-sponsored ideologies of 'multiculturalism'. The 'celebration' of actually existing identities becomes the norm here, if not 'toleration' but never 'critique'. The insidious inadequacies of such postmodern multiculturalisms have been demonstrated by Himani Bannerji in *The Dark Side of the Nation* (Canada); Ambalavanar Sivanandan in *Communities of Resistance and Race and Class* (UK); Vijay Prashad in *The Karma of Brown Folk* (USA); and Alain Badiou in *Ethics, Metapolitics and Polemics* (France). Yet they persist in the left-liberal discursive space of our mongrel cosmopolis, currently in blissful union with the 'creative class', some three decades after the decidedly more 'unhappy marriage' between feminism and Marxism. The regnant celebrations of postmodern difference, that is to say, are at peace with the reifications of capital and state, as such they are a far cry from what Lefebvre called forth by the concept of 'different space' in *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974], pp. 352–400). Needless to add, such advocates of difference are oblivious to the difference between forces and relations of production in identifying modernism with totalitarianism, under the spell of cold war ideology no doubt, while celebrating some version of market populism (mom-and-pop or corporate) as the way to go. Recall how Venturi summed up the distinction between the dull modernist city and the joyous Las Vegas Strip: 'Building for Man' versus 'Building for men (markets)'. The implication of this Hayekian equation of 'men' with 'markets', in case we miss it, is spelled out clearly in *Learning from Las Vegas*: the concern of the architect 'ought not to be with what ought to be but with what is' (Venturi *et al.*, 1972, p. 21). Connoisseurs of such counterrevolutionary counsel are to be found not only in the casino circuits of contemporary capital, but also in the halls of our own academia—wherein the discourses of postmodern urbanism, and a lot of their critiques too, can be counted on studiously to avoid the revolution.

6. Marxist urban theory = excrement of capital

'How much time is it going to take to recognize that the subtitle of *Capital* (Critique of Political Economy) had to be taken literally?' (Lefebvre, 1972, p. 76)²

What happened to radical urbanism after the revolution was derailed by state socialism and taken off the political agenda in the West by military–Keynesianism mirrors the fate suffered by Marxism under the same circumstances. Both registered a debilitating split between practice and theory; or a death of practice compensated by a new life in theory, itself conducted in academia rather than the realm of politics. In *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Perry Anderson underlined that the 'hidden hallmark' of this tradition is one of 'defeat', noting that 'its major works were, without exception, produced in situations of political isolation and despair'. Whereas Marx's own thought moved from philosophy to politics to economics, the trajectory of Western Marxism under these conditions ran in the opposite direction, 'to concentrate overwhelmingly on ... superstructures'. Here 'it was culture that held the central focus of attention' and 'within the realm of culture itself, it was Art that engaged the major intellectual energies and gifts of Western Marxism' (Anderson, 1976, pp. 42, 75–76). The distinctly postmodern phenomenon of 'cultural studies'—or what is simply called *theory*—illustrates but a logical extension of this tendency after the disappointment of political aspirations of the more or less radical left in crisis in the West after 1968. The city as such did not figure prominently in the canon of Western Marxism, it should be noted; although Benjamin, Lefebvre and the Situationists stand as the signal exceptions that prove this rule. When Marxist urban studies came into its own in the 1970s, however, a role to speak of was not yet mentioned; Gustave Lebon, the dead dog; only something intriguing but essentially abandoned than an actualization of Marxist urban theory at a moment to by-pass Western Marxism. Harvey himself and to an extent Harvey and his fellow articulators of Western Marxism brought economics to the fore, ever more sophisticated Hegelian cognitive frameworks and Althusserian allegations; their contribution as a possible counterpoint to the Marxist version of the Frankfurt School was following what Lefebvre called 'space' firmly in the context of *The Urban Revolution*, passing that 'abandoned' to industrial production and down, capital shifting from one 'estate', pointing out the possibilities that real-estate and housing were a principle source for antagonism, and that this, the realization of the estate in that and another population was not to develop in the city, but to explode in the urbanization of the city, the politicization of the situation of the role of the urban space in the crisis of overproduction and vice versa. Thus, crises of overproduction—may yet again be seen as a logical contribution of Western Marxism, as the *Limits of Capital*. Harvey's *Filtering* is, this is the vital dimension in the turn toward a theory of urbanism, espoused of course, in the context of crisis as in the context of change.
its own in the Anglo-American academy in the 1970s, however, none of them played any role to speak of in it: Benjamin was barely mentioned; Guy Debord was as good as a dead dog; only Lefebvre featured here as an intriguing but errant inspiration, no sooner abandoned than invoked. It was the distinction of Marxist urban studies in its formative moment to bypass the entire output of Western Marxism, and return to Marx himself and to his mature work *Capital*. In so doing, the pioneering work of David Harvey and his students reversed the path Western Marxism had travelled from economics to philosophy and art with ever more sophisticated applications of the Hegelian concept of *mediation*, or the Althusserian alternative of *overdetermination*; their contribution to Marxism and valuable counterpart to the substantive trend of the Frankfurt School lay precisely in anchoring what Lefebvre called the 'production of space' firmly in the laws of motion of capital. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre noted in passing that 'as the principal circuit—industrial production—begins to slow down, capital shifts to the second sector, real estate', pointing out how 'it can even happen that real-estate speculation becomes the principle source for the formation of capital, that is, the realization of surplus value'; yet his aim in that and other contemporaneous texts was not to develop a political economy of the city, but to explore more fundamentally the urbanization of the world and the attendant politicization of space. The intricate explanation of the role played by the production of urban space in the accumulation of capital and vice versa—especially in overcoming crises of overproduction or underconsumption—may yet qualify as the major theoretical contribution of critical urban theory to Marxism, as canonically presented in Harvey's *Limits to Capital*. Closely tied to this is the vital development by Neil Smith of a theory of *uneven development*, originally espoused of course by Lenin and Trotsky in the context of classical imperialism, but now focused on the urban and regional scales as well as questions concerning nature–society–history relations. While critical urban theory helped in this way to bring Marxism back to economics by means of space, paralleling Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* more than Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, it shared with Western Marxism, however, a soft spot on politics.

7. Urban political economy = capital + city – politics

'I think what is Marxist, and also Leninist—and in any case true—is the idea that any viable campaign against capitalism can only be political. There can be no economic battle against the economy.' (Badiou, 2001 [1998], p. 105)

'Space', Jameson wrote somewhere, 'is the least mediated expression of capital.' Urbanization in other words bears a more direct relationship than does political struggle or cultural production to the dynamics of capital, which in its case makes that much more neatly determined in the last instance by the economy more real than imagined. Proximity to capital in this sense lends itself to rigorous political–economic conceptions that are more economic and than political. But there is a debt accrued to the real world in exchange for that kind of theoretical precision on the economics of space, which must be paid sometimes with interest when it comes to the politics of space. For while political–economic approaches clearly excel at explaining how the city came to be what it is, they are less adept at saying what a good city may look like, and how we might go from the city we have to the city we love. The structural–functional cast of Marxist urban theory of the 1970s onwards only accentuates both retrospectively and prospectively the value of some key Western Marxists either missing or marginalized within it: Benjamin, Lefebvre and Debord. Benjamin—though not mentioned at all in *In the Urban Question* by Manuel Castells or *Social Justice and the City by Harvey*—found material evidence of
dreams for a liberated life as well as their non-actualization by the logic of capital in the everyday life of the city—especially in his major unfinished work, *Passagenwerk*. Few addressed the persistence of utopia with such originality as he did in the tradition of historical materialism, as something to be actualized by means of a dialectical articulation of unrealized dreams of the past and unconscious ones of the present for a better world with the new technologies of modernism. Here he was on the one hand following a famous letter written by Marx to Arnold Ruge in 1843:

‘Our motto must ... be: reform of consciousness not by means of dogmas, but by analyzing the mythic consciousness unclear to itself, whether it appears religiously or politically. It will then become clear that the world has long possessed in the form of a dream something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in reality.’

And on the other hand, Benjamin was responding to the real challenges of building actually existing communism that he knew from his visits to Moscow in the mid-1920s. In Buck-Morss’s words, his radical contribution to the ‘superstructural’ encounter between new technologies and the onerous desire for a better world consisted in asking how to bring forth

‘both technology and imagination out of their mystic dream states, through making conscious the collective’s desire for social utopia, and the potential of the new nature to achieve it by translating desire into the “new language” of its material forms’. (1989, pp. 124–125)

In their own ways, Lefebvre and Debord also understood the city as the arena for the revolutionary fusion of aesthetics, politics and technology, especially by proposing the concept of everyday life, which even today seems quite alien to political–economic renditions of Marxism. One of their original contributions to Marxism consisted in developing an historical materialist concept of everyday life, a notion hitherto resident most influentially in Heidegger’s philosophy of being, in spite of having been understood politically as the testing ground of the October Revolution by Lenin and Trotsky. The fascinating political–philosophical history of this concept sketched by John Roberts in *Philosophizing the Everyday* and Peter Osborne in *The Politics of Time* offers for us an indispensable lesson: the category of everyday life is as urban and political as it is philosophical. It lies at the heart of radical politics, the locus of which is increasingly the city. As such, everyday life also ought to be the central concern of any radical urban theory not simply content with offering us vivid descriptions of cities and capital, but also intent on producing a new concept of politics—beyond the exhausted attachments to party, state and parliament, not to mention ‘social capital’, ‘civil society’ or ‘citizenship’, none of which are adequate to the struggle for the right to the city.

8. Socialist revolution = urban revolution

‘Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term, or nothing at all.’ (Harvey, 2008, p. 40)

‘Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!’ (Lefebvre, 1984 [1968], p. 204). These are Lefebvre’s words, uttered in unison with Benjamin’s. Together with Debord, he defined Marxism above all as a critique of everyday life, and understood by means of this concept a level of social reality that is dialectically articulated with two other fundamental ones: the urban and the ‘global’, that is, the level of the most general economic and political logics of the social totality (neo-liberalism and neo-dirigisme). In Lefebvre’s work taken as a whole, we thus find a new conception of totality presented in terms of levels of the social, each of which possesses their own dynamic scales, while the city and its level now play a significant role. The radical philosophical contribution by Lefebvre is both *Critique of Urban Revolution* and *Urban Revolution with the City*. It is a new understanding, and nothing less than, of the everyday life. Yet, in which Lefebvre’s city must be read as an addition to the interpretative and democratic list of the right to the city. Lefebvre’s insights still offer an invaluable urban theory today and sharpen its meaning, for example, by Kroner’s theoretical attack on the problematic of graffiti in her penetrating analysis of modernization: as a “hyper-extension of urban experience” that assumes parametric, and imperial conjunctures, as a moment of geography, if not crisis, for the roles assumed by the new world systems. We must not merely grasp the increased immediacy between the urban and the value form as Simmel did for *Soziale Raumformen* and *Mental Life in Civilization*. We cannot abandon today’s urban experience symptomatic statements of Marxism is all the more if we envisage the absence of one of the years of magisterial contribution of Gramsci. But can it be rescued from this condition, while being vigilantly aware of Benjamin and
dynamic scales, and among which the urban level now plays the most decisive mediating role. The radical implication of this contribution by Lefebvre to Marxism is spelled out in both Critique of Everyday Life and The Urban Revolution: there can be no social(ist) revolution without an urban revolution, no urban revolution without a social(ist) revolution, and neither without a revolution in everyday life. This is the backdrop against which Lefebvre’s concept of the ‘right to the city’ must be understood—not as another addition to the self-contradictory liberal-democratic list of ‘human rights’, but rather the right to a radically different world. Lefebvre’s insights on the urban therefore offer an invaluable starting point for radical urban theory to focus its theoretical horizons and sharpen its political vision, as shown, for example, by Kristin Ross’s engagement with the problematic of gender and colonization in her penetrating study of French postwar modernization: Fast Cars, Clean Bodies. The extension of urban theory in such directions assumes paramount import in the current imperial conjuncture, as the far-flung order of our global social totality appears to be at a moment of geo-political-economic reformatizing if not crisis, to enquire into the possible roles assumed by cities and their subjects in a new world system. Such efforts, however, must not merely be descriptive, if we are to grasp the increasingly intimate relationship between the urban form of global space and the value form of global capital, as George Simmel did for his own time in ‘Metropolis and Mental Life’. Neither can they afford to abandon today the question of politics, the symptomatic silence on which in Western Marxism is all the more conspicuous by the absence of one communist in Jameson’s magisterial consummation of this tradition: Gramsci. But can our thoughts of politics be rescued from the grip of capital and state, while being vigilant of them? Adorno once said: ‘economics is no joke, and merely to understand it one has to “think economically”’ (1978, p. 132). The utopian moments of Benjamin and Lefebvre provide us with an orientation to escape the state-capital circuits imprinted in our minds; but we also need a new concept and practice of politics liberated from a transitive relation to capital, as Badiou has pointed out. Not accidentally, he has noted himself in this context the urgency of the ‘fundamental problem’ posed for radical politics today by the global urban condition.4 Badiou’s one-time student Slavoj Zizek recently asked: ‘what if the new proletarian position is that of the inhabitants of the slums of the new megalopolises?’ His Mike Davis-inspired answer: ‘while we should of course resist the easy temptation to elevate and idealize the slum-dwellers into a new revolutionary class, we should nonetheless, in Badiou’s terms, perceive slums as one of the few authentic “evental sites” in today’s society’ (Zizek, 2006, p. 268). Likewise, Tony Negri has underlined the centrality of urban struggles to revolutionary politics today, arguing that ‘the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory used to be to the working class’ (2009 (2002)).5 More proper names may be added to this list of leading thinkers of politics in the world today who have turned on the paramount import of the metropolis for radical praxis, vindicating in no uncertain terms the fundamental thesis of Lefebvre’s The Urban Revolution. It remains for radical urban theory to return the compliment, by heeding the example of Peter Marcuse and the radical core of the Right to the City movement. For its future now rests on delivering a ‘politics of prescription’ (Hallward, 2005, pp. 769–789) capable of doing justice to the emancipatory possibilities alive in our Age of Empire and Planet of Slums.

Notes
1 The expression is Heidi Hartmann’s: see Sargent (1981, pp. 1–41).
2 I am using Stefan Kipfer’s translation here.
3 Benjamin quotes these words of Marx in the famous Konvolut N (section of method) of his Passagenwerk; this translation is from Buck-Morss (1989, p. 261).
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Kanisbla Goonewardena was trained as an architect in Sri Lanka and now teaches urban design and critical theory at the University of Toronto. Email: kanisbla@geog.utoronto.ca

Planning theory questions and a political urban theory: to say that only a political urban theory can aim to develop political resources in the face of which both critics and practitioners share a duplicity of opinion, is not to trace the entangled theorizations about the right to the city, planning, here to planning. The paper is organized according to this theoretical alignment: the right to the city, urban planning, here to urban design.

The right to the city, urban planning, and urban design: normative project and politics of the present; right to the city, urban planning, and urban design: normative project and politics of the present.

Katharine Melville

Introduction

Planning the urban is critical. What does urban theory mean? I want to ask: planning, urban theory, left to the city, urban planning, urban design: normative project and politics of the present; right to the city, urban planning, urban design: normative project and politics of the present.

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