The Political Difference

While the conceptual differentiation between "politics" and "the political" (or la politique and le politique) can be traced back, in the French context, to Paul Ricoeur's "The Political Paradox,"1 it forcefully reemerged in the 1980s when many philosophers—among them Jean-François Lyotard, Claude Lefort, Alain Badiou, Jacob Rogozinski, Jacques Rancière, and Étienne Balibar—were invited by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to give lectures at the Center for Philosophical Research on the Political (Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique) and discuss what the founders referred to as the "retreat of the political." From then on what can be called "the political difference" has been canonized as a basic conceptual differentiation. As I have presented the emergence and genealogy of the political difference, from Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt to contemporary French thought, at length, I will not narrate the same story again. What I would like to reflect on are some of the consequences that might be drawn from this conceptual differentiation.² For what is at stake is not a philological question, it is the very way in which we imagine our political and social universe.

In order to tease out these consequences, however, one first has to gain a clear sense of the very status of this difference and the reasons for its emergence. And here we immediately register the uncanny resemblance of the political difference to Martin Heidegger's "ontological difference": that is, the difference between an "ontic" realm of beings (in our case, the realm
of politics as we know it) and the “ontological” realm of being (in metaphysics, logos, idea, substance, or ground). Heidegger’s claim is that metaphysics has always differentiated between beings and being, yet this difference has never come into view as difference. Similarly, we have to say that in contemporary political thought, there is frequent use made of the political difference but rarely is it asked what we have to make of this difference as difference. Thinkers such as Badiou, Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, or Nancy may make diverse, if not opposing, use of it (sometimes shifting the normative emphasis from the political to politics), but why do they all consider the difference to be of importance? Why was a need felt in political thought to introduce it?

My suspicion is that the political difference emerged out of a historical conjuncture in which it was increasingly realized that neither can our social world be based on a firm ground or ultimate principle, nor is it entirely without any ground or principle (we are not living in a void)—rather it is based on what Judith Butler calls “contingent foundations.”¹ These foundations will always be plural, they will be established only temporarily, they can be reversed, and they have to be established against conflicting foundational attempts. It makes sense, therefore, to describe theories that register the contingent and yet necessary nature of social foundations as postfoundingational rather than simply antifoundational. Now, it is also clear that our conventional notion of politics—as a functional system among others—would be too narrow to account for this process of contingent, temporary, conflictual, and plural grounding of all social relations. Hence, the political difference was introduced because it was felt we would need a broader concept in order to account for the more, indeed, for the fundamental function of grounding or reinstituting a world whose grounds had become fungible.

At the same time, if we retain the Heideggerian perspective, the process of grounding can never be put to a halt, given that all grounds are contingent and temporary. If for Heidegger the ontological never appears as such, if it always recedes and still chiasmatically intertwines with the ontic, this is because the differential play between the ontological and the ontic never stops. Don’t we have to assume an analogous relation between the political and politics? Isn’t the political, understood as the grounding or instituting moment of the social, constantly searching for its ontic actualization via politics? Isn’t politics, on the other hand, necessarily “touched” by the political, without ever merging with it (because in the latter case a firm ground would have been reached)? However, even postfoundingationalists who are prepared to agree on the differential nature of politics and the
political may still ask, So what? Are you not playing around with abstract concepts that have nothing to do with our social reality? And if not, what follows from the political difference?

The Political Difference and the Democratic Antinomy

Of course, from a postfoundational stance nothing follows with necessity from the differential play between politics and the political (this would be the case only if an ultimate ground had been found—an option excluded by postfoundationalists ex hypothesi). Hence, the consequences drawn will not be necessary but, rather, plausible consequences. They have to stand the less-than-difficult test of plausibility when confronted with both the philosophical world of arguments and the phenomenal world of politics. I wish to draw attention to two of these consequences. First, against the new antidemocrats among postfoundationalists, most prominently Slavoj Žižek and Badiou, I would defend the idea of democracy as a regime adequate to our postfoundational condition, provided that by the name democracy we understand the meeting point between a political and an ethical logic. I will argue that the long-forgotten concept of solidarity can be located at this meeting point. Second, I contend that ordinary politics has been ignored by most theorists of the political, and we need to reconstruct an adequate understanding of political action.

Let us first reflect on the implications for democracy theory. We have recognized the differential play between politics and the political as something of the order of a conceptual symptom of the ultimately groundless nature of the social. It is immediately evident that it would be a non sequitur to see in ultimate groundlessness (and the need to reground the social) the feature of a particular political regime. It is an ontological condition rather than the condition of a particular ontic politics. If this is the case, the groundless nature of the social may very well characterize all regimes and is not a privilege of democratic societies. Consequently, the specific difference between democracy and any other regime does not lie in the fact that one will have to cope with the irresolvable contingency of social affairs—which is the case in every regime. We have to look for it in the different ways in which regimes relate to this fact. While in some the absence of an ultimate ground of the social is negated, repressed, or disavowed, in democracy this absence is institutionally accepted, even promoted.

For this reason, it makes sense to define as democratic those symbolic arrangements of a given society that help to accept the ultimate fail-
ure of any attempt at grounding this very society, thus bringing to presence the very absence of an ultimate ground. Democracy openly turns the failure of foundation—which in other regimes may remain a hidden, dirty secret—into its very own ground. It is not the war machine of “capitalo-parliamentarism,” as Badiou and Žižek (after his Leninist turn) claim. Rather, it is an ethical exigency by which politics is not only confronted with contingency—that is to say, the absence of an ultimate ground—but forced to accept contingency as necessary. I call this dimension ethical because we have to agree that it is, precisely, not political. It necessarily interrupts the logic of grounding and impedes political action. In politics we are all foundationalists; we seek to lay new grounds and not to doubt our own capacity to do so. To accept the groundlessness of our actions democratically, hence, means to undermine the basis of these very actions. Hence, democracy is sensu stricto unpolitical, to use Roberto Esposito’s concept.

However, and here the next problem kicks in, democracy as a particular and historically defined way of instituting the social cannot evade the necessity of foundation. Even as it remains ungroundable in the last instance, it still has to be grounded time and again, at least provisionally. We are therefore confronted with an antinomy. On the one hand, in democracy the impossibility of a final foundation—and hence the impossibility of eventually realizing the democratic project once and for all—is institutionally accepted. On the other, the democratic regime is forced to supplement with “contingent foundations” a ground that necessarily remains absent. In this sense, democracy is a political project like any other. It emerges, historically, from social struggles, it has to be implemented against resistance and powerful enemies, and its crumbling foundations have to be reassembled and reinstituted constantly if it is to have a future. If this is the case, the same institutions that are supposed to ground democracy have also to signal the impossibility of instituting democracy. In other words, democracy, or a politics of democraticization, emerges, on the one hand, out of a political project that aims at hegemonically overcoming rival projects and instituting itself, yet on the other hand, the democratic project is in constant danger of self-subversion, of deliberately undermining the very foundation it seeks to institute, and of opening potential inroads for antidemocratic attacks.

Democratic Solidarity

One thing should have become clear from this argument: the democratic ethics of the unpolitical is not an unpolitical ethics. It is nothing less than
a political ethics—otherwise we would let loose of the political end of the
antinomy, thus running the danger of ethicizing politics ideologically. A
democratic ethics has to be inscribed into the flesh of the social politically.
And this can be done only through a political project of radical democra-
tization. The political institutions of the democratic dispositive—a point
made by Arendt with regard to the institutions of the republic—rely on new
beginnings, new efforts at instituting democracy time and again. There is
an activist component involved in democratic politics and in the ethics of
democracy. And there is a political concept that could live up to the task
by providing a sort of “missing link” between the ethical side of accepting
the ungroundable nature of democracy and the political side of radicalizing
democracy: the concept of solidarity.

In fact, the notion of solidarity does not belong to either of the two
traditions of egalitarianism or liberalism that in postfoundational demo-
cratic thought tend to be paradoxically combined (one has to think of Bali-
bar’s concept of égaliberté or Mouffe’s notion of a democratic paradox).7
In its classical rendering as fraternity it brought a more communitarian
component into political discourse. For a long time solidarity referred to a
mutual bond within a given social group or community—solidarity among
those similar to each other. A democratic notion of solidarity, though,
runs counter to this idea. It has a built-in dimension of self-alienation.
From a postfoundational perspective the term makes sense only where
one declares oneself in solidarity with others who are not already part of
the same community—just think of the case of worldwide solidarity with
the antiapartheid struggle of the African National Congress. Otherwise we
would be speaking about interest politics or identity politics, not solidarity.
An important consequence follows: in order to establish a relation of soli-
darity with someone who precisely does not share my own position (and
provided one does not want to fall into the trap of paternalism), I will have
to, at least partially, disidentify with my own position and identity. I have
to desolidarize myself from the community to which I belong. From the
perspective of this community, solidarity with someone outside its bor-
ders will always be suspicious. It will always be considered a form of trea-
son, because it means to further and promote foreign interests, interests
that may run counter to those of my own community. This is precisely the
reason why solidarity cannot be an entirely political concept and why it
keeps contact with the realm of the unpolitical and the ethical. It implies
that one’s own political project should be open to heterogeneous demands,
an openness that may undermine the vigor of one’s project and may force
the latter to deviate from its course (herein lies the difference between soli-
darity and the Leninist idea of class alliances). In this sense we may have found in the concept of solidarity a tenuous link between the ethical and the political. As a political concept, and it is a political concept, solidarity still registers an ethical demand for self-alienation—for degrounding one's own identity—and translates it into the language of political demands.

**Passing through the Fantasy of Grand Politics**

The discussion of solidarity has shown that a democratic ethics, when implemented politically, is far from being the harmless and conformist affair as it is portrayed by the new antidemocrats. To call for solidarity, in the ethical sense, is to call for treason. It is inconceivable why the new antidemocrats—such as Žižek, Badiou and their followers, but also the Invisible Committee, which authored *The Coming Insurrection*—consider their insurrectionist and revolutionist big bang theories so much more radical. This is all the more surprising, as in their accounts politics tends to disappear completely. Instead of political action they recommend what one may call the fantasy of “grand politics.” Badiou recommends “fidelity” toward a rare and grandiose truth event (that a subject may encounter once in a lifetime, like Paul did on the road to Damascus); and Žižek speaks about “the Act”—as opposed to *action*—which is not a matter of strategic deliberation but of leaping into a strategic vacuum. According to Žižek's narrative of grand politics, Lenin, by seizing the revolutionary opportunity and intervening in a situation that appeared premature, had thrown himself into the abyss of the revolutionary act. The highly problematic aspect of this narrative is not only that Žižek returns to a grotesque Kim Il-sungish version of the larger-than-life revolutionary (it was Lenin's lonely decision that in the end effected the revolution)—and I assume that Lenin himself would have denounced such a strange idea of politics as a clear case of Blanquism and adventurism. What is even more problematic is that politics is thereby based on the phantasmatic idea of a total break or rupture with a given situation. What results from this is a politics of the *political*, that is, of a direct and unmediated instantiation of a new ground. Thereby the difference between politics and the political is collapsed, as it is explicitly claimed by the Invisible Committee in its manifesto, in which the collective makes a plea for violent insurrection as an instantiation of the “purely political” uncompromised by ordinary politics.

I submit that with fantasies like these we rid ourselves of all intellectual and political gains of postfoundationalism and of the political dif-
ference in particular. The consequence is not more politics, but none. And indeed, Žižek and Badiou explicitly recommend that as long as one cannot effect the radical break with a given situation one should rather abstain from acting altogether—as every political action will be complicit with capitalo-parliamentarism. But if political acting is deemed impossible—unless the grand revolutionary subject appears out of nowhere—one can hope only for things collapsing by themselves. Hence, it is not surprising in the least that with Žižek’s recent book we witness the return of an apocalyptic vision of the world. According to Žižek, we are supposedly “living in the end times.” Nonsense like this, as well as the corresponding fantasy of grand politics, is fueled by a double disappointment: on the one hand, many on the left are disappointed by the deplorable state of conventional politics, where the neoliberal consensus has broadened to an extent that makes it difficult, in the West, to detect any differences among political parties. On the other hand, what has been called micropolitics—where the slightest act of individual subversion is considered political—is not a feasible alternative for many social movement activists who, indeed, want to act politically, not micropolitically. In other words, there is a new sense evolving that acting politically means acting collectively, it means acting strategically, it means confronting a rather complicated formation of obstacles and inimical powers (rather than a dichotomous relation between the revolutionaries and “the State”), and it implies the necessity to organize.

**Minimal Politics**

The criteria just mentioned stenographically make up the categorial nucleus of every politics that is worth the name. They, in a sense, constitute the minimal conditions of political action: collectivity, strategy, conflictuality, organization. Of course, such a notion of politics does not necessarily follow from the political difference. But it offers a description of our political world much more plausible than the ideas of either the nostalgic defenders of revolutionism or the romantic proponents of micropolitical subversion. From this perspective, politics is not about taking a blind leap of faith; it is a process of acting in a contingent situation on a terrain of immanence, criss-crossed by a plurality of antagonisms. While there will always be, of course, a moment of adventurism involved in the Žižekian sense—for, obviously, in politics one always takes a risk—strategic considerations, necessitated by the plethora of obstacles one encounters, remain an intrinsic part of political action.
This is exactly the reason why I think that it is of political importance to cling to the difference between politics and the political. We need a notion of the political, understood as the ontological moment of an initial grounding of the social—a moment that as such, and contrary to what the Invisible Committee seems to think, cannot be reached. But we also need a notion of politics, because the moment of contingent foundation will always have to be reactualized through ontic practices of ordinary political action. The latter, interestingly, has not received sufficient attention in the debates on the political difference. While there is a lot of discussion going on about the sublime nature of the political, interest in establishing the conditions of today’s “actually existing” political activism is negligible in the debate on the political difference. But we have to understand that, as a consequence of the chiasmatic nature of the political difference, the ontic side of politics is of as much importance as the ontological side of the political. Consequently, we have to develop a more flexible and yet determined notion of politics—one no longer afflicted by the question of scale, of intensity or the unconditionality of the act. In contrast to ideas of grand politics and micropolitics, we can meaningfully speak about politics whenever the minimal conditions of collectivity, strategy, conflictuality, and organization are met—no matter how big the collective, how effective the strategy, how intense the conflict, and how good (or bad) the organization. A renewed reflection on politics will have to rehabilitate the smallest political acts and the most modest achievements that are, provided the conditions are met, as political as the greatest revolution. What we need, in other words, to capture a world filled with less than grandiose political actions is a notion of what I would like to call minimal politics—which is politics in a rather straightforward sense but on a minor scale. Minimal politics can be found all around us all the time. The political difference, understood as the ceaseless play between an ontologically retreating ground and an imperfect ontic attempt at grounding, may remind us of this—and of the fact that even the biggest political upheavals will be supported by little actions in large numbers.

Notes
2 I have presented the main lines of this debate in Oliver Marchart, Post-foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). The implications of the political difference for democracy theory and minimal politics have been extensively discussed in the
extended German version of the book, Oliver Marchart, *Die politische Differenz* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2010).


4 A third set of consequences, which I have discussed in *Post-foundational Political Thought*, concerns the ontological implications on the side of the political. I claim that, given the reciprocal nature of the political difference, we do not need to think politics only ontologically (as the political), but we also need to think ontology politically. Every ontology, it follows, is essentially a political ontology.


8 The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009).


10 As Žižek wraps up his and Badiou’s pseudo-radical passivism: “To circumscribe the contours of this radical rejection, one is tempted to evoke Badiou’s provocative thesis: ‘It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent.’ Better to do nothing than to engage in localised acts the ultimate function of which is to make the system run more smoothly (acts such as providing space for the multitude of new subjectivities). The threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to ‘be active,’ to ‘participate,’ to mask the nothingness of what goes on. People intervene all the time, ‘do something’; academics participate in meaningless debates, and so on. The truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw.” Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 183.


12 I’m referring to a tendency to celebrate supposedly resistant everyday practices as it is to be found, for instance—with reference to Michel de Certeau—in the work of John Fiske. See John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991).
Taking Up Space: Anthropology and embodied protest

Drawing on experiences of the McGill University student occupations, Sheehan Moore calls for an anthropology of the body in protest.

On November 10, 2011, two students hid in a bathroom in the James Administration building at McGill University in Montreal. When they received word that an anti-tuition hike protest was reaching the campus’s main Roddick Gates, they let twelve others in through the building’s back door and together ascended to the fifth floor. The students, some of them masked or hooded, blocked doors with their bodies and proceeded to occupy administrative offices for a total of eight minutes before being forcibly removed by McGill Security.1 Two days later in a letter to The McGill Daily, the fourteen occupiers wrote:

By crossing the boundaries that authorities have forced on us, by taking up space where our presence is prohibited and our agency denied, we triggered a response that exposes the necessary violence with which the hierarchical power structure confronting students is enforced. […] The narratives of the corporate media, the police, and the administration will aim at a common end: a return to the status quo in which they control our spaces and our bodies. But we are engaged in a struggle that is far from over. We must continue to move beyond the liberal model of ‘discourse’ that has only served to maintain unjust power relations and control. Acting boldly and defying prescribed boundaries, we subvert the logic of submission.2

The November 10 occupation, as well as the occupation of the same building in February 2012, can be located within a long tradition of similar protests at universities that dates back to the early 1960s. Additionally, both incidents arrived at a time when occupation loomed large in the public consciousness: from the revolutionary encampments in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, to the Indignants in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol, to the Occupy movement, protesters across the world began moving into spaces and refusing to leave.

Occupations differ from other forms of protest like marches and rallies primarily in their temporal and spatial persistence, and in this sense they allow for more of an explicit meditation on the role of the persisting, protesting body. However, the majority of literature on the topic, as I outline below, tends to foreground the discursive dimensions of protests and occupations, focusing almost exclusively on demands and goals as the only “whys” for protest. Through this fairly limited analytic lens, we can easily lose sight of an important bodily dimension of protest that exceeds the stated or assumed politics of a demonstration or occupation. When we try to understand only the causes and intended effects of protest, we obscure their material nature and erase the physical bodies that enter – out of perceived necessity – into spaces that are forbidden to them. What would it mean to treat forms of protest like occupations not only as declarative – i.e., as political statements – but also as embodied and spatial practice?3

After a short overview of the rise of university occupations, the historical tactics they draw on, and the context in which they emerged as a form of protest, I turn to the two McGill occupations
during the 2011-2012 academic year, outlining the events and the general shape of the occupiers’ discourse. My primary aim here is to suggest some ways an anthropology of embodiment might approach occupations theoretically and methodologically, and specifically, how the way occupiers past and present talk about bodies can point us towards a reading of occupation as a bodily practice rather than merely political discourse. A reflection on the role of bodies persisting in spaces where they are forbidden from doing so is crucial to understanding why protesters continue to choose occupation as a tactic. To this end, I draw on theoretical work by Judith Butler and Edward Soja that locates meaningful and material bodies in contested and constructed spaces, and argue that such interventions may be thought about as opening up the ‘political’ or an ‘alter’ politics, as the terms are used by Miriam Ticktin and Ghassan Hage, respectively.

A brief history of occupation

On December 2, 1964, approximately one thousand students and other supporters of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley entered Sproul Hall, then the seat of the university’s administration, in what would become the first modern occupation of a university as a means of political protest on record. This was the occasion of Mario Savio’s famous call to action, issued from the steps of the hall, which related the protesters’ political convictions to certain political imperatives impressed on their bodies:

“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even tacitly take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you’re free, the machines will be prevented from working at all.”

From the beginning, then, university occupations have been presented by those engaging in them as a means of intervening physically into the prescribed means of
participation and decision-making – the ‘machine’. With these traditional avenues of democratic opposition non-functioning or foreclosed upon, dissent becomes, necessarily, an embodied action for those who decide they have no recourse except to occupy – to prevent the university machines from working at all.

In the decades leading up to the Berkeley revolt, occupations and similar tactics had gained increasing traction as a form of protest: university occupations can trace their tactical roots to the first sit-down strikes in the US in the early twentieth century. These were initiated first by workers unionised under the International Workers of the World (IWW), including General Electric employees in New York in 1906, and were quickly adopted as a tactic only in ceasing work, but also blocking replacement workers from entering factories and continuing production. Out of this tradition, and beginning in the 1940s, sit-in protests became associated with the civil rights movement in the United States, spreading rapidly across the American South following the February 1960 sit-ins at a Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina. But before Berkeley, student occupations of university spaces were virtually unheard of, not yet figuring in the ‘tactical repertoires’ of student protesters.

The emergence of occupation at this moment in California likely resulted from both the contemporary context of protest and activism – the association of sit-ins with labour and civil rights movements and with growing nationwide opposition to the war in Vietnam – as well as from the increasing diversity of the student population. During this postwar period, in the United States as well as in Canada, universities saw a massive surge in enrolment encouraged by the allocation of public funds. This ‘golden age’ of universities, full of the promises of education’s democratisation and a learned populace, saw university enrolment in Canada increase more than tenfold from 1956 to 1966, with comparable rates in the United States. In part, this meant universities became – relatively speaking – more accessible and open for many of those who historically had been excluded from the ranks of its students and faculty – including women, people of colour, and those whose class background barred them from elite campuses.

Thus, while university protest up to this point in the North American context had focused for the most part on issues of internal governance, most often taking the form of more or less harmless pranks, the post-war student body increasingly recognized itself as connected to broader social movements beyond the campus gates – anti-war movements, civil rights, labour, and so on. Out of this background, and with a student body growing in
its militancy, the Berkeley occupation became, in the words of former Berkeley sociologist Seymour Lipset, the ‘prototype event of the student movement’. A wave of university occupations followed the Berkeley revolt: the London School of Economics in 1966-67; Columbia University, McGill University, and the Sorbonne in 1968; Concordia University and City College of New York the following year; and recurrently in the decades since.

While the number of occupations has fluctuated with the political climate, a recent upsurge in the number and visibility of occupations has followed the implementation of austerity measures (most often entailing tuition hikes) resulting from the 2008 global financial crisis: students initiated austerity-related occupations of university buildings in the 2008-2009 academic year in the UK, California, and New York, multiple anti-government occupations in the UK in 2010, and occupations of University of California campuses in 2011 and 2012. Concurrent with a philosophy that went global through the Occupy Wall Street movement, recent university occupations have shown a markedly decreased interest in the formulation of specific demands that must be met as conditions of an end to the protest. Instead, many of those occupying have rallied under the slogan, ‘Occupy everything, demand nothing’.

2011-2012: Occupations at McGill

In total, fourteen students occupied sections of the fifth floor of the James building on November 10, 2011. During those eight minutes before their interception by the McGill Security Team, the occupiers explored the principal’s office and adjoining rooms, dropping from a window a banner that read ‘10 Nov. Occupons McGill’ (‘Let’s Occupy McGill’). After their removal they negotiated their amnesty with administrators, as well as the amnesty of those who had subsequently and spontaneously occupied the second floor of the building in solidarity. Across campus, certain other buildings were put on card-key access only, preventing protesters and bystanders from entering buildings surrounding the square while riot police used batons, pepper spray, and tear gas to disperse the large support rally that had formed outside. In their letter to The McGill Daily, quoted above, the fourteen occupiers made it clear that their occupation had been without demands, and that it was instead a response to the deterioration of lines of communication on campus, repression of striking non-academic workers, the lack of student representation in

many of those occupying have rallied under the slogan, ‘Occupy everything, demand nothing’

Photo by Victor Tangermann.
governance, and austerity measures advocated by a Board of Governors populated by CEOs, real estate moguls, McKinsey & Co. directors and mining executives. The occupiers specifically link their actions to both the Quebec-wide student movement and to the increasing neoliberalisation of society, in which they identify the university as a key player. ‘It is time to of what the administration deems acceptable’.17

Almost exactly three months later, on February 7, 2012, twenty-three students occupied the office of Deputy Provost Morton Mendelson on the sixth floor of the James building in what would come to be known as the #6party occupation, in reference to the hashtag used for Twitter updates. Unlike results of two referendum votes on the existence of the Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) and Radio CKUT – both of which votes administrators had nullified the previous month – and that the Deputy Provost resign.18

As on November 10, the planned #6party occupation prompted a spontaneous occupation of a lower level of the building: upon hearing that students were on the sixth floor, a group of students, myself included, entered the building’s lobby around 11:30am, but were blocked from staircases and elevators by security. Over the course of the evening, sixty to one hundred students and professors came and went freely in the lobby, teaching courses, holding informal discussions, and serving food, even after an eviction notice was served at 3:30pm. Around 8:45pm, a member of McGill’s Security Services announced to those occupying the lobby that they were free to leave, but would no longer be allowed to reenter.19 Roughly twenty students spent the night sleeping on the lobby floor, forced to use bottles and eventually a cooler as toilets in the absence of accessible lobby-level washrooms. At 11:30 next morning, the remaining students chose to leave the lobby of their own accord en masse, and were greeted by a support rally and reporters. The sixth-floor occupation, meanwhile,
continued until the morning of February 12, when the McGill administration asked Montreal police to evict the remaining nine students (the others had gradually left in the preceding days).

Neither of the occupation’s demands were ultimately met. But notably, when talking with student occupiers about #6party now, the conversation is almost always about the experience of the occupation – nearly universally viewed as positive and exciting – rather than about its technical failure in terms of actual demands. This is not to say that supporting both CKUT and QPIRG was not a priority for the lobby and sixth floor occupations – there were constant negotiations with administrators, and the bulk of the discussion and media coverage at the time made it clear that the actions taken were taken to defend student organisations from administrative overreach. But what sticks with those who occupied now, over a year later, is the act itself and not the immediate motives behind it. This could be dismissed as self-centredness on the part of occupiers, but I think it is worth lingering here on the feelings people have towards the act of occupation, on the fact that occupation can signify – can be meaningful – in excess of political declarations or demands. The physical, embodied action itself is a crucial aspect of this meaningfulness. In what follows, I suggest a methodological approach to occupation that centres on the role of the body in protest, arguing that bodily practices, independent of declared demands, can work to create alternative political situations.

**Occupation as embodied practice**

In thinking about what those alternatives may be, I want to take up some of Ghassan Hage’s proposals for a critical anthropology directed towards the ‘radical political imaginary’. To this end, Hage draws a distinction between a critical sociology and a critical anthropology: Critical sociology invites or initiates a reflexive analytical act that induces an understanding: it invites us to see how our social world is constituted and the way it can be unmade and remade by us. Critical anthropology, appropriately enough, is more akin to the shamanic act of inducing a haunting: indeed it encourages us to feel haunted at every moment of our lives by what we are/could be that we are not. In this sense critical sociology uncovers social forces and social relations that are believed to be already having a causal effect on us regardless of whether we are aware of them or not (class relations, gender relations, etc.), critical anthropology invites us to become aware of and to animate certain social forces and potentials that are lying dormant in our midst. In so doing it incites what was not causal to become so. Among these potentials are those ‘emerging social spaces

riot police used batons, pepper spray, and tear gas to disperse the large support rally that had formed outside
demands presented by occupiers is to read these occupations as if they were simply petitions to political figures, albeit petitions signed in the flesh. We risk missing important dimensions of radical practice when our approach is limited so narrowly to the policies and practices that occupations oppose, and to weighing their chosen tactics against their demands. Yet this has taken up the majority of commentary about occupations at McGill and beyond.\textsuperscript{24} We can locate this merely political discursive analysis within what Hage calls a politics of ‘anti’ – that is, a politics that is primarily deconstructive and oppositional.\textsuperscript{25} ‘Anti’ politics sits on the other end of a spectrum from an ‘alter’ politics, which addresses itself to open-ended alternative physical and political realities. And while almost any political or social movement will tend to incorporate both, providing an oppositional critique while opening up alternatives, this latter aspect is easily overlooked. Asking why about protest tends to mean merely in response to what: to protest is, after all, almost always to oppose or to resist, and the politics of protest are, on the surface at least, ‘anti.’

But to get to try and understand occupation anthropologically requires attending to alterity, looking for the ‘otherness-within-us’ to which Hage returns repeatedly, and extending our view beyond mere politics. It is useful here to draw on the distinction Miriam Ticktin makes between politics and the political in her work on humanitarianism: the former is ‘a set of practices by which order is created and maintained’ while the latter ‘refers to the disruption of an established order’.\textsuperscript{26} Politics – including the oppositional politics imaginary, can help us approach occupation in a way that is attentive not only to the politics of the action – the demands, the policies or machinery being explicitly opposed, and so on – but also to the possibility of the political and to the challenges occupying bodies pose to the current parameters set on politics.

In this sense, the body is central to the work occupations do in shifting from ‘politics’ to the ‘political’. Consistently, university occupiers and their supporters frame their bodily transgression of campus spaces as being a response to the failure of available lines of communication, dissent, and participation – that is, to the failure of politics in Ticktin’s sense of the word. For instance, citing a crackdown on various forms of dissent by McGill’s upper administration – from injunctions against striking workers, to disciplinary charges brought against students engaging in peaceful teach-ins,\textsuperscript{27} to security personnel filming faculty and students participating in approved forms of non-disruptive protest\textsuperscript{28} – McGill professors Hasana Sharp and Will Roberts wrote on November 14, 2011, of the necessity of the occupation that had occurred four days prior:

\begin{quote}
In 1997, students occupied the same offices as last
\end{quote}
week. They came with a list of demands, stayed for three days, and left peaceably when the administration refused to negotiate on the demands. The occupiers last week made no demands. Occupy everything, demand nothing. That is their watchword. This is not the frightening or confusing development people seem to think it is. If occupations do not make demands, that means they are not engaging in mercenary activity. The occupiers were not holding the Principal’s office hostage. They just want to talk and be heard. They occupy to short-circuit the usual channels by which concerns get mediated and diluted, and arguments get muted to the point of inaudibility. 

Sharp and Roberts, echoing the rhetoric of occupiers at McGill and at universities in North America and Europe over the past five years or so, assert the centrality of occupation in light of the shortcomings of ‘the usual channels’. By physically occupying a space without issuing demands, protesters intervene not through these channels, but into them, blocking them from operating and, in that very action, opening up a sort of free-space for the possibilities of new kinds of communication and participation in the university.

It is significant that the administration-sanctioned modes of participation at McGill are almost entirely immaterial (in both senses of the word). They take the form of websites where questions to the principal can be up- or down-voted, live-streamed videos of Senate meetings that have limited opportunity for physical attendance or else are closed to spectators altogether, and online voting on referenda about student life. When students appear physically to protest the insufficiency of these channels by sitting in the offices in which the real decision-making is assumed to take place, it becomes crucial to direct our attention to the way their presence asserts itself against this immateriality.

Doing so situates our methodological approach within the kind of materialism that Lock and Farquhar identify as central to an anthropological regard for the body. Unlike the dualistic or Cartesian materialism that has been theoretically dominant since the Enlightenment, or the empiricist and positivistic materialism critiqued by anthropologies of science, a materialism of embodiment is attentive to even these ‘empirical’ bodily practices as sites of meaning-making inextricable from human experience. Judith Butler helps to reconcile post-structuralist and feminist critiques of a supposedly pre-social materialism with this new materialism, arguing that theoretical attention to matter and embodiment means situating the body as constructed, but acknowledging the conditions and lived ‘realness’ of this constructed body.

Butler has also recently suggested some ways to approach the embodiment of occupation. In a talk given in Venice in September 2011, just days before Occupy Wall Street pitched their first tents, she drew on the recent Egyptian revolution in order to propose a politics based in a shared precarity of the physical body. Butler argues here that when protests manifest and persist in space, ‘the very public character of the space is being disputed and even fought over when these crowds gather’:

So though these movements have depended on the prior existence of pavement, street, and square, and have often enough gathered in squares, like Tahrir, whose political history is potent, it is equally true that the collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture.

Similarly, in ‘seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments’, occupiers make claims to the material supports of the body is central to the work occupations do in shifting from ‘politics’ to the ‘political’
certain aspects of life at the university – participation, political appearance, and being heard – that are otherwise perceived as being denied to them. Butler takes up and reconfigures Hannah Arendt’s notion of the ‘space of appearance’, in part as a means of understanding how ‘power operates prior to any performative power exercised by a plurality’ to structure public and private spaces in ways that make political appearance difficult to impossible for certain bodies. In the case of the McGill occupations, we can think here about the strategies of power that constrain the parameters of politics (again, in Ticktin’s terminology) to the realm of the nonphysical. Occupations that either make no demands – or that are remembered one year later for reasons other than the failure or success of their demands – remain meaningful for the way that the bodies involved, through their physical, spatial transgression, make political claims or demands that are inarticulable in the conventional discursive sense. Butler addresses this possibility, alluding to the then-recent occupation of university buildings at Goldsmiths in London:

[The symbolic meaning of seizing these buildings is that these buildings belong to the public, to public education; it is precisely the access to public education which is being undermined by fee and tuition hikes and budget cuts; we should not be surprised that the protest took the form of seizing the buildings, performatively laying claim to public education, insisting on gaining literal access to the buildings of public education precisely at a moment, historically, when that access is being shut down.]

The performative capacity of bodies that Butler draws on here is key to understanding the material aspects of occupation. It is this performativity that opens up the political by redefining, if only for minutes or days, the limits on politics at the university. In the case of the #6party, the use of the word ‘party’ rather than ‘occupation’ to refer to their actions is in part a gesture towards the openness to a new sense of the political that those participating attempted to engage. When McGill Provost Anthony Masi tried to talk to those in the lobby during #6party about why they were there and why they refused to leave, one student is quoted in The McGill Daily citing precisely the failure of conventional decision-making as a motive for occupation: ‘We have these discussions over and over. [...] The point is that all these decisions come to nothing. Everybody knows we’ve done this repeatedly, so we’re not going to do this again. [...] We came to have a party.’

In recognizing the way that the performative body can intervene in spaces to open them up to new sorts of political existence, anthropology is well poised to build theoretical bridges across disciplines, and particularly to a tradition of critical geography. The ‘spatial turn’ that emerged in the humanities and social sciences most notably from the work of Marxist geographer and sociologist Henri Lefebvre has led to a body of literature on the geographies of protest (especially in relation to urban space). The work of geographer Edward Soja, which addresses the spatiality of social justice movements in large urban centres, is valuable in approaching occupation here for its notion...
of ‘spatial consciousness’ – defined as ‘an awareness that oppression, marginality, and inequality are produced and reproduced to a significant degree through the new urbanization processes and the restructured socio-spatialities of urbanism’. Mapping this urban geographical term onto practices of collective struggle and contention within smaller, more institutional settings like universities helps direct our attention towards the lived physical and material dimensions of protest – those aspects of protest that are inextricably linked to the politics at hand, but which may not be accounted for in a merely discursive account that aims to envelope only the ‘facticity’ of an occupation. If Ticktin’s ‘political’ involves challenging the very parameters of contention that politics sustain, then we need to examine, similarly, the parameters imposed on our uses of space and the ways political protest disrupts those prescribed uses. What kinds of thinking shape the parameters for what is possible within the spaces of the university? How does protest create new possibilities? These questions seem foundational to an anthropological approach that takes the embodied, ‘political’ dimensions of occupation seriously.

* Occupation is necessary, writes former McGill student Erin Reunions in a 1998 alternative student handbook, when students are no longer able to participate and express dissent through the avenues the university has established for this purpose. The prescribed channels for communication – for democratic participation in life at the university – are ignored or ineffective, and the only response is to occupy, to ‘take up space’. Occupations and similar forms of protest, as physical manifestations of bodies into the spaces of the university, rewrite the parameters of those spaces and allow us to participate, feel, and hope differently, even if only briefly. When it is over, we might be ‘haunted’, to use Hage’s word, by what was made possible during those minutes, days, or months, even as the immediate causes of the occupation fade from memory.

I’ve attempted to outline a way of thinking about occupation that pays specific attention to the role of the bodily in collective dissent. The work of Hage and Ticktin is central here for the divisions they make between a merely contentious ‘anti’ politics and the radical ‘alter’ of the political. In the case of universities like McGill, the former is often nonphysical, and participation and dissent are relegated almost exclusively to the level of discourse and to virtual spaces. Understanding the limits this immateriality imposes on political existence at the university becomes key to listening to the way occupiers frame their actions: as the McGill occupiers’ statements show, it is through physical, material protest that they feel pressed to intervene against the failures of a largely immaterial machinery. Butler and Soja help us understand

When bodies gather together in and claim space, publicly and collectively, they open up political possibilities for the future at the same time as oppose the politics of the present.
occupation as both spatial and bodily practice, not just the declaration of an oppositional position. When bodies gather together in and claim space, publicly and collectively, they open up political possibilities for the future at the same time as oppose the politics of the present.

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Notes


11. Lipset 1971. This can be distinguished from a more militant tradition of student opposition in European universities, where activism was linked to a number of political and social upheavals in the early twentieth century and before, see M. Boren 2001 Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject. New York: Routledge.


18. Rather unusually, McGill’s Deputy Provost requires certain independent student groups that receive funding from student fees to run a referendum every five years polling the student body on their continued existence. The administration nullifies QPIRG and CKUT’s votes because of ambiguity in the questions. The majority of the backlash on campus targeted a perceived overreach on the part of the administration into the jurisdiction of the student union’s affairs.


29. Sharp and Roberts 2011.

30. There’s a temptation here not only to equate the non-physical/spatial with powerlessness and inefficacy, but also to establish a causal relationship between the two. Taken to its extreme, it becomes easy to argue that there can be no real democratic political participation without physical presence – a reductive conclusion that fails to consider who can and cannot ‘take to the streets’, where the levels of risk are differentially allocated based on gender, ability, sexuality, status, and where the levels of risk are differentially allocated based on factors like gender, ability, sexuality, status, and care responsibilities. My intention here is not to argue that occupation is the only possible response in situations like the one at McGill. Rather, the context in which these two occupations occurred – as well as the context for many occupations globally – is one in which people on all sides are grappling with these questions of physicality and the political. Anthropology, for its part, seems well-poised to take up these questions.


34. Butler 2011

35. Butler 2011

36. Hudson 2012


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Researching Space, Transgressing Epistemic Boundaries

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ABSTRACT Innovation may be triggered by crossing the lines that delineate the fields of spatial knowledge and practice. Transgressing epistemic boundaries could bring about the possibility of new approaches to researching and transforming space. This paper identifies three interrelated types of epistemic boundary, and critically explores how they may be crossed. Set by definitions of the disciplinary subject matter, concepts, and practices, these boundaries may be crossed, respectively, through relational ontology, meta-disciplinary paradigms, and dialogic practices. These crossings, however, have problems of their own. Epistemic practices are both cognitive and social, and need to be addressed through dynamic and democratic multiplicity.

Introduction

Investigating space poses a dilemma that would be familiar to many fields of inquiry. On the one hand, the complexity of the phenomena demands breaking down the fields of knowledge into ever more specialized sub-fields, facilitating the investigation of phenomena at a more detailed level for acquiring a more sophisticated understanding. On the other hand, and as a consequence, the emerging epistemic fields may become alienated from one another, so fragmented that they are unable to account for where they fit in, how they relate to one another, or offer a good grasp of the wider concerns. In this process of specialization, furthermore, action is separated from knowledge, practitioners from researchers. The fields of policy and practice are also subject to a continuous division of labour to develop the expertise needed to solve particular problems, fragmented further by liberalization and privatization of social and economic spheres. Meanwhile, problems are often interrelated, and the researchers and practitioners may find themselves unable to communicate or work with one another, mobilize the necessary efforts needed to address those concerns, or come up with new ideas and practices that cannot be found within the confines of single perspectives. This is a classic dilemma, in which specialization and fragmentation are the twin sides of the same coin, the double effects of the same process of subdividing the phenomena for various practical purposes. It is in this context that repeated attempts are made at integrating different approaches, engaging in interdisciplinary
research and collaborative practice, aiming to overcome compartmentalized approaches to common problems.

The need for crossing disciplinary boundaries has been acknowledged by many stakeholders for a long time. In almost all fields of knowledge, efforts at analysing the dimensions, progress, obstacles, and the effectiveness of interdisciplinarity are on-going (Chuk et al. 2012; Klein, Mitcham, and Frodeman 2010; Miller et al. 2008; Porter and Rafols 2009; Wagner et al. 2011). In spatial policy and practice, globalization and privatization have increased the number and range of actors involved in development, management, and interpretation of space. Making collective action possible by moving beyond the isolated perspectives of single actors and involving other stakeholders has become an epistemic and democratic necessity, fuelling research into governance and inter-sectoral relations. These concerns have been wide-ranging, from the critique of departmental silos in large public organizations to the concern over the unregulated prevalence of the market in spatial transformation, the role of civil society and non-state actors, and the problems of public participation in urban processes (Boddy and Parkinson 2004; Madanipour, Hull, and Healey 2001; Pierre 1998; Sorensen and Okata 2011).

The context, therefore, is that specialization and liberalization have expanded and fragmented the fields of knowledge and action, which in turn need to be re-connected to facilitate the necessary conditions for addressing the current problems and fostering the emergence of new ideas and practices. In this paper, I focus on this twin process of disconnection and reconnection, exploring the ways in which reconnection may be attempted through epistemic transgression, moving beyond the epistemic boundaries set to delineate a field of inquiry and action. What are the boundaries and obstacles to this crossing, in what ways are they crossed, and what are the possible implications? These boundaries, I aim to show, are set by a field’s subject matter, its concepts, and its practices, which are used for conceptualization, production, and use of space. The boundaries, it is argued, might be crossed through relational ontology, meta-disciplinary paradigms, and dialogic practices, but each crossing may in turn have its own problems, owing to the cognitive and social dimensions of epistemic practices.

Relational Ontology

In the first place, epistemic barriers are inherent in definitions and ontologies: what space consists of and what it means to each observer or group. The ontology and epistemology of space are closely intertwined, as the definition of something may be difficult to separate from the way we get to know about it (Hollis 2002). In other words, the knowledge of something is not separated from the way it is described. Explicit or implicit definitions generate epistemic boundaries, which may turn into insurmountable barriers; to search for new ideas, these definitions may need to be revisited, ontologies rethought, and barriers crossed through contextualization and critical analysis.

The primary tension in defining space is between abstract concepts and relationships between phenomena. Space, as Lefebvre (1991, 12) argues, ‘in isolation, is an empty abstraction’. Contemplating the epistemology of space in isolation, therefore, would remain a mental activity disconnected from the social reality. To understand what space means, we need to investigate the context in which it is used, ranging from technical discourses to everyday practices.
For much of the human history, space has been a common sense, relational idea, referring to the location that bodies occupy in the world (Čapek 1976; Gray 1989). The ancient Greek mathematicians, however, turned it into an abstract concept of a limitless void, which became the basis for deductive thinking and the emergence of philosophical thought (Algra 1995; Faber 1983). After the Renaissance, Descartes (1968, 58) embraced the Euclidean concept of abstract space: ‘a continuous body, or a space extended indefinitely in length, width, and height or depth, divisible into various parts, which could have various figures and sizes and be moved or transposed in all sorts of ways’. With its application in Newtonian physics, this idea found a central place in modern science, but a series of challenges eventually dethroned it. Modernist architecture and planning embraced this abstract concept of space, which also came under attack from its critics.

In architecture, as Colquhoun (1989, 225) shows, this abstract concept of space appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century, used as ‘a positive entity within which the traditional categories of tectonic form and surface occurred’. From then on, architects and planners tried to shape this entity with the help of geometry and technology (Sert 1944). The concepts with which Le Corbusier reads space include ‘mass’ and ‘surface’, which are shaped through the tool of the ‘plan’ (Le Corbusier 1986, 2–3). This was a rationalist epistemology imposed on a complex ontology to give it an idealized order and shape. What determined the relationship between the two was functionality, hence the label functionalism. The way out of this illusion lay in realizing that the reality was far more diverse and complex than could be so easily simplified and transformed. Even so, the inherent assumptions about the neutrality of space, the benevolence of the technical experts, and the functional rationale of spatial transformation have remained paramount to this day in many professional discourses.

The idea of abstract space was criticized from early on, starting with Leibniz (1979, 89), who believed

space to be something merely relative, as time is ... an order of coexistences, as time
is an order of successions. For space denotes, in terms of possibility, an order of
things which exist at the same time, considered as existing together.

Around the same time, Locke (1979, 101) defines space as ‘the relation of distance
between any two bodies or points’. Kant (1993, 61), in turn, transformed the basis of
understanding space and time, further relativizig them by arguing that they did not
exist independently, and they were only aspects of our perception, representations of
appearances, which ‘cannot exist in themselves, but only in us’. With the rise of non-Eucli-
dean geometry and Einstein’s relative physics, the idea of space as a distinctive entity
almost disappeared from the research agenda, replaced by a relationship between phenom-
ena, which is what geographers have called relative space (Gregory et al. 2009).

In geography, definitions of space referred both to the things in themselves, as well as to
the relations between them as expressed in maps. Abstract space was defined as ‘a distinct,
physical and eminently real or empirical entity in itself’ (Blaut 1961), as something which
is ‘clearly distinct, real, and objective’ (Mayhew and Penny 1992). Relative space, on the
other hand, focused on ‘the characteristics of things in terms of their concentration and
dispersion’, as traced back to the early map-makers and their concern with precise
measurement of locational relationships, continued in the contemporary spatial analysis
(Goodall 1987). Both the abstract and relative concepts, however, remained within the
scope of positive science, without explicit reference to the social context of these spatial phenomena. The epistemology of space involved in measuring and mapping locations and distances, which were claimed to have factual neutrality. Spatial analysis, therefore, set out to capture a factual map of the world, now armed with information and communication technologies. The notion of space as an entity was replaced by the positive science of spatial analysis. Transgressing the epistemic boundaries here required going beyond positive science.

The abstract and relative concepts of space, therefore, were now substituted by a relational concept of space, which referred to ‘a relation between events or an aspect of events, and thus bound to time and process’ (Blaut 1961), which was ‘perceived by a person or society’ (Mayhew and Penny 1992). Rather than viewing space as ‘a container within which the world proceeds’, the relational concept of space sees it ‘as a co-product of those proceedings’ (Thrift 2003, 96). Rather than detached from any process, space is an integral part of social processes: ‘abstract spatial forms in itself can guarantee nothing about the social, political or ethical content of the relations which construct that form’ (Massey 2005, 101).

In embracing a relational notion of space, human geography has integrated time and space, focused on the co-production of time and space, and has accepted the unruliness and porosity of space and time. In other words, it has ‘abandoned the project of an autonomous science of the spatial’ (Gregory et al. 2009, 709), becoming largely integrated with other social sciences. In return, other social sciences have embraced a spatial perspective (Soja 1989). This includes the anthropologists who ‘are rethinking and reconceptualising their understanding of culture in spatialized ways’ (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003, 1). Interest in the spatial also includes the economists who, beyond the usual interest in urban economics (O’Sullivan 2012), use space to explain economic processes (Fainstein and Campbell 2011; Fujita, Venables, and Krugman 1999). At one point, time was given priority over space in social analysis (Foucault 1993). If space has now found its proper place, and if there are such emerging proximities in social sciences, where space and time are given equal weight, what epistemic barriers are left?

The question is that with the integration of space and time, and with abandoning the desire for establishing a separate spatial science, can we still speak of an epistemology of space? It would seem that an investigation of space would be the same as any other social investigation, using the same epistemologies and methodologies as other social sciences. There may be specific spatial methodologies, such as mapping and drawing, but would they amount to specific epistemologies of space?

A problem is that the relationship between the physical and the social remains ambiguous. On the one hand, social analysis of physical space continues to be through its functions. In planning, definitions of space may be found in the descriptions of what planners do. The European Council of Spatial Planners defines the field and nature of town planners’ activities: ‘Town Planning embraces all forms of development and land use activities… It is concerned with the promotion, guidance, enhancement and control of development in the constantly changing physical environment’ (ECTP-CEU 2012). The UK government’s National Planning Framework identifies the aim of planning as sustainable development with its social, economic, and environmental dimensions, with its main focus on the built environment (DCLG 2012, 2). The UK’s Royal Town Planning Institute is more explicit about ‘space’, using a subtitle in its logo: ‘mediation of space, making of place’. It describes what planning does, which expands on this subtitle: ‘Planning involves
twin activities — the management of the competing uses for space, and the making of places that are valued and have identity’ (RTPI 2012). This is further clarified by the Urban Forum in its *Handy Guide to Planning*: ‘The planning system in the UK manages the use and development of land and buildings. The aim of the system is to create better places for people to live, work and play in’. Space, therefore, seems to equate with land and buildings. Place is distinguished from space, but indirectly explained in physical and functional terms, i.e. where people ‘live, work and play in’.

On the other hand, social analysis of space may emphasize social relations, without much attention to the physical objects and the material world that mediates between humans, seeing physical objects as unimportant or merely a social construct. The danger in this interpretation is that we might lose the material world of objects in an idealist interpretation, falling into the Cartesian dualism of body and mind. Interpretations such as Lefebvre’s (1991) try to restore this link with the material world. Space is indeed inclusive of the range of physical and social phenomena and their relationships with one another. As Bourdieu (2000, 134–135) argues, social space is ‘a structure of juxtaposition of social positions’, which tends to be translated into physical space, so space becomes ‘correspondence between a certain order of coexistence (or distribution) of agents and a certain order of coexistence (or distribution) of properties’.

A metaphysical concept of abstract space as an invisible substance is no longer tenable, but so is the idea of immaterial relations, decontextualized as if existing outside a material and social context. The focus on space as pure relations could be as metaphysical as the focus on space as a substance. To understand space, we cannot see it only as relations, but as a collection of phenomena and their relations. In this sense, space is a collection of people, life forms and inanimate objects and the variety of relations that can be identified between them, relations that can range from events and processes to perceptions and feelings, which can lead to the generation of new objects and relations. This collection of objects and relations, however, is not fixed and unchanging, but constantly evolving (Massey 2005). The forms of knowledge that are produced offer propositions about this collection, report about other ways of knowing it, and engage in transforming it, each with its own epistemological character.

Transgressing epistemic boundaries, therefore, may take place through broadening the conceptual core of a discipline, decentring it to incorporate its social context, and so be aligned with other forms of social inquiry. But even when a core is kept or redefined, the definitions are not easily settled. In planning, for example, the practical necessities demand setting clear spatial boundaries around the problem at hand. The notion of bounded space involves a clear delimitation of an area and focusing on who and what matters in this space. This is a position that many policy documents and planning tools adopt, as they need to set out a clear boundary around a neighbourhood, city, or region, even if on an arbitrary basis, to be able to initiate and manage action, mobilize resources, and make or change legal and administrative arrangements. There are also cultural claims by other groups towards a bounded space; territorial claims that may provide the ground for mobilizing some energies at the expense of excluding others. In contrast, the concept of relational space looks outside, considering the global forces, which can have significant roles in local affairs, challenging a parochial interpretation of space and social relations. None can reject the empirical presence, and the significance, of the other: delineation of space cannot deny the importance of outside forces, while acknowledging its relations with the outside cannot ignore the weight of the local context. It is in the normative
interpretations of territoriality or relationality that the battle lines are drawn, but often mixed with, and hidden under a haze of, the descriptive and analytical positions. What is at stake is the priority given to one or the other set of relations (Castells 1996; Massey 2005). Transgression of epistemic boundaries may allow the participants to see how space can be interpreted as bounded or relational, but deciding what to do next would also depend on the social position and political implications of such decisions. Epistemic processes are both cognitive and social processes, and transgression in both directions is required. Bounded space is a place where fixity and porosity in thinking, as well as inclusion and exclusion in action, about space may be rethought.

In investigating space and society in their interaction, a related challenge is that of the diversity of perspectives. By integrating space into its psychological and social contexts, epistemic boundaries seem to multiply, rather than crossed. We are immediately confronted by a new challenge: epistemic diversity and pluralism, which reflects the diversity of perspectives that could offer different accounts of space and how to transform it, and overlapping relations between different forms of knowledge. As knowledge is embedded in social practices, this challenge reflects the diversity and potential incommensurability of epistemic fields, i.e. the consolidated and institutionalized forms of knowledge production which can be found in academic disciplines and routinized forms of thinking and acting. An epistemology of space, however, cannot remain entirely within a predetermined epistemic field or it would have to transgress these fields in search of new ideas and practices. Two possible paths present themselves for crossing these epistemic barriers of diversity and pluralism: at the conceptual level, resorting to meta-disciplinary epistemic paradigms; and at the institutional and discursive level, resorting to dialogic practices.

Meta-Disciplinary Epistemic Paradigms

Knowledge is classified into different types, including propositional knowledge, which is knowing that something is so; non-propositional knowledge, which is knowing of something, by direct awareness or acquaintance, such as knowing a person or a place; and ability knowledge, which is knowing how to do something (Audi 1995; Pritchard 2006). An older classification divided knowledge into scientific knowledge, which dealt with knowing the nature of things; technical knowledge, which was about how to make things; and practical knowledge, which revolved around how to decide on the best course of action (Aristotle 1998). The analysis of knowledge often revolves around propositional knowledge, concerned with the conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for knowing that such-and-such is the case. It was episteme, the Greek word for scientific knowledge, denoting both systematic and personal knowledge, which was later used to indicate inquiry into knowledge (Cooper 1999; Steup and Sosa 2005). As science was partitioned into many subject areas, its pathways also proliferated, leading to epistemic pluralism.

The diversity of epistemic fields reflects the diversity of perspectives, whereby those who are involved in investigating, producing, and using space will have different understandings and approaches, a complex social context in which space finds different meanings and uses. It includes personal biographies and the diversity of interest and experience, as well as collective meanings and conventions, which have been systematically consolidated in academic disciplines and professional expertise, and framed within social conventions and institutions. Epistemology of space, therefore, involves producing accounts and
judgements from a perspective about the phenomena and their relations, accounts, and judgements which are rooted in the overlapping contexts of personal preferences, social conventions, and expert knowledge. Personal preferences may be as diverse as there are people, but they do not take shape in a void; they often also reflect the contextual conditions in which they have emerged. Making decisions about personal preferences appears to become easier, therefore, when relying on social conventions and expert knowledge, each putting forward explicit or implicit criteria for deciding on a course of action. Each of these contexts, however, can frame a judgement in such a way that limits it to a narrow range of considerations.

Major concerns in epistemology include the problem of doubt and scepticism, asking whether it is possible at all to acquire knowledge about something (Cooper 1999), and finding a basis for such an inquiry, asking whether we need a foundation for justifying our beliefs, or the coherence of the account that we produce is sufficient (BonJour and Sosa 2003). Owing to the existence of different types of knowledge (UNESCO 2005), and with the emergence of many branches of science, it is no longer easy to speak of epistemology in a singular form. Epistemologies of space would then indicate the many different possible ways of acquiring different types of knowledge about space.

Schutz envisaged the stock of knowledge to be related to the situation of the experiencing subject (Schutz and Luckmann 1974). The context in which knowledge is developed, therefore, and the ‘relationship between human thought and the social context in which it arises’ becomes important (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 16). The social context of knowledge is partly consolidated in academic disciplines and meta-disciplinary paradigms, as well as in social conventions, practices, and individual biographies. Alongside the contextualization of knowledge in an epistemic context formed by history and culture, knowledge is also contextualized in human bodies, or in other words supplementing the notion of embedded knowledge with the idea of embodied knowledge. Knowledge production and acquisition is a social process, which is embedded in a social context, and is conducted by people who have internalized particular ways of thinking and behaving. According to Polanyi, who coined the term tacit knowledge, knowing is ‘an active comprehension of the things known, an action that requires skill’, and the knower personally participates in ‘all acts of understanding’ (Polanyi 1958, vii).

Embodiment and embeddedness of knowledge indicate the materiality and spatiality of knowledge both in its social and individual dimensions. Any form of knowledge can be identified to have originated from and be drawing on a particular epistemic milieu, which will have its own social, temporal, and spatial dimensions. The places that individuals occupy and the social context in which they are framed take material and spatial dimensions, which reflect as well as frame their social conditions. At the same time, knowledge of space is an integral part of the development of epistemology. The challenge, therefore, is to find out how to deal with the diversity of contextualized perspectives into space, either in an individual or group capacity. At the individual level, the differences become matters of taste and interest, and so what makes sense for one is pointless for another, what is fair for one is unfair to another, what is beautiful to one is ugly to another. At the group level, the differences can be expressed in a collective capacity, and so becoming deep seated and institutionalized through social conventions and expert disciplines. Does this perspectivism mean that we cannot go beyond the limits of first-person phenomenological accounts or collective group interests and accounts? How
can contextualized epistemologies be transgressed? An answer has been provided by meta-disciplinary paradigms.

Faced with the wide range of possible directions that aesthetic judgement can take, David Hume recommended relying on social conventions. Hume (1998, 141) believed that ‘beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external’. But the diversity of sentiments was puzzling, so he looked for a standard of taste, which was based on ‘those models and principles which have been established by the uniform consent and experience of nations and ages’ (Hume 1998, 143). This was an influential, but ultimately conservative, search for finding a solid basis for making aesthetic judgement. While the aesthetic judgement in the arts remained controversial, science moved in the direction of searching for solid ground, formed of robust theories and replicable empirical evidence.

Disciplines in humanities and social sciences are often informed by common meta-disciplinary paradigms. For example, the influential paradigms in literary theory, such as phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism (Eagleton 1983), may also be found in sociology, geography, planning, architecture, and so on. Although the emergence and acceptance of any paradigm may take some time, and these paradigms are increasingly taking multiple and eclectic forms, and many may claim the death of the old ideologies, paradigms continue to set the underlying intellectual atmosphere for many researchers, to which they try to conform. The way to develop coherent methodologies for research into space, therefore, may seem to lie in the exploration and exposition of the meta-disciplinary epistemological paradigms, as the frameworks to which the diverse participants can subscribe. Could this be a promising bridge to cross the disciplinary boundaries?

Kuhn’s notion of scientific paradigms was a direct challenge to the authority of science, as he argued that, rather than a rule-governed method of inquiry, the scientific community was the source of that authority. As a temporal and social context for science, a paradigm was ‘the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community’ (Kuhn 1970, 175). Scientists are socialized in a way that, through the similarity of their education, professional institutions, and scientific literature, they become members of a community with its sense of identity and purpose. A shared paradigm helps them work together, as it establishes common understanding and rules and standards. There are also meta-disciplinary paradigms, which are embraced by different disciplines and cultures. Foucault’s investigation of the history of ideas showed two such meta-paradigms in the past five centuries, each ruptured to make way for the next: one in the middle of the seventeenth century, marking the start of what the French call the classical age, and the other at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at the start of the modern age (Foucault 2002, xxiv). We can also identify smaller-scale, meta-disciplinary paradigms within these two meta-paradigms, such as structuralism, which occupied a position of prominence in humanities and social sciences for decades.

Meta-disciplinary paradigms may show the potential for building bridges between disciplines. Positive science, for example, has provided a strong backbone on which many sciences have based their epistemic foundations. It is now acknowledged, however, that this paradigm is itself embedded in social conventions and practices (Latour and Woolgar 1986). The challenge to positive science has come from two fronts: the subjective challenge developed by phenomenology, and the social challenge developed by political economy. Each challenge has attempted to locate the apparent neutrality of facts and objects into a perceptual and social context, producing interpretive accounts of
phenomena, their relationships and representations. The challenges to positive science do not necessarily agree with one another (Adorno 1964). A number of significant attempts, however, have been made to bridge the gap between political economic analysis and cultural analysis. Schutz (1970), for example, hoped to combine subjective and objective perspectives by combining Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy with Weber’s interpretive sociology. Habermas (1984) tried to bring the social, objective, and subjective perspectives together into a single theory. More directly relevant for spatial analysis, Lefebvre (1991) used the conceptual framework of production to locate space in its political economic context, but also drew on phenomenological analysis to show how it finds meaning, hoping to integrate the mental, physical, and social aspects of space into a single coherent framework.

Knowledge is closely related to power, as it has been known for a long time, and according to the quote attributed to Francis Bacon: Knowledge is power. When knowledge is consolidated and institutionalized, as in academic and professional disciplines, it generates a powerful block, a set of circumstances which frame the actions of its members and others. The emergence of meta-disciplinary paradigms may solidify these power blocks further, turning them into closed systems of belief and action, discourses, and practices which can set limiting effects on others in explicit or implicit ways, ruling out dissent and innovation. Crossing the defensive walls of these blocks may not be welcome or easy, as it may jeopardize particular privileges and conventions. It is in this context that transgression becomes essential, opening the closed systems to scrutiny, challenging the established orthodoxies and searching for new forms of knowledge. As Foucault (1983, 211) argued, many struggles that have emerged in our age, such as the struggles against ‘the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live’ are ‘transversal struggles’. They are partly a manifestation of ‘an opposition to the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge. But they are also an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people’ (Foucault 1983, 212). Meta-disciplinary paradigms open disciplinary boundaries for transgression at a structural level, which can penetrate deep into the concepts and practices of professions and disciplines, but they have their own risks.

Meta-disciplinary paradigms provide structural concepts and umbrella conventions, to which disciplines, professions, and individual researchers and practitioners subscribe. Their emergence may be gradual, but they provide a framework for going beyond single disciplinary boundaries. However, not everyone subscribes to a convention, and those who do so may not be aware or explicit about it. Such paradigms are always in a flux; and when they do become stable, they run the risk of turning into reactionary orthodoxies, ready to be challenged by other perspectives or new generations of researchers. Beyond these structural bridges, could lower-level collaboration through dialogic practices show ways to transgress epistemic barriers through discursive and practical engagement?

**Dialogic Practices**

Uni-disciplinary research involves working within a single discipline, using some commonly agreed concepts and methods to investigate a common subject (Stokols et al.
An academic discipline is defined to have a central problem with its related facts, explanations, goals, and theories (Wagner et al. 2011, 15). This has historically been the case in the development of disciplines, so that Durkheim (1938), for example, defined sociology as the study of social facts, Lewin (1936) defined psychology as the study of psychological facts, and, as we saw, space has been identified as the core of geography (Thrift 2003) and spatial planning (RTPI 2012). However, the inadequate nature, and fragmentary impact, of this way of conceptualizing complex and interrelated fields of inquiry were recognized from early on (Abbott 2000). Moreover, some problems (e.g. security, Beier and Arnold 2005) demand the researchers to go beyond the limits of a single discipline. As a result, pressure for crossing the boundaries and collaborating across disciplinary lines emerged and intensified. Expansion of interdisciplinary collaboration may cause concern among the disciplinary guardians, who worry about the loss of identity and contraction of their protected areas of activity (Holmwood 2010). However, disciplines and professions are so deeply ingrained in academic and practical institutions that they show resistance to any such threat (Abbott 2000).

Disciplines are social worlds, which can be self-reproducing and closed networks (Abbott 2000), and relations between disciplines involve both social and cognitive dimensions (Wagner et al. 2011). A restless process of specialization has created new subdivisions, shaping academic and professional disciplines, which are communities of interest that speak different languages and have different subcultures. An anthropological analysis of this process likens it to the formation of tribes, and how they recruit and maintain membership through rituals, forums, and conventions (Bourdieu 2000). The membership of these tribes would offer common understanding and a sense of belonging, but erect barriers with other tribes, causing miscommunication and even alienation between disciplines that may have a shared subject matter. In asking and answering questions about space, the significance of the conditions and frameworks within which such approaches are set is paramount. Depending on their area of interest and expertise, on their philosophical outlook and social position, different academic disciplines and professions that deal with space will answer these questions differently. Disciplines are engaged in self-reproducing social division of labour, through in-group conversations and excluding others through setting up sophisticated ritual boundaries. Like all tribes and communities, disciplines have strengths and weaknesses for their members and for others. By being socialized into this community, however, they start becoming alienated from other comparable communities.

The various forms of collaboration between disciplines include the overlapping modes of multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary work, each with its own possible impact on epistemic boundaries. Multidisciplinary collaboration is the most common form of collaboration between different disciplines and professions. It involves a number of representatives from different disciplines working independently or sequentially, but maintaining their identity and staying within their boundaries, entering the process of collaboration to work on a particular task (Stokols et al. 2008). It juxtaposes the perspectives embedded in disciplines and professions, providing a broad range of knowledge, information, and methods. According to Wagner et al. (2011, 16), ‘They speak as separate voices, in encyclopedic alignment, an ad hoc mix, or a melange… In short, the multidisciplinary research product is no more and no less than the simple sum of its parts’. This way of collaboration accepts the existing intellectual and institutional division of labour, according to which tasks are allocated to different experts in the name of higher productivity (Smith 1993).
This is very common in spatial professions, where in the production of space, a team of architects, planners, engineers, and others may be assembled in a project, each playing a relatively clearly specified role. Urban development is inherently a multidisciplinary activity, and spatial planning typically involves drawing on a number of disciplines. Such multidisciplinary collaboration may also happen in research projects, where different skills and methodologies may play a specific role in the process of inquiry. No effort is made to cross epistemic boundaries, as this pragmatic approach would leave disciplines and their different epistemologies intact, and instead ask them to work together towards a common goal. Such cooperative processes, however, are limited in what they can achieve (Austin, Park, and Goble 2008).

It is in interdisciplinary work that the participants are encouraged to cross the epistemic boundaries, leading to the emergence of new concepts and methods. Interdisciplinarity aims to create a common understanding of an issue by integrating separate theories, concepts, methods, and data into a new whole, an integrative outcome that is more than the sum of its parts. Rather than the multidisciplinary contracting out of services, interdisciplinary work closely involves a range of partners, coordinates organizational frameworks, alters perspectives, revises hypotheses, generates new insights, and forms ‘a new community of knowers with a hybrid interlanguage’ (Stokols et al. 2003; Wagner et al. 2011, 16).

An important transgression in interdisciplinary collaboration would be inwards, questioning the values and assumptions inherent in the disciplinary epistemic practices (Tuana 2013). Training and shared experiences within a discipline may be used as resources in a dialogue with other disciplines, enabling the parties to rethink and evaluate their own assumptions and practices. The process of questioning could help the participants be released from some of the embedded limitations, or in other words become ‘undisciplined’ (Beier and Arnold 2005). Epistemic barriers, therefore, far from keeping the researchers in different disciplines apart, would be seen as potential avenues for successful interdisciplinary collaboration. When faced with researchers and practitioners from other fields, these assumptions come in sharper focus, out of their inherent and embedded condition that has been taken for granted by the participants. Epistemic self-reflection and inwards transgression could be a product of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Going further still, but largely overlapping with the integrative character of interdisciplinarity (Derry, Schunn, and Gernsbacher 2005) transdisciplinary collaboration is the stage in which ‘a fundamental epistemic shift’ takes place, in which the participating parties are able to produce a coherent reconfiguration of the situation (Austin, Park, and Goble 2008, 557). This level of integration moves towards the development of metadisciplinary paradigms, as discussed. While working together in interdisciplinary research, researchers still tend to maintain their own disciplinary perspective, but in transdisciplinary research they draw on their disciplinary epistemic resources jointly to develop and use a common conceptual framework (Stokols et al. 2008, S24). Transdisciplinarity involves the members of different fields working together over a long period of time, which creates the possibility of producing an overarching synthesis that goes beyond any single framework, as exemplified by research in ecology. Research within single disciplines may have brought about fundamental changes, but what sets transdisciplinarity apart is the integrative quality and scope of its research products, such as new hypotheses and theories (Stokols et al. 2008). It also involves trans-sector collaboration, in which problems are addressed through the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in society (Klein 2008).
Innovation is the keyword that links these epistemic transformations to social and economic consequences. In economic development, for example, the restless process of liberalization and privatization creates fragmentation and competition. Meanwhile, economic processes depend on the ability of different people and organizations to work together effectively. This is why interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and cross-sectoral collaboration are promoted through the label of innovation, which takes place when people from different disciplinary backgrounds are brought together, triggering the development of new ideas, products, and practices. In this context, innovation is defined as ‘The design, invention, development and/or implementation of new or altered products, services, processes, systems, organizational structures, or business models’ (Advisory Committee 2008, i). Innovation accounted for three quarters of productivity gains in the USA over the 30 years prior to 2008 and is seen to be the driving force of economic development in an era in which, at least before the recent economic crisis, capital, and labour were readily available in abundance (Advisory Committee 2008, ix). This is why major efforts have been made in the USA (US Department of Commerce 2008) and the European Union (European Commission 2009) to find a way of recording and measuring innovation.

While transgressing the disciplinary boundaries may be considered a cognitive change (Derry et al. 2005), its social dimensions are important, both in involving the members of research and practice teams, as well as the wider society. While much time and money is invested in interdisciplinary activities, change may be limited to the participants in the process, rather than the broader division of intellectual labour. These changes may happen in the mind of single researchers or teams, where a specific epistemic community may be created in problem-focused team-working, but have limited impact on the institutional structure of disciplines. When working in teams, the group dynamic may bring about new outcomes that are convincing to the group members, but may not go beyond that particular situation.

Social fields tend to develop limited perspectives of their own, and it is through the agency’s interaction with this context that social phenomena are shaped and transformed (Bourdieu 2000; Giddens 1984). Disciplinary focus has imposed limitations on how to analyse social phenomena, for example, whether phenomena should be considered primarily as social or spatial; whether it is economics or culture that should be the target of analysis, whether it is the struggle for recognition or redistribution that help its development (Fraser and Honneth 2003). A better understanding of social phenomena, however, can be built at the intersection of these fields, where political economy and cultural analysis meet (Lefebvre 1991).

Dialogic practices may offer open and flexible ways of crossing the boundaries of knowledge. But here too we need to beware of the hidden risks. As Foucault (1983, 222) put it, power is exercised ‘as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions’. This power is exerted at all levels, and not necessarily limited to formal institutional processes. As he argued, ‘power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted “above” society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of’ (Foucault 1983, 222). In the social struggles that marked his time, Foucault (1983, 222) argued, ‘What is questioned is the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power. In short, the regime du savoir’. The consequence of this form of power relations is that what may appear to be a transgression is indeed a way of reproduction of a set of ideas and practices. If meta-disciplinary paradigms establish overarching levels of conformity, dialogic
practices may offer short journeys within these paradigms, or excursions to pave the way for new paradigms. They may appear to be open and exploratory, but may be part of what Schumpeter (2003) called creative destruction, as an integral element of a system at work to renew itself.

Rather than being trapped in a single viewpoint, Nietzsche advocated the employment of ‘a variety of perspectives and effective interpretations in the service of knowledge’, so that ‘the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity”, be’ (quoted in Schacht 1996, 159). The attempt to see from more than one perspective offers a dynamism and mobility of standpoint and a multiplicity of views that can offer more resources and energies in making judgements about the subject at hand. Dynamic multiplicity (Madanipour 2007) is, therefore, the attempt and the possibility of moving beyond limited perspectives, appreciating the multiplicity and complexity of views into social phenomena, and trying to understand as many perspectives as possible. Epistemic democracy would bring all the voices to a table, but it also needs to search for the voices that remain unheard and the stories that are untold (Madanipour 2011a). It requires transgressing the boundaries, bridging the gaps, and trying to make visible that which often remains invisible.

Epistemic inclusiveness is the process that ensures these unheard voices and unacknowledged forms of knowledge are involved. Transgression here would mean going beyond the involvement of scientific and technical expertise and reach out for the various forms of knowledge that exist in society (UNESCO 2005). Knowledge exists in different forms which need to be taken into account in the creation of new knowledge. At the same time, the social nature of epistemic processes would mean they follow the same potentials and limitations of social processes. Transgression in epistemic fields would require a parallel transgression in social fields, where equality and inclusiveness, rather than hierarchy and inequality, are demanded. Rather than entirely looking to an academic and professional elite to collaborate and trigger innovation, wider communities of interest are in this way acknowledged to be involved in the development of new concepts, methods, and applications (Madanipour 2011b).

**Conclusion: Dynamic and Democratic Multiplicity**

Intense specialization in academic disciplines and professional fields, alongside social and economic liberalization and privatization, tend to splinter the fields of knowledge and practice. Disciplines and professions are involved in self-reproducing social division of labour, evolving as exclusive tribes into which members are socialized through rituals, forums, and conventions. Meanwhile, bringing these increasingly fragmented fields together is essential for the development of new ideas and practices. Bringing fragments together requires going beyond the narrow fields in which these fragments are shaped, transgressing the epistemic boundaries that are rooted in disciplinary and professional practice, so as to investigate space from alternative perspectives and develop a fuller picture that combines understanding and explanation. The paper has investigated three possible ways of epistemic transgression: rethinking the core concepts, resorting to meta-disciplinary paradigms, and engaging in dialogic practices.

The first way involves adopting a relational ontology, through which the definitions of space are revisited, abandoning the abstract and metaphysical, as well as utilitarian and
functional, concepts of space. Instead, it broadens the definitions of space by locating the phenomena in relation to one another and to the wider social contexts, where space is integrated with time, process, and change, where physical objects and social relationships are linked, and where knowledge is both embodied and embedded. The direct implication of this transgression for the fields of architecture, urban design, and planning is for these fields to acknowledge the simultaneously material and social character of spatial relations. Broadening the concepts, however, may risk removing the distinctive character of disciplines, and multiplying epistemic boundaries through the acknowledgement of social diversity and epistemic pluralism, in a cacophony of accounts and judgements that reflect overlapping effects of personal relations, social conventions, and expert knowledge. The second way may offer a response to this challenge, through the meta-disciplinary paradigms that are shared between different perspectives and disciplines, creating an integrated epistemic sphere in which disciplinary and professional boundaries lose their rigidity and may be crossed with ease. They offer basic concepts and umbrella conventions, a common ground on which to develop new relations between disciplines and professions, where the disciplinary boundaries may be transgressed within a shared structure. An example for the fields of architecture, urban design, and planning was the meta-framework set by modernism, in which a fairly coherent set of ideas were articulated through different disciplines. These paradigms, however, run the risk of creating rigid power blocks, becoming closed systems of discourse and practice that limit dissent and innovation. The third possibility of epistemic transgression comes in the form of dialogic practices, in which lower-level connections are made through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teamwork. Here the inherent assumptions of a group may come into sharper, critical focus, facilitating inward transgression through epistemic self-reflection, or outwards when they may move towards developing new shared concepts. This form of transgression offers a promising way of bringing together the spatial fields, as the participants are willing to experiment with new concepts and ideas. The appearance of open-ended innovation may, however, be misleading, becoming a new way of reproducing questionable power relations, or contributing to ‘creative destruction’ of existing paradigms.

The shortcomings of rethinking core concepts and transforming structural and dialogic practices, which are both cognitive and social processes, may be partly addressed through dynamic multiplicity and epistemic democracy. Different forms of knowledge and different voices are faced with one another, opening a platform for the process of change and multiplicity of voices, addressing the uneven power relations and invisible participants, and combining the efforts at explanation with those of understanding. This encounter may take the form of the juxtaposition of different skills in a division of labour; alternatively, it may attempt at innovation by developing new concepts and methodologies. Epistemic transgression would involve removing the obstacles that prevent the inclusion of different participants and forms of knowledge. In the fields of architecture, urban design, and planning, this would mean an inclusive process of urban development, in which the participation of as wide a range of stakeholders as possible would facilitate this democratic dynamism.

References


Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation

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Place and space: a Lefebvrian reconciliation

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a dialectical interpretation of place. It argues that much of the confusion in the literature on place stems from its failure to engage with the ontological nature of place. This has led to much research implicitly accepting a restrictive Cartesian view of socio-spatial reality. Entrikin's (1991) 'betweenness of place' thesis is a notable recent illustration. In this paper I suggest that the problematic nature of place and its relationship to space can be resolved through a dialectical mode of argumentation. The spatialized dialectic of Henri Lefebvre offers a fruitful framework for reconciling the interaction between place and space insofar as it strives to overcome dualistic conceptions of capitalist spatiality. Lefebvre's dialectical approach will be counterposed to Entrikin's argument. The paper concludes by outlining the implications of the respective perspectives for robust place theorization and place politics.

KEY WORDS: Place, Spatial theory, Henri Lefebvre, Dialectics, Ontology, Marxism

INTRODUCTION

Arguments centring around the concept of place have reappeared on the agenda of many human geographers in recent years. The insistence that 'place matters' became something of a clarion call during the 1980s (Massey, 1984; Massey and Allen, 1984) and repeated invocations about issues of 'uniqueness', 'contextuality' and 'place perspective' have accordingly intensified within the geographical imagination (Agnew, 1987, 1989; Agnew and Duncan, 1989). Thus the recognition that places differ and that this difference is significant in affecting explanation has gained prominence once again.

Yet lessons have been learned from the earlier days of idiographic regional geography. Recent research on place is, to be sure, much more sophisticated insofar as it has, in broad terms, attempted to reconcile the traditional spatial analyst’s concern for space (chorological 'areal differentiation' in Hartshorne’s neo-Kantian lexicon), Marxists’ concern with social relations and structural factors, and humanists’ appeals for subjectivity, place meaning and place experience (see Entrikin, 1991). That this interest in place and region has grown during the last decade is confirmed by the development of the so-called 'new' regional geography (Gilbert, 1988; Jonas, 1988; Pudup, 1988). The recent 'locality' debate, culminating with the Changing Urban and Regional Systems (CURS) initiative, is, of course, a further attempt to reinstate the importance of place within the geographical agenda (Cooke, 1987, 1989; but see also Massey, 1991; Smith, 1987). Attempts to come to grips with place (and related concepts such as region and locality) have, in short, become widespread and diverse in recent years.

But amid this resurgence of interest in place and eagerness to engage in empirical research on place and locality, certain deep-rooted philosophical and methodological shortcomings have revealed themselves. For me, this boils down to the failure of much research to establish more thoroughly the basic ontological nature of place itself. There has, for instance, been a relative neglect of the basic ground rules from which many theorists and researchers construct their understandings of place; which is to say, the manner in which they construct their specific 'object' of inquiry. This neglect is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it has precluded the formulation of a dialectical approach to the question of place and so trapped much research on place (often unwittingly) within a restrictive Cartesian philosophical straitjacket.

The present contribution sets out to expose the tacit Cartesian foundation of certain strands of place research by invoking the necessity for a dialectical
reinterpretation. To do so, I shall draw upon Henri Lefebvre’s (1991a, b) pioneering formulations on space and everyday life. Herein I argue that Lefebvre’s maverick, non-dogmatic spatialized reading of Marx’s materialist dialectic (a project he termed spatiology) offers the most fruitful route for broaching the problematic of place as well as permitting the formation of a robust politics of place. I propose that a reassertion of an explicit dialectical mode of argumentation can make a major contribution to the goal that has hitherto effectively eluded geographers: that of reconciling the way in which experience is lived and acted out in place, and how this relates to, and is embedded in, political and economic practices that are operative over broader spatial scales.

In this light, the argument will proceed as follows: first, I will contrast the dialectical and Cartesian world views. Secondly, I will crystallize the deficiencies and limitations of Cartesianism within geography by briefly examining Entrikin’s recent ‘betweenness of place’ thesis (see Entrikin, 1991). Thirdly, I will offer a corrective to the defects of Cartesian geography by framing the question of place within an explicit dialectical framework. Here the relationship between space and place will be discussed. Grappling with this interconnection is tantamount to understanding the interaction between the global and the local, and the general and the particular; it holds the key to resolving the thorny issue of deriving universal statements about specific instances and changes in socio-spatial practices. The space-place dilemma can be reconciled, I shall argue, by putting Lefebvre’s (1991a) ‘spatial triad’ through its conceptual paces. Lefebvre’s framework can transcend the dualistic Cartesian thinking prevalent in many geographical treatises on place.

THE DIALECTICAL WORLD VIEW

Dialectics is both a statement about what the world is and a method of organizing this world for the purpose of study and presentation (Ollman, 1990, 1993). Dialectical argumentation has a long and variegated legacy in philosophy. Its origins – in the Western world at least – stem from the ancient Greek classicists such as Democritus, Plato and Heraclitus, before passing – mainly via Spinoza and Leibniz – through to Hegel and Marx. Despite the diversity of this legacy, a common thread is the concern to address the question of change, different kinds of change (which may, for example, manifest itself as apparent stasis) and different degrees of movement, interconnection and interaction (Engels, 1934; Ollman, 1990; see also Harvey, 1993a). For most dialecticians, therefore, dynamism is fundamental to all matter and reality. Apparent stability can itself be shown to be a peculiar manifestation of change which necessitates explanation. As Ollman (1990, 34) insists, ‘given that change is always a part of what things are, the problem for research can only then be how, when and into what they change and why they sometimes appear not to change’ (original emphasis).

In order to perceive change, dialectics emphasizes process, movement, flow, relations and, particularly, contradiction. Contradiction has often been singled out as the principal feature of dialectics (Kojeve, 1980; Lefebvre, 1968; Mao, 1954); it may be understood as some kind of incompatible development or movement of different elements within the whole whereby each element within a relationship simultaneously supports and undermines the other (see Ollman, 1993).

All contradictions, however, must be viewed relationally within an internally-related holistic framework (Ollman, 1976, 1993). Implicit here is the concept of totality (Marx, 1973, 101). From this standpoint, ‘each part is viewed as incorporating in what it is all its relations with other parts up to and including everything that comes into the whole’ (Ollman, 1990, 38). So it is not possible to understand different interrelated parts of a whole without understanding how the parts relate to each other within this whole. This position simply implies that the manner in which ‘things cohere become essential attributes of what they are’ (Ollman, 1993, 37). Totality thereby represents ‘the way the whole is present through internal relations in each of its parts’; it is a dynamic, emergent and open construct, and is not to be confused with totalization or closure (Lefebvre, 1968, 111). Assumed within dialectical method this sense of totality offers a conceptual device that can be employed for understanding the totalizing nature of capitalism without itself being a totalizing theory. It concurs with Haraway’s (1990, 223) notion that ‘the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now’. Failure to assert a commitment to a critical reading of the totalizing character of the contemporary capitalist system – which comprehends only the difference and otherness that is expressed
through the market – is, however, another matter. This shortcoming merely succeeds in anaesthetizing critical sensibility and results in an *alienated* reconstruction of the world that ‘lap[es]es into boundless difference and giv[es] up the confusing task of making partial, real connection’ (Haraway, 1990, 202). Consequently there is, following quantum physicist David Bohm (1980, 11), always ‘a need to look on the world as an *undivided whole*’ (original emphasis).

This *relational ontology* contrasts markedly with atomistic, mechanistic, empiricist viewpoints. These latter, Cartesian-inspired, conceptions tend to separate out and ‘thingify’ different aspects of social reality, treating it as consisting of ‘discrete objects’ without any sense of relational interconnectivity. Capra (1982) insists that Cartesianism – which emerged through the philosophical inquiries of Descartes in the seventeenth century – has had an enormous and frequently limiting influence on the social and scientific development of Western civilization. As a method it is analytic, being directly oriented to reconciliation of thoughts and problems into pieces and in arranging these in their logical order’ (Capra, 1982, 44). The ‘whole’ from this perspective amounts to nothing more than the sum of the parts. Levins and Lewontin (1985, 269) remark that this reconstructs an ‘alienated’ and ‘reductionist’ view of the world. The Cartesian world view holds, furthermore, to a sharp separation between thinking and the material world, between the mind and matter, between the observer and the observed, and between the analyst and the analysed. Most forms of empiricism acknowledge a Cartesian atomized ontology. Cartesianism posits an essentially mechanical and mathematical representation of reality. For Descartes, the universe and living organisms were little more than machines governed by iron laws, much the same as the operation of a clock. Descartes’ atomized and mechanical view of the world profoundly influenced Newtonian physics wherein space was seen, as indeed it frequently is today in much geographical literature (cf. Sayer, 1985), as absolute, a passive empty container independent of physical phenomena (see Capra, 1982, ch. 2; Smith, 1984, ch. 3).

Confirmation of geography’s failure to shed its Cartesian baggage may be witnessed in Entrikin’s (1991) recent confrontation with the nature of place in his *The Betweenness of Place*. Although Entrikin’s thesis marks the latest reassertion that place matters, his declared goal of understanding the ‘full dimensionality of the concept of place’ is restricted owing to its unwitting Cartesian philosophical underpinning. To this end, it is revealing here to outline the central thrust of Entrikin’s viewpoint and pinpoint its limitations – *pari passu* a dialectical conceptualization – for explanation and for praxis.

**THE ‘BETWEENNESS OF PLACE’?**

Entrikin stresses that geographers have tended to study place by way of a continuum polarized between a *subjective*, idiographic and unique descriptive interpretation and a relatively *objective*, nomothetic and general explanatory understanding. What this engenders is a

large intellectual gap [which] exists between our sense of being actors in the world, of always being in place, and the ‘placelessness’ that characterizes our attempts to theorise about human actions and events. (Entrikin, 1991, 7)

According to Entrikin, geographers throughout the twentieth-century have sought – largely in vain – to reconcile this dualism between science and art, between explanation and description, between a *decentred* universalism and a *centred* particularism, via some middle-ground. Entrikin, too, maintains that a deeper understanding of place requires access to both objective and subjective reality:

From the decentred vantage point of the theoretical scientist, place becomes either location or a set of generic relations and thereby loses much of its significance for human action. From the centred viewpoint of the subject, place has meaning only in relation to an individual’s or group’s goals and concerns. Place is best viewed from points in between. (5)

Drawing upon French philosopher and literary critic, Paul Ricoeur, Entrikin argues that the key element straddling this relationship – or ‘getting between’ place – is the process of *emplotment* (25).

This is a form of narrative which gives structure to the particular connections that people have with places and, in so doing, ‘draw[s] together agents and structures, intentions and circumstances, the general and the particular, and at the same time seek[s] to explain causally’. Entrikin readily admits that he is offering neither a method nor an instructional guide for the study of place and, while it can be debated as to whether this failure to provide exemplars of emplotment is a basic weakness of his book (see
Johnston, 1992), my criticism is nonetheless aimed at a slightly different and arguably deeper target: the restrictive philosophical tradition within which the book is couched.

Entrikin’s evident starting point is human experience and the meaning given to place by conscious individuals. He aims to hold on to this phenomenological perspective while integrating a more decen-tred and objective component. But all of this begins with a tacit assumption that place is dualistic to begin with; Entrikin’s attempts to reconcile this dualism from the humanist point of view is tantamount to a reversion to the classical Cartesian position, though with a different emphasis. So even if Entrikin had wished to put his thesis into motion, it would, to my mind, have foundered sooner or later, simply because of the implicit Cartesian foundation.

As noted above, the Cartesian viewpoint assumes a duality between the material (external) world and the (internal) world of human consciousness. Rational knowledge became the potential source of mediation between the body and the mind, between the external and internal world. Duality is, therefore, the leitmotiv of Cartesian reality and this quality carries over into Entrikin’s thinking on place. To begin with, Entrikin constructs his argument from the postulation that place can be viewed by bridging two ends of a continuum. There is thus a polarity between subjective and objective realms of place (as if there is an a priori division); the objective and the subjective are, as he repeatedly insists, ‘both sides of this divide’ (Entrikin, 1991, 134) (emphasis added). He talks, furthermore, of place being the fusion of space and experience (as if the two are divided in the first place) which gives the earth’s surface a ‘wholeness’ or an ‘individuality’ (6) (emphasis added). The notion of ‘or’ here implies that space and experience and wholeness and individuality are in some sense two domains. This is Cartesian thought par excellence. A dialectical viewpoint suggests that the earth’s surface is ‘wholeness’ and ‘individuality’ since, following Hegel (1969, 606), wholeness contains individuality and individuality, ‘through its determinateness’, contains the whole.

This dualism persists in the way Entrikin deploys emplotment. The ‘large intellectual gap’ (Entrikin, 1991, 7) (emphasis added) that he perceives between our sense of being actors in place and our attempts to theorize about place, represents a ‘basic polarity of human consciousness’ (9) (emphasis added). In telling the story of place through the narrative (emplotment), the geographer is thus forced to occupy a position ‘between an objective pole of scientific theorising and a subjective pole of empathetic understanding’ (113–4) – all of which surely implies that the researcher did not have an immanent position in the material world as a fellow thinking subject in the first place. This sounds like Descartes’ belief that rational knowledge can be employed to mediate the assumed division between the external material world and the internal world of the mind although, for Entrikin, ‘rational’ humanist knowledge can somehow ‘get between’ external place and internal consciousness. Such a dualistic Cartesian conception is further reinforced through Entrikin’s assumption that the ‘theoretician seeks a level of abstraction and decentredness that diminishes the significance of the specificity of place and period for both the object of study and for the viewpoint taken toward the object’ (133). Therein surely lurks an implicit acknowledgement that the observer (viz. the viewpoint toward the object) and the observed (viz. the object itself) are somehow detached. Again, this is pure Cartesianism, for it seems to posit that intellectual knowledge can be mustered detached. Again, this is pure Cartesianism, for it seems to posit that intellectual knowledge can be mustered detached. Again, this is pure Cartesianism, for it seems to posit that intellectual knowledge can be mustered detached. Again, this is pure Cartesianism, for it seems to posit that intellectual knowledge can be mustered detached. 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underlying social processes once these commodities enter daily life via the market. Marx (1967, 71–83) terms this obfuscation the 'fetishism of commodities'; at and after market exchange, it is impossible to apprehend anything about the social relations, activities or struggles of private labour in the 'hidden abode of production' (Marx, 1967, 176). Marx argues that commodities, like other phenomena, are processes which appear in the form of things – a conclusion difficult to acknowledge in 'common-sense' empiricist understandings, since it asserts the bold postulation that the material world is simultaneously both a thing and a process.\(^3\)

Lefebvre's 'production of space' thesis effectively represents a spatialized rendition of Marx's conception of fetishism.\(^4\) Thus:

The ideologically dominant tendency divides space up into parts and parcels in accordance with the division of labour. It bases its image of the forces occupying space on the idea that space is a passive receptacle. Thus, instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it – relationships which introduce specific contradictions into production, so echoing the contradiction between the private ownership of the means of production and the social character of the productive forces – we fall into the trap of treating space as space 'in itself', as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so fetishise space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider 'things' in isolation, as 'things in themselves' (1991, 90) (emphases added).

Such a conceptualization alerts us to the fact that the material landscape (as fixed capital) is produced, of necessity, as a thing in place and becomes imbued with meaning in everyday place-bound social practices. But this physical and social landscape emerges through processes that are simultaneously operative over varying spatial and temporal scales and may have a broader significance within the whole – that is, they are operative over the domain of space. The interaction between space and place here is a crucial one. Equally vital is that while we must distinguish between these different realms if we are to apprehend place construction and transformation, we must simultaneously capture how they are in fact forged together in a dialectical unity. The material landscape and practices of everyday life occurring in different places under capitalism\(^5\) are inextricably embedded within the global capitalist whole. To this extent, the global capitalist system does not occur solely in some abstract sense; it has to ground itself and be acted out in specific places if it is to have any meaning (cf. Lefebvre, 1991b). The space of the whole thus takes on meaning through place, and each part (i.e. each place) in its interconnection with other parts (places) engenders the space of the whole.

The capitalist space-place relationship does not arise out of some kind of abstract concrete determination. Space is not a high level abstract theorization separated from the more concrete, tactile domain of place which is frequently taken as synonymous with an easily identifiable reality such as a specific location or 'locality'.\(^6\) An attempt to overcome this absolute separation is made here by arguing that both space and place have a real ontological status since they are both embodied in material processes – namely, real human activities. Their distinction must, therefore, be conceived by capturing how they melt into each other rather than by reifying some spurious fissure.

Marx's discussion on fixed and circulating capital in the Grundrisse is exemplary in framing the dialectical interconnection between space and place. For Marx, all capital is circulating capital in the sense that its nature is one of movement and process (1973, 618–26). Yet while circulating capital is the flow of going from one phase to the next – that is, from commodities to money to capital and so on – at the same time within each phase, it is 'posited in a specific aspect, restricted to a particular form, which is the negation of itself as the subject of the whole movement' (26). In short, it becomes fixed capital:

\[\text{[a]s the subject moving through all phases, as a moving unity, the unity-in-process of circulation ... capital is circulating capital; capital as restricted into any of these phases, as posited in its divisions, is fixed capital, tied-down capital. As circulating capital it fixates itself, and as fixated capital it circulates. (621) (original emphases)}\]

The formal nature of Marx's understanding here is suggestive for our own discussion: '[t]he distinction between circulating capital and fixed capital appears initially as a formal characteristic of capital, depending on whether it appears as ... the unity of the process or as one of its specific moments' (621) (latter emphasis added). Marx, therefore, makes a qualitative distinction whereby he identifies 'fixed' capital whose form directly opposes that of 'circulating'
capital, despite the fact that one takes on meaning only through the other; and, in the end, they are but different ‘moments’ or characteristic forms of the same – i.e. circulating – capital. In other words, fixed capital is the apparently static material thing-form quality of the embodied process of circulating capital.

What, then, does this all mean for space and place? If we have recourse to the above dialectical logic, the following picture emerges. Social space must be posited as a material process. This process represents the rootless, fluid reality of material flows of commodities, money, capital and information which can be transferred and shifted across the globe. Put simply, we can say that capitalist social space is subsumed under the domain of capital, since its command of property, money power, technology and mass media enable it to dominate and appropriate the space of global capitalism. This command is essential if it is to reproduce and expand a system based on commodity production and exchange and the accumulation of capital. From this standpoint, social space becomes a force of production itself (Lefebvre, 1979; Harvey, 1982; Swyngedouw, 1991, 1992), representing simultaneously a network of exchange and a flow of commodities, communication, energy and resources. This characteristic harks back to the ontological and dialectical proposition that the quality of capitalism as a ‘thing’ (it appears as a network organized in space) cannot be dissociated from its ‘processual’ aspects (it is also a diffusive flow over space). Again, quantum theory echoes precisely these notions: all matter, recall, is a particle (a concentrated entity in space) and a wave (a dispersive non-spatially concentrated process) at one and the same time.

Capital is an inexorably circulatory process diffusive in space which also fixes itself as a thing in space and so begets a built environment. The fixity nature (the thing quality) of the geographical landscape is necessary to permit the flow and diffusive nature of capital; and vice versa. Capital fixity must, of necessity, take place somewhere, and hence place can be taken as a specific form emergent from an apparent stopping of, or as one specific moment in, the dynamics of capitalist social space. This ‘thing’ and ‘flow’ feature of reality implies, too, an inextricable interconnection between time and space since one takes on meaning only through the other and they cannot effectively be distinguished. The process of capital circulation must take place as a thing somewhere so as to combine with other ‘things’ (such as labour-power and means of production) which are themselves constituted by specific processes. The production of space is thus the process as well as the outcome of the process (i.e. the produced social space); it is the totality of the ‘flow’ and ‘thing’ qualities of capitalist material geographical landscape (Lefebvre, 1991a, 86–92). I should point out here, nevertheless, that Castells (1985, 14) fails to comprehend this double-edged dialectical interconnection with his rhetorical phrase that the ‘space of flows [is] substituting a space of places’. What Castells fails to recognize is that it is not one or the other – that is, the space of flows or the space of places – but rather space is already flow and place – it is simultaneously a process and a thing. It is only by identifying this feature theoretically, as we shall see later, that a prospective ‘place-bound’ radical political practice can emerge, since flows do take on a thing form in place and hence are always vulnerable in that place. The problem for this practice is that the processes that embody this fixity are diffusive insofar as they are operative over varying spatial scales.

This ‘moment’ of apparent fixity of capital in place is never merely uniform as each fraction of capital responds to competitive economically-conditioned exigencies. And while Lefebvre himself rightly accredits significance to the economic sphere, he is also careful to avoid economism.7 To be sure, Lefebvre is adamant that this overall process of space and place production is a deeply political event. Consequently, space internalizes conflictual and contradictory social forces and social conflict is thereby ‘inscribed in place’. This conflict arises from the inextricable tension between the usage and appropriation of place for social purposes and the domination of place (and space) as a productive and commercial force through private ownership. Only class and social struggles, therefore, have the capacity to ‘generate differences which are not intrinsic to economic growth’ (Lefebvre, 1991a, 55). In the ideal world of capitalism, capital would be just a ‘free-floating’ flow liberated from any constraints of space and place. The whole space of capitalism would then represent the homogeneous economic space of exchange value. Although individual capitalists may themselves be relatively free-floating, this normative landscape can never be generalized in reality if capitalists are to fulfil their historical roles as personifications of capital since actual production, realization and distribution of surplus value is
necessarily place-dependent and hence always vulnerable to political contestation.

It follows here that place is not merely abstract space: it is the terrain where basic social practices – consumption, enjoyment, tradition, self-identification, solidarity, social support and social reproduction, etc. – are lived out. As a moment of capitalist space, place is where everyday life is situated. And as such, place can be taken as practiced space. What is practiced is the clash between a consumption of space which produces surplus value and one which produces only enjoyment – and is therefore ‘unproductive’. It is a clash, in other words, between capitalist ‘utilisers’ and community ‘users’. (Lefebvre, 1991a, 359, 60)

Consequently, spatial contradictions – that is, political conflicts between socio-economic interests and forces – express themselves in place. It is only, pace Castells, in place that such conflicts come effectively into play, and in doing so they become contradictions of space (cf. 365). Place is not, therefore, a tabula rasa upon which these broader capitalist (economic) forces unfold, for place-specific ingredients and the politics of place are not innocent and passive in the formation of overall capitalist social space; the significance of these qualitative aspects of place and how they, in turn, shape space and political conflicts and meaning centring around everyday life cannot, needless to say, be downplayed.

It is not too difficult to see, furthermore, how this state of affairs could erupt into a political struggle to define place (space): Whose place? What kind of place? Which place? And, as Lefebvre has noted, it ‘hardly seems necessary to add that within this space violence does not always remain latent or hidden. One of its contradictions is that between the appearance of security [is] the constant threat, and indeed the occasional eruption, of violence’ (1991a, 57). Violence is therefore invariably connected with spontaneity of action and hence place-specific contestation (see Lefebvre, 1969). Still, the power of capital to organize, control, counteract contestation, and forge place in its own exchange value image is usually predicated on its superior ability to dominate space (Harvey, 1989; cf. Ross, 1988). As Lefebvre (56) soberly argues, ‘there is no getting around the fact that the bourgeoisie still has the initiative in its struggle for (and in) space’.

Within the very moment of place, in short, there lies a copresence of heterogeneous and conflictual processes, many of which are operative over a broader scale than the realm of place itself. Place emerges through the interpenetration of objective and subjective forces; it is a ‘state of being’ (Relph, 1989, Seamon and Mugerauer, 1989) as well as a formative political-economic process (cf. Harvey, 1993b). Yet from the dialectical viewpoint these qualities are different moments of the same unity. They should not be grasped, as I earlier argued contra Entrikin, as the unification of two different realms. The basic problematic here lies in understanding the mode of determination between space and place and, specifically, how these two realms are mediated. Reconciling the way experience is lived and acted out in place, and how this relates to political and economic developments on a global and national scale, remains a most challenging concern for theoretical endeavour. These difficulties can, however, be overcome by way of an alternative dialectical conceptualization, the germ of which is found in Lefebvre’s spatialized dialectic. Lefebvre’s framework is an extremely suggestive and flexible heuristic device for interpreting the mode of mediation between space and place which can shed light on the nature of place and how it, in turn, relates to the broader social whole. Let us, therefore, elucidate Lefebvre’s spatiology more closely.

TOWARDS A RECONCILIATION: LEFEBVRE’S SPATIAL TRIAD

Lefebvre’s explorations in The Production of Space (1991a) are the culmination of a life-long intellectual project in which he sought to understand the role of space, the nature of the urban and the importance of everyday life in the perpetuation and expanded reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. In The Survival of Capitalism (1976) [1973], Lefebvre had earlier made explicit that capitalism was indeed a deeply geographical project:

what has happened is that capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and consequently, in the hundred years since the writing of Capital, it has succeeded in achieving ‘growth’. We cannot calculate at what price, but we know the means: by occupying space, by producing a space (1976, 21) (original emphasis)

But it wasn’t until the following year with the publication of the The production of space that Lefebvre pursued more directly the idea of producing space. Lefebvre’s originality stems from the fact that he invoked the need for a ‘unity theory’
(1991a, 11) between different ‘fields’ of space which had hitherto been apprehended separately in Western intellectual (Cartesian-Newtonian) practice. Lefebvre’s aim was to ‘detonate this state of affairs’ (24) since he rightly saw fragmentation and conceptual separation as serving distinctively ideological purposes. His approach aimed both ‘to reconnect elements that have been separated . . . [and] to rejoin the severed and reanalyse the commingled’ (413, emphasis added). Lefebvre strove for a unity theory of space, a rapprochement between physical space (nature), mental space (formal abstractions about space) and social space (the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias’ (12)). Implicated in this project was Lefebvre’s own particular brand of Marxism which stressed the importance of everyday life, of alienation and of the writings of the early, humanist Marx.10 Consequently, his project on space does not simply reduce the mental to the material in a ‘vulgar’ Marxist fashion. For Lefebvre, the realms of perception, symbolism and imagination, although distinguishable, are not separable from physical and social space.11

According to Lefebvre, bringing these different modalities of space together within a single theory would expose space, decode space, and read space.12 This could be achieved only by thinking about the dialectical character of their interaction; thinking, in other words, about the manner in which they come together as a conflictual process of creation, as a process of producing. At first sight, Lefebvre admits, to speak of ‘producing space sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it’ (1991a, 15). But the method by which he elucidates this argument is provocative, subtle and, as I hope to illustrate shortly, particularly germane for our own purposes.

Lefebvre immediately urges that if we are to shift our attention from the conception of ‘things in space’ to the ‘actual production of space’, our theoretical understanding must capture the generative process of space (37). For Lefebvre, the process of producing space (process) and the product (thing) – that is, the produced social space itself – present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas. Thus space as a material product is a present space: a moment absorbed in a complex dynamic process which ‘embraces a multitude of intersections’ (33). Lefebvre attempts to render intelligible the complex interplay between the different aspects of this process in its totality through the use of a ‘conceptual triad’ (1991a, 33). Incorporated therein are three moments identified by Lefebvre as: representations of space, representational space and spatial practices. Let us ponder each in turn.

Representations of space refers to conceptualized space, the discursively constructed space of professionals and technocrats such as planners, engineers, developers, architects, urbanists, geographers and those of a scientific bent. This space comprises the various arcane signs, jargon, codifications, objectified representations used and produced by these agents. According to Lefebvre, it is always a conceived and abstract space since it subsumes ideology and knowledge within its practice. It is the dominant space in any society and is ‘tied to the relations of production and to the “order” which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to “frontal” relations’ (33). Because it is effectively the space of capital, conceived space has a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space (42) and finds its ‘objective expression’ in monuments, towers, factories and in the bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space’ (49).

Representational space is directly lived space, the space of everyday life. It is space experienced through the complex symbols and images of its ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’. This space ‘overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects’ (39) which may be linked to some underground, clandestine side of social life. Lived representational space has no need to obey rules of consistency or cohesiveness because it is, as Lefebvre (1991a, 42) says, alive:

it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.

Equally, it is an elusive space which the imagination (conceived) must seek to change and appropriate. Lived space, therefore, is the dominated, passively experienced space that the conceived, ordered, hegemonic space will intervene in, codify, rationalize and ultimately attempt to usurp. Architects,
planners, developers and the like are, of course, all active in this very pursuit.

Spatial practices are practices that 'secrete' society's space. For Lefebvre the spatial practices of any society are revealed by 'deciphering' its space (38). Spatial practices, however, have close affinities to perceived space. In other words, people's perceptions condition their daily reality with respect to the usage of space: for example, their routes, networks, patterns of interaction that link places set aside for work, play and leisure.13 These practices result from a perceived space, a space, for example, that embraces both production and reproduction. Spatial practices structure daily life and a broader urban reality and, in so doing, ensure societal cohesion, continuity and a specific spatial competence (33).

Lefebvre is, nevertheless, tantalizingly vague on the precise fashion in which the conceived-lived-perceived triad interrelate. He certainly points to a dialectical as opposed to a causal mode of determination; but this demands further clarification. Lefebvre gives centrality to the body in the understanding of the relationship between these different moments. He brings to bear a libertarian, humanist Marxism here which made him acutely sensitive to quotidian lived experience.14 Bodily experience towards space as lived, he argues, is 'strangely different' from when it is thought of and perceived. And spatial practices are lived directly before they are conceptualized. The relationship to space of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or society implies a certain relationship to their body and vice versa (40). As a result, Lefebvre's discussions on space and the body leave plenty of room for dialogue with both phenomenological perspectives and feminist geographers. For example, he emphasizes (1991a, 280ff) the way in which abstract space is not solely the repressive economic and political space of capital, but it is equally a repressive male space which invariably finds its representation in the phallic aspect of towers — symbols of force, male fertility and masculine violence. 'Phallic erectility', Lefebvre declares, 'bestows a special status on the body and vice versa.' (287). For Lefebvre, abstract space functions 'objectally' (49) insofar as it is formal, homogeneous and quantitative, erasing all differences such as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity). In sum, conceived, abstract space is a quintessentially masculine priapic space where Logos (logical knowledge) prevails over Eros (erotic knowledge). Significantly, such a reading implies a political and geographical programme wherein 'reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space . . . is a non-negotiable part of its agenda' (167).

Relations between conceived-perceived-lived moments are never stable and exhibit historically defined qualities, attributes and interconnections. But the problem under capitalism is, according to Lefebvre, that primacy is given to the conceived; all which renders insignificant the 'unconscious' level of lived experience (34). What is lived and perceived is subsumed under what is conceived. The social space of lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what he calls an 'abstract' conceived space which dances to the tune of the homogenizing forces of money, commodities, capital and the phallus. It denies the celebration of lived difference, of tradition, of jouissance, of sensual differential space. Capitalism demands an abstract masculine space of capital accumulation and repression which it conceives in accordance with the exigencies of banks, business centres, productive agglomerations and information networks. Henceforward it is class and social struggle which 'prevents abstract space from taking over the whole planet and papering over all differences' (55).

Lefebvre here prioritizes the lived and perceived over the conceived. Or, put more accurately, he upbraids their factitious separation under modern capitalism. His fierce invectives on alienation in everyday life invoke the necessity for a reconciliation between thinking and living. For Lefebvre, the distinction has led to a separation of different spheres of human activity and a 'despoliation' of everyday life, since the latter remains in the thrall of abstract space. Hence, for Lefebvre (1991b, 1971), there is no knowledge of everyday life without a critique of everyday life. While, however, there is a powerful phenomenological moment in his writings here, there is, as might be surmised, equally a rejection of the hyper-phenomenology of Heidegger.15 In consequence, Lefebvre rejected appeals to any atavistic model as a source of 'authenticity'. His nostalgia was firmly for the future and, as an active Marxist within and later outside the French Communist Party, repeatedly pointed to the necessity of revolt.

In itself, though, Lefebvre's conceived-perceived-lived triad does not explain anything about capitalist spatiality. Lefebvre himself admits that it is essentially a hollow, abstract device which has to be
employed in concrete situations. Indeed, if treated solely as an abstract 'model', he argues, it loses all its force and its import is severely limited (1991a, 40). Furthermore,

spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period. (46)

The space-relations identified by Lefebvre, then, take on meaning through, and are permeated by, historically defined social relations (and vice versa). As for unravelling the present dilemma, however, Lefebvre's triad becomes remarkably suggestive when projected onto the space-place problematic. Consider the following scenario.

I suggested earlier that space represented the realm of flows of capital, money, commodities and information, and remained the domain of the hegemonic forces in society. From this viewpoint, place comprises the locus and a sort of stopping of these flows, a specific moment in the dynamics of space-relations under capitalism. Place is shaped by the grounding (the 'thingification', if you will) of these material flows, though it concomitantly serves to shape them too by way of social and class struggle over place necessitating, for example, that abstract capital takes a particular physical and social form in place. I shall now argue that space is always set to a particular conceived representation because it is the dominant conception — an ideal type of homogenized global capitalist space — that is tied to the hegemonic relations of production and sexuality. It is the realm of dispassionate 'objects' rationally 'ordered in space'; a deracinated space where representation is simply the representation of the ruling groups, just as the ruling ideas were for Marx. Here, knowledge and power attempt to reign supreme and impose what they know onto lived sensual and sexual experience. Correspondingly, everyday life becomes a practical and sensual activity acted out in place. The battle becomes the moment of struggle between conceiving space through representation and living place through actual sensual experience and representational meaning. Place is synonymous with what is lived in the sense that daily life practices are embedded in particular places. Social practice is place-bound, political organization demands place organization. Life is place-dependent, and hence the Lefebvrian struggle to 'change life' (borrowing Rimbaud's phrase) has to launch itself from a place platform. Equally, place is more than just lived everyday life. It is the 'moment' when the conceived, the perceived and the lived attain a certain 'structured coherence' (to borrow Harvey's term). Lefebvre puts it majestically in Critique of Everyday Life (1991b, 6): everyday life in place is 'the supreme court where wisdom, knowledge and power are brought to judgement'.

There are important issues emerging from this. First, while space-place/conceived-lived evinces a separation of human relations, it is only in particular places — in, if you will, particular lived experiences — that this distinction is realized. The dualism is not, as previously noted, indicative of an abstract/concrete affair. What is conceived in thought expresses a specific representation of space, but this is actualized materially only in place. To paraphrase Lefebvre (1991b), it is something which must be everyday, or it will not be anything at all. This is why place (actual daily life) has to be the starting point of theoretical and political analysis. But dialectical inquiry must, as I have suggested, also acknowledge that within place there is an antagonistic movement. There lies within lived experience, for example, an objective force that thinks and mobilizes this knowledge to control a broader domain than simply the lived alone. And it is such an abstract material power that must be woven into an understanding of place and recognized in any political praxis occurring around daily life.

Nevertheless, there is another implication of a Lefebvrian articulation of space-place relationships, involving the nature of spatial practices. If, as Lefebvre insists, spatial practices are fundamental in ensuring continuity and cohesion in terms of overall capitalist social space through the way space is perceived, then they are afforded a certain mediating role in reproducing the space-place separation. The corollary of this is that spatial practices are dialectically implicated in both conceived space and lived place. The images, symbols and perceptions of local people, subcultures, gangs, for example, all embrace different spatial practices. This imagery, too, may centre around symbolic representations of landscape (monuments, landmarks) which, while put in place through dominant spatial practices, become imbued with meaning in daily life. So we can witness how spatial practices become blurred with respect to the conceived (space)/lived (place) distinction (see, e.g. Merrifield, 1993, 107–18).
All this suggests that spatial practices fulfil an ambiguous regulatory role. They become the pressure point in keeping the space-place relationship together, yet apart. The manner in which space is perceived in place gets played out in daily life. But these daily spatial practices reproduce a spatial and political hierarchy which I have identified as a space-place dualism. Furthermore, the perpetuation of the global space of capitalism is both acted out, and dependent on, these spatial practices operating as they do. Any challenge to this political power must recognize that the political power of represented space over representational lived space is not a detachment of differentiated forces. Lefebvre (1991a, 366) captures this in a vitally important passage for the purpose of the present argument:

It would be mistaken in this connection to picture a hierarchical scale stretching between two poles, with the unified will of political power at one extreme and the actual dispersion of differentiated elements at the other. For everything (the 'whole') weighs down on the lower or 'micro' level, on the local and the localizable — in short, on the sphere of everyday life. Everything (the 'whole') also depends on this level: exploitation and domination, protection and — inseparably — repression. The basis and foundation of the 'whole' is dissociation and separation, maintained as such by the will above; such dissociation and separation are inevitable in that they are the outcome of a history, of the history of accumulation, but they are fatal as soon as they are maintained in this way, because they keep the moments and elements of social practice away from one another. A spatial practice destroys social practice; social practice destroys itself by means of spatial practice. (emphasis added)

'A spatial practice destroys social practice; social practice destroys itself by means of spatial practice.' This is an intriguing proclamation. But what does it signify? Understanding its intent, arguably, relates specifically to the manner in which any theory about the space-place interconnection can inform an actual political programme around place, an agenda so clearly at the core of Lefebvre's argument all along.

Lefebvre is speaking here in terms of political strategy, wherein he clearly accords a specific role to spatial practices. For Lefebvre, any emancipatory politics presupposes a dialectics of space, a particular set of theoretically informed spatial practices aimed at overcoming separation and dissociation between the global 'whole' and the 'local' everyday. Appreciating that the maintenance of the conceived global whole is dependent on the local lived level is somehow integral for informing subversive spatial practices. Lefebvre thus points to the baleful effects of thinking and acting out one's daily spatial practices in terms of separation: on the one hand there is the global, and, on the other is the local, the everyday. Taken in this way, the domination of the 'whole' over the 'parts' is actively reproduced. In other words, the sum of the parts is somehow dominant over each part. This latter conceptualization is Cartesian and one from which Lefebvre, as a supreme dialectician, would want to distance himself. As he rightly says, it is 'fatal ... to keep the moments and elements of social practice away from one another' (1991a, 366). So he is pointing to the way in which, at the level of everyday life, this dualism is perceived and perpetuated by the way localized spatial practices are acted out.18 This opinion appears to corroborate the argument that the Cartesian atomized world view is deeply ingrained in popular consciousness (Capra, 1982).

Yet Lefebvre certainly holds that social practice and spatial practice are interconnected at whatever scale; and a spatial practice, as he says above, has the capacity to destroy social practice. He argues, furthermore, that those spaces most effectively appropriated are those occupied by symbols: spatial practices are profoundly affected by the perceived, symbolic landscape. The symbolic meaning, for example, of parks and gardens (that emphasize an absolute nature), religious buildings (that symbolize absolute wisdom, reverence and power) and monuments (charged with psychological power, representing desires, past events and battles waged or to come, etc.) are legion. The landscape is thus impregnated with symbols and imagery that have an explicit and insidious impact in spatial practices of everyday life. To this end, for Lefebvre, the symbolic landscape is fecund with myths and legends, and hence remains a formidable means of appropriating space.19

On the other hand, while the 'micro' level 'does contain both the resources needed and the stakes at issue', it is not always the 'sphere in which contending forces are deployed' (1991a, 366). Recall that place (what we can variously term the 'local' or a 'part') is constitutive of flows and practices that operate over varying spatial scales. For Lefebvre, it follows that challenging the hegemony of the whole must likewise incorporate spatial practices that perceive of how the whole is in fact constituted; and
how, moreover, the foundation and perpetration of this whole is actively based on a Cartesian underpinning that emphasizes separation and dissociation of spheres. This deeper knowledge of the whole and the part, space and place, the global and the local must also be acted upon politically. The utopian element of Lefebvre’s arguments on space and political practice are evidence enough. But there is still something very important to be learned here. For his message suggests that place-bound spatial practices must be formulated in such a way as to confront the spatial sphere in which hegemonic forces are deployed: in other words, these spatial practices occurring in place have to be mindful of the dominant conceived spatial practices operative over space. Place, therefore, has the resources and capacity to transform space, but it cannot do so from the vantage point of place alone: political practices must thus be organized around place in form yet extend in substance to embrace space. For Lefebvre, the dialectical interconnection of this ostensible disjunction poses a pressing dilemma for theorization and, above all, for practical politics. To this degree, a politics that is informed by a theory founded upon dualism and separation – one which divides and fragments space, consciousness and the material world, and the body and spatiality – is, in the last instance, likely to be retrogressive in its praxis. And herein, in short, lie the dangers of Enrikin’s ‘betweenness’ thesis.

SUMMARY

This paper has sought to lay out a philosophical and theoretical framework for understanding the construction, meaning and reconstruction of the geographical landscape in place. Via Lefebvre’s spatialized dialectic, I stressed the need for a dialectical mode of analysis, one that questioned Cartesian-inspired geographical formulations and recognized the flow/thing relationship of space and place. In this way, the broader mechanisms through which the built environment is produced, becomes imbued with meaning and undergoes transformation in specific places. I suggested throughout that the task of place theorization is not one of achieving knowledge of the way the dualism between the different realms of space and place is bridged – as with Enrikin’s ‘betweenness’ thesis – but rather in theorizing how space and place are different aspects of a unity – that is, two facets of a dialectical process just as the wave and particle aspect of matter is assumed in quantum physics. Under these conditions, a distinction between these two realms is made; though only insofar as it represents different ‘moments’ of a contradictory and conflictual process. The necessity to understand how the space-place, global-local, macro-micro levels are articulated and mediated is, I further argued, vital for theory and for a robust, progressive politics of place.

Here Lefebvre’s ‘triadic’ analysis, which establishes the different dimensions through which capitalist social space is produced and appropriated, can help inform such a project and in the process pioneer the development of a non-Cartesian critical human geography, one that is sensitive to bodily lived experience and is broad and subtle enough to enable a practical project that can embrace, in undogmatic fashion, a class, gender, ethnic and affinity group politics. My purpose in propounding a Lefebvrian formulation was to set up a framework capturing the different moments of space – i.e. phenomenological, perceptual and the material – dialectically in a way that could be projected onto the space-place problematic; without, however, suggesting that the realm we call space can be ‘read off’ from a different realm we call space in a vulgar materialist and Cartesian mechanistic fashion or, alternatively, to reduce place to the purely phenomenological realm of experience and metaphysical meaning.

‘Every social space’, Lefebvre (1991a, 110) has written, ‘is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents.’ The goal of theoretical inquiry, finally, must be to grasp how this outcome and internally-heterogeneous process is inextricably bound up with the other. The current difficulties with interpreting the production, meaning and frequent destruction of particular places could, following Lefebvre’s dialectical invocation, ‘be brought to an end if a truly unitary theory of space were to be developed’. Though this reunification in no way ‘aspire[s] to the status of a completed “totality”’ (1991a, 413), Lefebvre’s intellectual project has strategic objectives and these, as I have attempted to illustrate, are worth spelling out at a time when the spectre of Cartesianism haunts the geographical agenda. Lefebvre’s brilliance, to say nothing of his value to the geographer, stems from his realization that the struggle for empowerment, emancipation and the ‘right to difference’ (for the spatial and social body) is an intensely geographical project: nothing and no one, he implores, can ever avoid a ‘trial by space’.
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NOTES

1. Einstein’s theory of relativity, for example, which showed the interconnection between time, space and matter, exposed the limitations of Newtonian–Cartesian physics, even though Einstein himself remained a recalcitrant Cartesian as his historic debate with Bohr in the 1920s demonstrated (see Capra, 1982). Today, quantum physics cogently emphasizes the shortcomings of Cartesianism (Bohm, 1980; Bohm and Peat, 1989; cf. Massey, 1992).

2. Cf. Werlen’s (1993: 52–6) critique of the phenomenological tradition and the similarities it holds with the Cartesian world view.

3. It is precisely this understanding of matter, incidentally, that informs the epistemological and ontological bases of quantum physics. Moreover, such a viewpoint also cogently demonstrated the limitations of the Cartesian–Newtonian world view (Capra, 1982 ch. 3). Indeed, quantum theory points to the dual nature of matter and light: it can be simultaneously a ‘particle’ – viz. an entity – and a ‘wave’ – viz. a process or flow. As Capra illustrates, ‘while it [matter] acts like a particle, it is capable of developing its wave nature at the expense of its particle nature, and vice versa, thus undergoing continual transformations from particle to wave and from wave to particle’. This means that neither the electron nor any other atomic ‘object’ has any intrinsic properties independent of its environment [the error of absolutist Newtonian physics]. The properties it shows – particle-like or wave-like – will depend on the experiential situation [i.e. on the relational context] (68–9) (cf. Bohm, 1980; Bohm and Peat, 1989). See also Kojève (1980) who underscores the similarities between Hegel’s dialectical interpretation of science and quantum physics, especially Heisenberg’s relations of ‘uncertainty’ and Bohr’s ‘complementary notions’ between the wave and the particle (177, n2).

4. Lefebvre, rightly in my mind (pace Althusser), points to the manner in which Marx’s mature scientific conception of fetishism derives its basis from his earlier philosophical writings on alienation.

5. In saying this, though, it is apparent that the space-place dialectic is not uniquely capitalist in orientation since the relationship would seem to hold for non-capitalist social formations. Just, then, as Marx posited that each mode of production did possess a labour theory of value – though of course the particular form and dynamics assumed by this law were historically and geographically specific – it is also evident that the form and constituent processes embodied in the space-place interconnection are likewise specific to particular modes of production.

6. Cox and Mair (1989) also advocate the need to get away from viewing space-place, global-local as an abstract concrete distinction. (See, too, Graham and St Martin (1990) who ‘delve’ into the philosophical and epistemological ‘origins’ of these dualistic conceptual formulations.) Cox and Mair argue, for example, that the ‘seeming impasse between the abstract and the concrete can be substantially alleviated through the recognition and adoption of different levels of abstraction’ (122). Under this agenda, Cox and Mair pinpoint how a methodology incorporating a hierarchy of abstractions – regimes of accumulation, local dependence, local social structure and coalitions, etc. – that refer to various aspects of the locality could be adopted to make more general statements about locality per se. These general insights could then inform particular local studies (128). While the method that Cox and Mair invoke may differ from my own, common ground is found because we all recognize the importance of abstract theorization in reconstructing and understanding observable localized processes and, following Smith’s (1987, 67) neat summation, that the ‘essence of the intellectual enterprise . . . is to construct sustainable generalisations’.

7. Economism is simply the thesis asserting that the economic has absolute priority in any social formation. Yet, by the same token, in eschewing economism it is simultaneously vital that economic factors and their significance in conditioning the geographical landscape of capitalism are not downplayed. Fredric Jameson (1988, 354) is, to my mind, bang on the mark in affirming that ‘anyone who believes that the profit motive and the logic of capital accumulation are not fundamental laws of this world, who believes that these do not set absolute barriers and limits to social changes and transformations undertaken in it – such a person is living in an alternative universe’.

8. I have here reversed Michel de Certeau’s (1984, 117) formulation where he argues that ‘space is a practiced place’. De Certeau’s distinction between space and place, however, bears close affinities to my own argument above. According to de Certeau, place (lieu) is ‘the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which a person is living in an alternative universe’.
an indication of stability. Space (espace), on the other hand, is 'composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it ... in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts'.

9. In the Anglo-Saxon world, for example, this is something David Harvey has repeatedly asserted over the last twenty years or so. His concept of 'spatial fix' and space being an 'active moment' were formulated precisely to emphasize this point. See, too, Soja (1989 ch. 2).

10. This, I should add, also made him something of a heretic in the post-war French Marxist Communist tradition, as his early autobiographical account, La Somme et le Reste (1959) confirms. For details see Trebitsch's informative preface to Lefebvre's Critique of Everyday Life (1991b). See, too, Kelly (1982) for a critical account of Lefebvre's stormy relationship with the French Communist Party.

11. I thus find Werlen's (1993, 4–5) accusations – in an otherwise engaging book which offers a non-Marxist challenge to Cartesian 'geo-determinism' within geography – that Lefebvre's formulations of space in The Production of Space are a 'reductive materialist view' to be totally unfounded. His suggestions that Lefebvre lapses into 'vulgar materialism' in defining space is so startling that I have to wonder whether he has read the book.

12. Lefebvre (1991a), in this latter instance, is nonetheless careful to distance himself from a purely semiological 'reading' of space. While he generally concurs with Barthes that it is possible to read space as a text (see 142–44, 159–64), left at such a level this would overlook a vital point: 'space is produced before being read'; and it was, according to Lefebvre, produced not in order to be read 'but in order to be lived by people with bodies and lives' (143) (original emphases).

13. Cf. Kevin Lynch's seminal text, The image of the city (1960), where he first expounded how the realm of perception conditions an individual subject's actual spatial practices in the city. As Lynch highlighted, the perceptual 'imageability' of the urban landscape – monuments, distinctive landmarks, paths, natural boundaries, etc. – simultaneously aids and deters city dwellers' sense of location and the manner in which they act.

14. Lefebvre frequently draws on the dialectical interpretations of the body and signs of the body (via mirrors) found in the political and spiritual poetry of Mexican poet and critic, Octavio Paz. The production of space is laced throughout with Paz's work.

15. Though this was never an outright rejection. Indeed, Lefebvre (1991a, 121) acknowledges the important influence of Heidegger's 'ontological excavations' (see Heidegger, 1971) as well as Bachelard's 'moving and emotional' writings on the 'poetics of space' (Bachelard, 1969).

16. The writings of John Berger (1992) in a different context (rural peasant life in the French Alps) are analogous to Lefebvre's here (accepting that Lefebvre's early studies did focus on Pyrenean peasant rural sociology), as are some of Raymond Williams's. Like Lefebvre, both Berger and Williams concern themselves with how landscapes have the potential to obfuscate and articulate positive lived experience (cf. Daniels, 1989). In this regard all three insist that the 'manipulative' and 'redemptive' dimensions of landscape should be kept in dialectical tension.

17. An excellent example of this very phenomenon is the Beaubourg (Pompidou) centre in Paris which, although conceived as a bourgeois representation of space (necessitating, incidentally, the partial destruction of Lefebvre's own vibrant neighbourhood of the Marais), the interstitial spaces of the project have become reshaped and thoroughly amalgamated into local neighbourhood and Parsian daily life, becoming in the process something of a 'spectacle of the people' now expressive of a lived representational space.

18. I should point out in this respect that the construction and reproduction of daily life practices is something central to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'. This is a 'generative' mechanism whereby distinctive subjective practices and dispositions reproduce themselves on the basis of their given objective position. Habitus thus conditions the thoughts, perceptions, actions, etc., of individual subjects, complicitiously setting the parameters in such a way as to maintain the current objective conditions (Bourdieu, 1977, 95). To illustrate the mode of enactment of habitus, Bourdieu (80) cites Leibniz: 'Imagine,' says Leibniz, 'two clocks or watches in perfect agreement as to the time. This may occur in one of three ways. The first consists in mutual influence; the second is to appoint a skilful workman to correct them and synchronize them at all times; the third is to construct these clocks with such art and precision that one can be assured of their subsequent agreement'. Writers such as Harvey (1987) and Budd (1992) have shown how habitus is a generative principle that structures spatial practices. More specifically, Harvey (1987, 268) suggests that Bourdieu's theorization is a 'very striking depiction' of the constraints to the power of the lived over the conceived.

19. This was something the Situationists also recognized at the time. So much so in fact that, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, they attempted to redirect dominant urban symbolism and transform and
reappropriate its meaning for their own subversive ends. Lefebvre himself, while of an older generation, worked with various members of the movement until an acrimonious squabble in 1963 (when the Situationists accused Lefebvre of plagiarism). Notwithstanding, the parallels between positions are clear enough. Focusing on the notion of everyday ‘situations’ as the battleground for transforming society, the Situationists attempted to construct various novel subversive strategies (artistic and practical), many of which explicitly acknowledged the importance of the built environment and architectural symbolism. D *tourment* (literally ‘hi-jacking’), for example, which is ‘first of all a negation of the value of the previous organisation of expression’ (Debord, 1989, 29), was a case in point. Here, everyday situations, meanings and symbols would to be subtended, transformed and reappropriated in order to create new, ‘free activity’. Subverting and reappropriating the existing symbolic landscape, giving it a different meaning either through art (graffiti, for example) or through practical occupation was the central objective of *D tourment*. As Debord suggested, such an activity would permit the ‘integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu’ (22). This would help create a new ‘symbolic urbanism’ (Chtcheglov, 1989, 24) which would perceive and practice the urban landscape differently. It would be a gesture of contestation, a ‘critique of existing human geography’, through which individuals and communities could create places and events suitable for their own appropriation (Debord, 1967). This would give rise to a new ‘unitary urbanism’ which would bring together living, perceiving and imagining into the construction of a dynamic and more humane urbanism. Numerous *d tourments* of buildings, for instance, lay at the core of the Situationists’ manifesto on ‘unitary urbanism’.

20. ‘Nothing is possible’, Lefebvre insistently urged, ‘without the desire and demand for the impossible.’ Thus, ‘imagination’ must strive ‘to seize power’. And his thesis of de-alienated ‘total man’ (which, notwithstanding its gendered connotations, represented a whole, unfettered human being), ‘can only be conceived of as a limit to the infinity of social development’ (1991b, 66).

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INTRODUCTION

With the current success and proliferation of Henri Lefebvre’s phrase “the production of space,” it becomes increasingly necessary to oppose its banalization by revealing the philosophical sources of this concept and preventing the isolation of the thesis that space is socially produced from other dimensions of his theory. Of paramount import in this regard is Lefebvre’s argument that space is a concrete abstraction.¹ In this chapter I would like to assert that the concept of concrete abstraction brings together the most vital elements of Lefebvre’s theory of production of space, relating it to his rethinking of the philosophies of Hegel and Marx as well as studies of postwar French architecture and urbanism. In so doing, I wish to show in particular how Lefebvre’s approach to space as a product of historically specific material, conceptual and quotidian practices was facilitated by his use of the concept of concrete abstraction. This requires a brief discussion of its Hegelian origins, before examining three appropriations of concrete abstraction by Marx to highlight their mobilization in Lefebvre’s theory.

I will first argue that Marx’s definition of concrete abstraction as an “abstraction which became true in practice” was developed by Lefebvre into the claim that the space of capitalism is an abstraction that “became true” in social, economic, political,
and cultural practice. Next, I will show that Marx’s understanding of concrete abstraction as a “sensual-suprasensual thing” inspired Lefebvre to theorize the paradoxical character of contemporary space as simultaneously homogeneous and fragmented. Finally, I will claim that Marx’s analysis of concrete abstraction as “form” allows us to grasp Lefebvre’s thesis on the dialectical “form” of space. Significantly, Marx proposed these three ways of defining concrete abstraction in order to analyze labor and commodity in the conditions of the nineteenth-century capitalist economy. Here I will show that Lefebvre’s argument about space as concrete abstraction, formulated during his Nanterre professorship (1965–73), was contextualized likewise by his empirical studies of urbanization in the trente glorieuses, his critiques of postwar functionalist urbanism, and the revision of Modernist architecture in France in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

**HEGEL’S CONCRETE UNIVERSAL AND LEFEBVRE’S PRODUCTION OF SPACE**

In the first chapter of *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre writes that his aim is to develop a theory that would grasp the unity between three “fields” of space: physical, mental, and social. They are distinguished not only by disciplines such as philosophy, mathematics, and linguistics, but by functionalist urbanism, which assigns specialized zones to everyday activities such as work, housing, leisure, and transportation. Critically reacting to the post-structuralist rethinking of the tradition of Western philosophy, and writing in the wake of the urban crisis in the 1960s and 1970s, Lefebvre considers this fragmentation of space as a theoretical fallacy with practical ramifications and also a symptom of the economic, social, political, technological, and cultural reality of twentieth-century capitalism. With the envisaged “unitary theory” of space, he sought to theorize space as the shared aspect and outcome of all social practices, investigating what remains common to spaces differentiated by historically specific conditions of their production. Lefebvre suggests that these demands can be addressed by a theory based on Hegel’s category of concrete universal: “Does what Hegel called the concrete universal still have any meaning? I hope to show that it does. What can be said without further ado is that the concepts of production and of the act of producing do have a certain concrete universality.”

The category of concrete universal stems from Hegel’s distinction between the abstract and the concrete. In the instructive article “Wer denkt abstract [Who Thinks Abstractly]?” (1807) Hegel addresses this distinction in a way that announces the intuitions developed in his subsequent philosophical work. He writes that those who think abstractly are the “common people”: the saleswomen in the market thinks abstractly by considering the convicted criminal just as a murderer—that is, by one isolated feature of the individual in question; by contrast, the “knower of men”
thinks concretely, by considering the crime as a product of the conditions of the criminal’s life—that is, his poor education, family, injustice he suffered, and so on. This initial distinction between the concrete, as embedded in a variety of relations, and the abstract, as impoverished, one-sided and isolated, can be applied to describe features of things, phenomena, thoughts, and experiences. It clearly influenced Lefebvre, who writes that spaces considered in isolation are “mere abstractions,” while they “attain ’real’ existence by virtue of networks and pathways, by virtue of bunches or clusters of relationships.”

In Hegel’s philosophical writings there is an important line of development leading from this preliminary distinction between the concrete and the abstract to the theory of concrete and abstract universals. An abstract universal is an isolated feature shared by a collection of objects, while a concrete universal (das konkrete Allgemeine) refers to an essence of a thing considered as embedded into and constitutive of the world of related and interacting things: that is, dialectical totality. This distinction was underscored by Hegel in his lectures on aesthetics where he describes a concept (der Begriff) as a concrete universal: “Now, as regards the nature of the Concept as such, it is not in itself an abstract unity at all over against the differences of reality; as Concept it is already the unity of specific differences and therefore a concrete totality.”

Michael Inwood explains the difference between those two types of universal by contrasting redness and life. Redness is a feature shared by all things red; this feature does not significantly influence the nature of a red thing and its relationships with other red things; thus it is an abstract universal. By contrast, life, as a concrete universal, “constitutes, in part, an essence of living things, directing their internal articulations, and living things are essentially related to each other in virtue of their life: different species feed off, and occasionally support, each other, and species reproduce themselves.” This understanding of the concrete universal—as the internal principle of development, or a driving force of an examined thing—will be crucial for Marx’s unfolding of this concept.

Following Hegel, in The Production of Space Lefebvre wrote that a concrete universal is constituted by three “moments”—those of universality (or generality), particularity, and singularity. They are called “moments” by Hegel in order to underscore that universality, particularity, and singularity cannot be sharply distinguished and to stress their logical, ontological, and epistemological interrelationships. According to Hegel, the universal moment is the general principle of development of things of a certain type. The particular moment is determined by the universal moment, but at the same time it is a differentiation of the universal moment and thus, in Hegel’s words, its negation. The singular moment is an individual thing that is concrete in the previously explained sense—it exists in a determinate embeddedness in the world. The singular is thus the final step in the differentiation of the universal moment and, simultaneously, its realization. That is why Hegel writes
that “the concrete is the universal in all of its determinations, and thus contains its other in itself”. The concrete is the differentiated, or negated, universal.

Lefebvre experiments with this understanding of the moments of universality (generality), particularity, and singularity in his theory of production of space. Accordingly, he distinguishes the “level of singularities” on which space is experienced sensually by endowing places with opposing qualities, such as masculine and feminine, or favorable and unfavorable. Furthermore, the “level of generalities” relates to the control and distribution of bodies in space by dominant powers, often by mobilizing symbolic attributes. Finally, the “level of particularities” is linked to smaller social groups, such as families and to spaces “which are defined as permitted or forbidden.” In another attempt, Lefebvre divides space into “logical and mathematical generalities” (thus, representations elaborated by scientific disciplines), particular “descriptions” of space, and singular places “in their merely physical and sensory reality.” It is not easy to relate these two rather scarcely explained claims to each other, and their fluidity was noticed by Lefebvre himself, who argues that a literal application of Hegelian terms to the theory of space would lead to a “new fragmentation.” Thus, when Lefebvre uses the Hegelian term moment in his theory of production of space and invokes the perceived, conceived, and lived moments of space, he intends to stress their tight bond rather than their correspondence to the three moments of the concrete universal.

Lefebvre was especially influenced by Hegel’s theorizing of the internal dynamics of the concrete universal, described as a development from the universal to the singular via the particular. This dynamic shaped Lefebvre’s concept of production, and, specifically, of the production of space. Lefebvre explains this by referring to Hegel: “In Hegelianism, ‘production’ has a cardinal role: first, the (absolute) Idea produces the world; next, nature produces the human being; and the human being in turn, by dint of struggle and labour, produces at once history, knowledge and self-consciousness.” Thus, Hegel’s concept of production refers to the development of the concrete universal from the universal moment through the particular to the singular moment. In Lefebvre’s view, it is this broad scope of the concept of production, which is not restricted to manufacturing, that makes it most inspiring. He regrets that this breadth, openness, contingency, and lack of sharp borders between the three moments of the concrete universal were lost in some strands of Marxism.

It is this internal dynamic of the concrete universal that above all influenced Lefebvre’s theorizing of space. It characterizes the description of the production of space in his short preface to Philippe Boudon’s Lived-in Architecture: Le Corbusier’s Pessac Revisited (1979 [1969]). Boudon’s book is an empirical study about the Quartiers Modernes Frugès in Pessac, France, designed by Le Corbusier and opened to residents in 1926. Making a common cause with the critical rethinking and reevaluation of Modernist architecture after the death of Le Corbusier (1965), Boudon investigated the changes introduced to the neighborhood’s houses by their
inhabitants, focusing on the relationship between the alterations of particular houses, their designs, and their positions in the district. Accepting Boudon’s results, Lefebvre stresses three levels on which space is produced in Pessac: in his view, the original Modernist project of the architect was initially transformed because of the site conditions and the requirements of the client, and then, after construction, appropriated by the inhabitants to their own purposes. The practice of appropriation, Lefebvre writes, manifests “a higher, more complex concrete rationality than the abstract rationality” of Modernism. Significantly, as in Hegel’s category of concrete universal, these steps from the abstract to the concrete are seen as a sequence of differentiations: Lefebvre writes explicitly that the inhabitants “produce differences in an undifferentiated space.”

The Production of Space credits Marx with discovering the “immanent rationality” of the Hegelian concept of production. This “immanent rationality” allows the theorization of production neither as determined by a preexisting cause nor as teleologically guided, but as organizing “a sequence of actions with a certain ‘objective’ (i.e. the object to be produced) in view.” Lefebvre writes that even the most technologically developed system “cannot produce a space with a perfectly clear understanding of cause and effect, motive and implication.” These formulations may well have been inspired by Lefebvre’s acquaintance with Boudon’s research on Pessac: in the preface he underscores that the “concrete rationality” of production of space cannot be identified with the rationality of any particular subject—the architect, the occupant, or the critic.

MARX’S GRUNDRISSE AND SPACE AS AN “ABSTRACTION TRUE IN PRACTICE”

Even though he tried to retrieve some of the initial features of Hegel’s concrete universal that were lost in Marxism, Lefebvre shared Marx’s critique of Hegel’s stress on the intellectual characteristics of production. Thus, following Hegel and Marx, Lefebvre develops a materialist interpretation of this concept that could be applied to space. The need for a reconceptualization of space emerges from Lefebvre’s empirical study on the new town of Lacq-Mourenx in the Pyrénées Atlantiques, which initiated his research about urban space. The paper “Les Nouveaux Ensembles urbains,” published in La Revue Française de Sociologie (1960), is based on interviews with the inhabitants carried out in 1959, two years after the construction of this city of 4,500 inhabitants. Pierre Merlin, in his 1969 book LesVilles nouvelles, characterized the problems of Mourenx by noting the insufficiency of facilities, monotony of architecture, and separation of functions. Lefebvre’s text, however, goes beyond a critique of functionalist urbanism as it was emerging at that time in France in the publications of Pierre Francastel or the group around Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe.
“ce n’est pas une ville, c’est une cité” — and speculated that the negative connotation of the term cité might resonate with the concept of the “workers’ city” (cité ouvrière). Even if the specific meaning attributed to this opposition is ambiguous, the message given by the inhabitant was clear: Mourenx was not what a city was supposed to be. Lefebvre attributes this dissatisfaction to the meaninglessness of spaces in the city and the boredom of everyday lives deprived of any unexpected and ludic situations. These interviews demonstrate that it is not enough to distribute amenities in the city: the production of urban space also involves practices of representation of space as well as the appropriation of what Lefebvre later called “spaces of representation.” Thus, his research about Mourenx can be read as an anticipation of the triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation that Lefebvre formulated during his Nanterre professorship.

While the study of Mourenx inspired Lefebvre’s subsequent theorizing of space as a product of heterogeneous, historically specific social practices, it was his reading of Marx’s analysis of labor from the Grundrisse as an “abstraction which became true in practice” that provided him with a model for such a new concept of space.²⁹ Lefebvre’s description of the emergence of the concept of space is analogous to Marx’s theorizing of labor, which considered every theoretical concept as a symptom of a larger social whole and related the emergence of the concept to the social, economic, political, and cultural contexts of its appearance. Although humankind has always been working, the emergence of the concept of labor is a historical fact: Marx writes that labor could have been conceptualized only when the general features conveyed by this concept became decisive in social practices, most importantly in economic reality. Thus, he claims, it is no accident that the concept of labor as a wealth-creating activity regardless of its specificity was discovered by Adam Smith in eighteenth-century Britain, where industry required labor to be reduced to its bare features and stripped of the personality of the worker. This type of labor—malleable, quantifiable, divisible, and measurable by time—was compatible with newly introduced machines and thus most efficient in the economic conditions of early industrialization. Marx writes that under such conditions “the abstraction of the category ‘labour,’ ‘labour as such,’ labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice [praktisch wahr].”³⁰ Thus, labor is seen as consisting of two aspects: the specific labor of a particular worker (in Capital it is called “concrete labour”—a “productive activity of a definite kind and exercised with a definite aim”) and the non-specific “abstract labour,” defined as “the expenditure of human labour in general.”³² Labor becoming “true in practice” is concrete abstraction: an abstraction “made every day in the social process of production,” as Marx writes in the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859):

The conversion of all commodities into labour-time is no greater an abstraction, and is no less real, than the resolution of all organic bodies into
Labour, thus measured by time, does not seem, indeed, to be the labour of different persons, but on the contrary the different working individuals seem to be mere organs of this labour.\textsuperscript{33}

This definition was borrowed by Lefebvre, who in \textit{De l’État} (1977) defined concrete abstraction as an abstraction that “concretizes and realizes itself socially, in the social practice.”\textsuperscript{34} He adds that concrete abstraction is a “social abstraction,” which “has a real existence, that is to say practical and not conventional, in the social relationships linked to practices.”\textsuperscript{35}

Analogous to Marx, Lefebvre looks for the “moment of emergence of an awareness of space and its production.”\textsuperscript{36} He sees this moment at the Bauhaus:

For the Bauhaus did more than locate space in its real context or supply a new perspective on it: it developed a new conception, a global concept, of space. At that time, around 1920, just after the First World War, a link was discovered in the advanced countries (France, Germany, Russia, the United States), a link which had already been dealt with on the practical plane but which had not yet been rationally articulated: that between industrialization and urbanization, between workplaces and dwelling-places. No sooner had this link been incorporated into theoretical thought than it turned into a project, even into a programme.\textsuperscript{37}

This discovery of a “global concept of space” was a recognition of the spatial interconnections between locations of work, habitation, and consumption in advanced capitalism. While Adam Smith demonstrated that different professions are facets of work in general, the architects, artists, and theorists gathered at the Bauhaus (particularly during the phase under Hannes Meyer’s directorship) showed that different places are interrelated and are thus parts of one space.\textsuperscript{38}

This project of designing space as a whole comprised of interdependent processes and locations was shared by progressive architects between the world wars. Ludwig Hilberseimer in his \textit{Grossstadt Architektur} (1927) argued that every urban structure must be developed in relation to the whole city: “The architecture of the large city depends essentially on the solution given to two factors: the elementary cell of space and the urban organism as a whole.”\textsuperscript{39} Hilberseimer writes that the space of a single house should become a design determinant for the whole city, while the general plan of the city should influence the space of the house.\textsuperscript{40} This continuity between all scales of a city was sought by the film \textit{Architecture d’aujourd’hui} (1930), directed by Pierre Chenal a the script by Chenal and Le Corbusier. It developed a polemical narrative against the nineteenth-century city, suggesting the necessity of an organic link between the private house, represented by Le Corbusier’s villas, the neigh-
borhood, epitomized by the Quartiers Modernes Frugès in Pessac, and the urban plan, exemplified by the Plan Voisin (1925).

K. Michael Hays, in his *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject* (1992), argues that Hannes Meyer’s aim was to design space as a whole that not only encompasses interrelated economic, social, and cultural processes but strives to make those relationships visible. Meyer’s projects—such as the Palace of the League of Nations in Geneva (1927), the Petersschule in Basel (1927), and the school in Bernau (1928–30)—were designed as indexes that reflected the processes of their production and thus as machines of a new, performative perception, in which the functional diagrams of the building, the transformation of raw materials and their assembling in the processes of construction are visually reestablished. For Hays, Meyer’s projects seek to move their viewers “to critically produce or (re)invent relationships among the architectural fact and the social, historical, and ideological subtexts from which it was never really separate to begin with.”

The emergence of space and labor as general concepts in the conditions of capitalism shows the intrinsic connections between them. Whereas Adam Smith discovered abstract work—the aspect of work that is conditioned by the capitalist mode of production and that facilitates the capitalist development—the intellectuals at the Bauhaus discovered abstract space—the space of developed capitalism. In *La Pensée Marxiste et la ville* (1972), a response to and unfolding of Marx’s and Engels’s theorizing of the city, Lefebvre described urban space and urban life as the place, tool, milieu, negotiator, and scene of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Elsewhere he developed a similar argument about the relationship between twentieth-century capitalism and abstract space. In his view, the new planning procedures and new systems of representing space invented at the Bauhaus were essential for the emergence of abstract space, the space of contemporary capitalism:

> If there is such a thing as the history of space, . . . then there is such a thing as a space characteristic of capitalism—that is, characteristic of that society which is run and dominated by the bourgeoisie. It is certainly arguable that the writings and works of the Bauhaus, of Mies van der Rohe among others, outlined, formulated and helped realize that particular space—the fact that the Bauhaus sought to be and proclaimed itself to be revolutionary notwithstanding.

This argument was strengthened by the architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri, whom Lefebvre met in person in the late 1960s during the activities of the Unité Pedagogique d’Architecture n°8 in Paris. Tafuri linked the new understanding of space held by the most progressive Modernist architects to the capitalist reorganization of Europe. In *Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology* (1969) he underscores Hilberseimer’s understanding that “once the true unity of the production cycle has
been identified in the city, the only task the architect can have is to organize that cycle.\textsuperscript{45} Both Lefebvre and Tafuri recognize that this supposedly revolutionary way of producing space served the economic and political system.\textsuperscript{46} This new unity of space was in fact accompanying and facilitating the unity of the processes of production, distribution, and consumption.

Abstract space and abstract labor are thus both the result of a series of economic, social, political, technological, and cultural developments. Marx and Lefebvre show that these developments were followed by a shift on an emotional and personal level: they are not only perceived and conceived but lived in the everyday. Marx describes the worker’s feeling of “indifference” toward a specific type of work, which cannot provide him with personal identity any more.\textsuperscript{47} A hundred years later, Lefebvre wrote that abstract space is not just a perceived product of capitalist spatial practices and a projection of the representations of space conceived by planners, but that the lived practices of those inhabiting this space are themselves abstract: his examples include the one-sided perception of space by a driver or the reductive use of space in a functionalist house.\textsuperscript{48}

**MARX’S CAPITAL AND SPACE AS A “SENSUAL–SUPRASENSUAL THING”**

The emergence of abstract space meant not only the mobilization of space in the chain of production, distribution, and consumption, but a transformation of space itself into a commodity: produced, distributed, and consumed. The consequence of this is the twofold character of abstract space that Lefebvre examined as being at the same time homogeneous and fragmented—a description applied to Mourenx in his *Introduction to Modernity* (1995 [1962]).\textsuperscript{49} This investigation of abstract space is based on Marx’s analysis of another concrete abstraction—the commodity.

As with every commodity, space reflects the duality of the abstract and concrete aspects of labor by which it is produced. In *Capital* (1867), Marx theorizes this dual character of a commodity as a concrete abstraction—a “sensual–suprasensual thing” (sinnlich–übersinnliches Ding).\textsuperscript{50} The concrete (“useful”) labor produces the use value of a commodity, while its exchange value is determined by the amount of abstract labor socially necessary for its production.

In *Capital*, Marx writes: “As use values, commodities are, above all, of different qualities, but as exchange values they are merely different quantities, and consequently do not contain an atom of use value.”\textsuperscript{51} Thus, the development of the commodity economy was conditioned by the development of universally accepted, practically applicable, and quantitative systems of representation and procedures which, applied to the goods, would allow for comparison between them.

Accordingly, in order to become a commodity, space must have been subjected to systems of representation and procedures that allow it to be divided, measured,
and compared. Thus—as in Marx’s example of abstract labor measured by time—the historical process of the commodification of space was paralleled by an implementation of a system of representation, which would depict different “pieces of space” as distinct and endowed with comparable features. Represented by this system, a “piece of space” must radically differ from the “place” traditionally understood as characterized by blurred borders, and qualitatively defined by identity, natural peculiarities, topography, authority, religion, tradition, and history. An early symptom of this transition “from nature to abstraction” is the evolution of systems of measurements, which proceeded from measuring space with parts of the body to universal, quantitative, and homogeneous systems. These requirements were fulfilled by the system within which a point in space can be determined by three coordinates, as developed over the centuries by philosophers and mathematicians, most famously by Descartes. Lefebvre writes that the space of developed capitalism “has analogical affinity with the space of the philosophical, and more specifically the Cartesian tradition.”

The reductionism of the Cartesian system of representation (the very cause of its practical success), which became “practically true” in the social practice of capitalism, endowed space with a simultaneous tendency towards homogenization and fragmentation. In his diagnosis of abstract space, Lefebvre writes:

“Formal boundaries are gone between town and country, between centre and periphery, between suburbs and city centres, between the domain of automobiles and the domain of people . . . And yet everything (“public facilities,” blocks of flats, “environments of living”) is separated, assigned in isolated fashion to unconnected “sites” and “tracts”; the spaces themselves are specialized just as operations are in the social and technical division of labour.”

Lefebvre argues that these two tendencies are interdependent: “It is impossible to overemphasize either the mutual inherence or the contradictoriness of these two aspects of space . . . For space ‘is’ whole and broken, global and fractured, at one and the same time.” Abstract space, writes Lefebvre, “takes account of the connections and links between those elements that it keeps, paradoxically, united yet disunited, joined yet detached from one another, at once torn apart and squeezed together.”

This simultaneity of homogeneity and fragmentation is determined by features intrinsic to the Cartesian model itself: homogeneity results in fragmentation, and fragmentation determines homogeneity. As a system of representation, it is unable to give an account of any other features of “pieces of space” than their location expressed with three coordinates of the analytic geometry; areas or volumes differing in location differ in “everything,” have “nothing in common” besides being part of the “entirety of space.” Thus, space appears as fragmented: it is an
aggregate of independent, distinct areas or volumes. At the same time this system of representation offers no intrinsic criteria for delineating areas or volumes of space; by eliminating “existing differences and peculiarities”\textsuperscript{58} this system does not suggest any intrinsic differentiation. Thus, it lends itself to any parceling required by land speculation, functionalist zoning, or segregation by the state. Deprived of intrinsic differentiations, the “entirety of space” is endowed with a “geometric homogeneity,”\textsuperscript{59} which means both a representation and a practical attitude to the management of space. These descriptions of space as simultaneously homogeneous and fragmented are clearly inspired by other concrete abstractions discussed by Lefebvre: money, capital, and the market.\textsuperscript{60}

The process of erasing differences—of homogenizing space—may be executed only by force.\textsuperscript{61} That is why Lefebvre claims that “there is a violence intrinsic to abstraction, and to abstraction’s practical (social) use.”\textsuperscript{62} For Lefebvre, abstraction supported by science and technology is a tool to develop oppressive, classificatory, and phallic space.\textsuperscript{63} At the same time, in \textit{De l’État}, Lefebvre adds one more characteristic of postwar space: this space is characterized not only by a homogeneity of interchangeable places and by a fragmentation of allotments caused by real-estate speculation but by hierarchization: sensitized by the recent gentrification of the Marais and Quartier Les Halles in Paris, Lefebvre writes that the distinction between center and periphery becomes translated into social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{64}

\textbf{MARX’S FORM OF VALUE AND LEFEBVRE’S FORM OF SPACE}

The historically specific analysis of abstract space—the space of capitalism—is developed in \textit{The Production of Space} into a wider project of addressing the shared characteristics of all spaces, produced in various historical conditions by various social practices. This argument is facilitated by Lefebvre’s concept of space as a concrete abstraction and by his application of the method Marx developed in \textit{Capital} in order to describe the universal characteristics of all commodities.

According to Marx, the feature shared by every commodity is its twofold character consisting of use and exchange value. In \textit{Capital} he writes:

\begin{quote}
A commodity is a use value or object of utility, and a value. It manifests itself as this twofold thing, that it is, as soon as its value assumes an independent form—viz., the form of exchange value. It never assumes this form when isolated, but only when placed in a value or exchange relation with another commodity of a different kind.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

Marx arrives at the definition of the “general form of value” (\textit{allgemeineWertform}) and explains it with the example of linen: its general form of value “expresses the values of the whole world of commodities in terms of a single commodity set apart for the
purpose, namely, the linen, and thus represents to us their values by means of their equality with linen.”66 Thus, the exchange value of a commodity is established in relation not to some specific commodities but precisely to all of them, and it becomes manifest only in the context of all other commodities.

According to Marx, the principle of development of capitalism is the contradiction between use value and exchange value, which characterizes every commodity and every act of exchange. In the act of exchange, the owner of one of the exchanged objects considers his or her object as deprived of use value (otherwise the owner would not exchange it) but endowed only with exchange value, while considering the object of the other owner as having only use value but no exchange value; an analogous view is held by the owner of the second exchanged object. There is a contradiction between the empirical fact of substituting the exchange and use values and the theoretical impossibility of combining both value forms in one commodity. For Marx, this contradiction points to the real impossibility of a precise measurement of value in bartering.67

Marx’s method is to investigate how this contradiction is dealt with in social practice. He concludes that the introduction of money should be interpreted as an attempt to mediate between use and exchange values. Money is the “means by which use value begins to transform itself into exchange value, and vice versa.”68 However, the initial contradiction is not solved by money, but dialectically preserved and internalized in commodities (and generating more mediating links, like labor power, a unique commodity whose use value consists precisely in the fact that in the course of its consumption it is transformed into its counterpart—exchange value); in Marx’s view this contradiction can be resolved only by the socialist revolution.69

Just like a commodity characterized by the general form of value, space for Lefebvre is defined by its form. Whereas the form of the commodity characterizes all commodities regardless of their specific features, the form of space is the most general relationship between locations that can be attributed to every location independently of the differences between them. Lefebvre describes the form of the commodity as the possibility of exchange conceived independently of what is exchanged, while the form of space is defined as the possibility of encounter, assembly, and simultaneous gathering regardless of what—or who—is gathered. Lefebvre writes that socially produced space “implies actual or potential assembly at a single point, or around that point.”70 This fundamental feature of such space is called centrality.

Drawing an analogy to the form of the commodity, which is characterized by a dialectical contradiction between use and exchange value, Lefebvre describes centrality as dialectical: there is a dialectic of centrality “because there is a connection between space and the dialectic.”71 The “dialectical movement of centrality” consists of gathering “everything” in space and of the simultaneity of “everything.”72 Lefebvre’s work on space and the urban society from the late 1960s and early 1970s can be read as unfolding, developing, and differentiating this claim. In The Urban
Revolution (1970) he writes that in a city characterized by centrality, things, objects, people, and situations “are mutually exclusive because they are diverse, but inclusive because they are brought together and imply their mutual presence.”73 He adds that conflicts in urban space arise from differences, which recognize and test each other.74 Thus, centrality consists of a collection of contradictory and mutually conditioned elements.

In The Production of Space yet another aspect of the dialectic of centrality is addressed. The process of centralization is described as conditioned by the process of dispersion: “the centre gathers things together only to the extent that it pushes them away and disperses them.”75 On the same page Lefebvre uses different wording to describe this interdependence: centrality “is based on simultaneous inclusion and exclusion precipitated by a specific spatial factor.”76 Thus, the “dialectic of centrality” consists not only of the contradictory interdependence between the objects gathered but of the opposition between center and periphery, gathering and dispersion, inclusion (to center) and exclusion (to periphery).

The descriptions of centrality from The Production of Space and The Urban Revolution resemble Lefebvre’s depiction of Paris from his text “The Other Parises,” published originally in Espaces et Sociétés (1974/5), the journal he co-founded with Anatole Kopp in 1970.77 In this text, the various centers of Paris are addressed as gathering and dispersing living beings, things, ideas, signs, symbols, representations, projects, and ways of life.78 The social practices of gathering and dispersion can be seen as practices of producing space—transforming the physical environment, representing space, and appropriating it in everyday life. Material practices may include or exclude not only by building bridges or walls but by making strategic investments in the built environment that render particular areas in the city central while excluding others. Representational practices develop new theories of space and set some of them in the center of public attention, damning others to library back shelves. Practices of everyday life appropriate places and ideas—giving meaning to some, while rendering others obsolete.

Lefebvre’s discovery of the form of urban space as dialectical parallels the transition in his thinking from an early review “Utopie expérimentale: pour un nouvel urbanisme” (1961) to his writings in the late 1960s. Published in La Revue Française de Sociologie, it sympathetically presents an urbanistic project for a new city in the Furttal valley near Zürich.79 The authors of the project, presented in the book Die neue Stadt (1961), express the ambition to develop a paradigmatic solution for the problems of congestion, traffic, and housing and to tackle the aesthetic challenge of inscribing modern architecture into the Swiss landscape. The main principle of the design is the concept of a balance that regulates the social, economic, emotional, political, and aesthetic aspects of the new city.80 In his review Lefebvre embraces this principle, praising the project for proposing “an equilibrium, at the same time stable and vivid, a sort of self-regulation.”81 This support for the project, which exposed
Lefebvre to the accusation of reformism by the Internationale Situationniste, was soon withdrawn. In “Humanisme et urbanisme. Quelques propositions” (1968), he notes that it is deceptive to envisage a perfect equilibrium between architectural concepts, and in The Urban Revolution he claims that the concept of a “programmed” and “structured” equilibrium, as proposed by the planners, is an even greater risk for a city than chaos. This revision in Lefebvre’s thinking might have been influenced not only by his reevaluation of the postwar urbanism in France and an examination of the urban crisis of the 1960s but by the development of his theoretical interests: his critique of the functionalist concept of needs, his adherence to the ludic and the unforeseen as necessary aspects of urban space, his research on the Paris Commune, and his rethinking of the concept of concrete abstraction.

The analysis of the form of urban space as dialectical allows Lefebvre to sharpen his claims about the role of space in the processes of capitalist production, distribution, and consumption. Whereas the contradiction between use and exchange values was shown by Marx to be the engine of the development of capitalism, Lefebvre complicates this picture by describing the contradictions inherent to space as contributing to this development. The method of both Marx and Lefebvre is based on the rather counterintuitive assumption that the principle of capitalism is preserved throughout its whole development, becoming manifest in its most advanced and complex stage. The Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov demonstrated that this method is made possible by the structural features of the concept of concrete abstraction. By assuming the commodity as a concrete abstraction, Marx was able to consider it as the universal expression of the specific nature of capital, and, at the same time, as an empirical fact: a commodity exchanged in a particular act. In “Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx’s Capital” (1960), Ilyenkov writes that the historically necessary conditions of emergence of every concrete abstraction are “preserved in its structure throughout its development”; thus, the development of capitalism is conceived as a reproduction of its original principle. Similarly, centrality as a form of space is considered by Lefebvre as a feature of a particular location, and, at the same time, as a facilitator of economic, social, political, and cultural development.

CONCLUSION: LEFEBVRE’S THEORETICO-EMPIRICAL METHOD

This chapter has argued that Lefebvre’s theory of production of space is structurally based on the concept of concrete abstraction developed by Hegel in his theorization of the concrete universal and further developed by Marx. Lefebvre refers to Hegel’s dynamic and open-ended concrete universal in order to theorize space as a dynamic entity produced by historically contingent social practices. Following Marx’s theorization of labor as a concrete abstraction, Lefebvre demonstrates that space is an “abstraction which became true in practice”—produced by material, political,
theoretical, cultural, and quotidian practices. In analogy with Marx’s analysis of abstract labor as conditioned by capitalist development and facilitating its further success, Lefebvre discovers abstract space as enabling the capitalist processes of production, distribution, and consumption. In the course of the development of capitalism, space itself was turned into a commodity—a concrete abstraction described by Marx as a “sensual–suprasensual thing”—becoming at the same time homogeneous and fragmented. Like the commodity that in its most developed and differentiated stage reveals its most universal characteristics, the space of the capitalist city manifests a fundamental dialectic between the processes of centralization and dispersion, inclusion and exclusion. This concept of space as a concrete abstraction—socially produced and thus historically contingent and yet characterized by a universal feature called centrality—is the basis of the “unitary theory of space” envisaged by Lefebvre at the beginning of The Production of Space.

Significantly, this argument that Lefebvre developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s was prepared and informed by his earlier empirical studies as well as critiques of urbanistic and architectural projects. Ilyenkov demonstrated that Marx’s method in Capital mobilized both theoretical and empirical research and the procedures of induction and deduction. In Lefebvre’s writings one can find a similar approach, albeit not as rigorous as that of Ilyenkov. His theorization of space as concrete abstraction—developed by a close reading and appropriation of the philosophical sources in Hegel and Marx—was not merely accompanied, informed, and inspired by his texts on Mourenx, Furttal, Pessac, and Paris but questioned by them.

NOTES


2. Lefebvre, Production of Space, 11.

3. Henri Lefebvre, La Production de l’espace (Paris: Anthropos, 1986), 23. Note that the English translation of this passage in Lefebvre, Production of Space (p. 15)—where “l’universalité concrete” is rendered as “abstract universality”—is utterly misleading.

5. Lefebvre, Production of Space, 86.
9. Lefebvre, Production of Space, 15–16.
11. See Dieter Wandschneider, “Zur Struktur Dialektischer Begriffsentwicklung,” Philosophisches Institut der RWTH Aachen, <http://www.phil-inst.rwth-aachen.de/lehrenden/texte/wandschneider/wandschneider%20-%201997%20b%20-%20zur%20struktur%20dialektischer%20begriffsentwicklung.pdf>. Moreover, Hegel applies the triad of universality, particularity, and singularity to types of judgment: a universal judgment refers to all entities of a given type, for example “all men are wise”; a particular judgment concerns some of those entities, for example “some men are wise”; while a singular judgment refers to one entity, for example “Socrates is wise.” Inwood notices that both the universal and the singular judgment refer to the whole of a subject and not to a part of it (as is the case with a particular judgment); this contributed to Hegel’s view that singularity is a restoration of universality on a higher level (Inwood, Hegel Dictionary, 303).
13. Lefebvre, Production of Space, 226–7.
15. Ibid., 15.
16. Ibid., 68.
18. Lefebvre, preface to ibid.: n.p.
19. Ibid.
20. Lefebvre, Production of Space, 71.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 37.
24. For a discussion, see Schmid, Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft, 85ff.


36. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 123.


43. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 126.


46. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 124.


52. See Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 338–9.


55. *Ibid.*, 97–8. However, in *Production of Space* one can find claims that “abstract space is not homogeneous; it simply has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its ‘lens.’ And indeed it renders homogeneous” (*Ibid.*, 287, see also 308). Thus, homogenization and fragmentation are tendencies of development of space rather than its stable features. This apparent contradiction can be solved by referring to the fact that Lefebvre
understands space as a concrete abstraction that can be named by its principle of
development even if it did not reach this level of development yet.

64. Lefebvre, *De l’Etat*, III, 309.
65. Marx, “Das Kapital,” 34.
68. *Ibid*.
69. *Ibid*.
70. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 101.
72. *Ibid*.
75. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 386.
76. *Ibid*.
78. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 101. See also Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, ch. 6.
87. Ilyenkov, “Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete.”
88. *Ibid*. 
8 Insurgent Architects, Radical Cities and the Promise of the Political

Erik Swyngedouw

It's useless to wait – for a breakthrough, for the revolution, the nuclear apocalypse or a social movement. To go on waiting is madness. The catastrophe is not coming, it is here. We are already situated within the collapse of a civilization. It is within this reality that we must choose sides. (The Invisible Committee 2009: 138)

**Insurgent architects: staging equality**

The Taksim Square revolt in Istanbul and the Brazilian urban insurgencies are still in full swing at the time of writing, with uncertain and largely unpredictable outcomes. Romanian activists mobilise Occupy-type tactics sparked off by resistance to accumulation by dispossession and threatened socio-environmental destruction by Canadian company Gabriel Resources around planned gold mining in Rosia Montana. These urban rebellions are the latest in a long sequence of political insurgencies that unexpectedly erupted after Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on 17 December 2010 ignited the Tunisian revolution. During the magical year 2011, a seemingly never-ending proliferation of urban rebellions sparked off by a variety of conditions and unfolding against the backdrop of very different historical and geographical contexts profoundly disturbed the apparently cosy neoliberal status quo and disquieted various economic and political elites. There is indeed an uncanny choreographic affinity between the eruptions of discontent in cities as diverse as Istanbul, Cairo, Tunis, Athens, Madrid, Lyon, Lisbon, Rome, New York, Tel Aviv, Chicago, London, Berlin, Thessaloniki, Santiago, Stockholm, Barcelona, Montreal, Oakland, Sao Paulo, Bucharest, and Paris, among many others. The end of history proved to be remarkably short-lived as incipient political movements staged – albeit in often
The spectral return of the political

For Jacques Rancière, democratising the polis is inaugurated when those who do not count stage the count, perform the process of being counted and thereby initiate a rupture in the order of things, in ‘the distribution of the sensible’, such that things cannot go on as before (Rancière 1998). From this perspective, democratisation is a performative act that both stages and defines equality, exposes a wrong, and aspires to a transformation of the senses and of the sensible, to render commonsense what was non-sensible before. Democratisation, he contends, is a disruptive affair whereby the ochlos (the rabble, the scum, the outcasts, ‘the part of no part’) stages to be part of the demos and, in doing so, inaugurates a new ordering of times and places, a process by which those who do not count, who do not exist as part of the polis become visible, sensible and audible, stage the count and assert their egalitarian existence. Egalitarian politics is about ‘the symbolic institution of the political in the form of the power of those who are not entitled to exercise power – a rupture in the order of legitimacy and domination. It is the paradoxical power of those who do not count: the count of the “unaccounted for”’ (Rancière 2000: 124). Egalitarian-democratic demands and practices, scandalous in the representational order of the police yet eminently realisable, are precisely those staged through mobilisations varying from the Paris and Shanghai communes to the Occupy, Indignado, and assorted other emerging political movements that express and nurture such processes of embryonic re-politicisation. Identiﬁtarian positions become, in the process, transﬁgured into a commonality, and a new common sense, and they can be thought and practised irrespective of any substantive social theorisation – it is the political itself at work through the process of political subjectivation, of acting in common by those who do not count, who are surplus to the police.

There are many uncounted today. Alain Badiou refers to them as the ‘inexistent’, the masses of the people who have no say, ‘decide absolutely nothing, have only a fictional voice in the matter of the decisions that decide their fate’ (Badiou 2012: 56). The inexistent are the motley assortment of apolitical consumers, frustrated democrats, precarious workers, undocumented migrants, and disenfranchised citizens. The scandal of actually existing instituted (post-)democracy in a world choreographed by oppression, exploitation and extraordinary inequalities resides precisely in rendering masses of people inexistent, politically mute, without a recognised voice.

For Badiou, ‘a change of world is real when an inexistent of the world starts to exist in the same world with maximum intensity’ (Badiou 2012: 56). In doing so, the order of the sensible is shaken and the kernel for a new common sense, a new mode of being in common becomes present in the world, makes its presence sensible and perceptible. It is the appearance of another world in the world. Was it not precisely the sprawling urban insurgencies that ignited a new sensibility about the polis as a democratic and potentially democratising space? This appearance of the inexistent, staging the count of the uncounted is, it seems to me, what the polis, the political city, is all about. Indeed, as Foucault reminds us, ‘[t]he people is those who, refusing to be the population, disrupt the system’ (Foucault 2007: 43–4).

The notion of the democratising polis introduced above is one that foregrounds intervention and rupture, and destabilises the apparently cosy biopolitical order, sustained by an axiomatic assumption of equality. Democratisation, then, is the act of the few who become the material and metaphorical stand-in for the many; they stand for the dictatorship of the democratic – direct and egalitarian – against the despotism of the instituted ‘democracy’ of the elites – representative and inequalitarian (Badiou 2012: 59). Is it not precisely these insurgent architects that brought to the fore the irreducible distance between the democratic as the immanence of the presumption
of equality and its performative spatialised staging on the one hand, and democracy as an institutional form of regimented oligarchic governing on the other? Do the urban revolts of the past few years not foreground the abyss between ‘the democratic’ and ‘democracy’, the surplus and excess that escapes the suturing and depoliticising practices of instituted governing? Is it not the re-emergence of the proto-political in the urban revolts that signals an urgent need to re-affirm the urban, the polis, as a political space, and not just as a space of biopolitically governed city life?

Of course, the social markers of the insurgencies are geographically highly differentiated: for example the resistance against the Morsi regime in Egypt; the attacks on Erdogan’s combination of religious conservatism with a booming neoliberalisation of the urban process in Turkey; or the spiralling discontent over the public bail-outs and austerity regimes mounted by assorted states and international organisations to save the global financial system from imminent collapse after the speculative bubble that had nurtured unprecedented inequalities and extraordinary concentration of wealth finally burst in 2008. The quilting points that sparked these rebellions were highly variegated too: a threatened park and a few trees in Istanbul; a religious-authoritarian but nonetheless democratically elected regime in Egypt; massive austerity in Greece, Portugal and Spain; social and financial mayhem in the UK and the US; a rise in the price of public transport tickets in Sao Paulo; the further commodification of higher education in Montreal; large-scale gold mining in Romania. Yet the urban insurgent quickly turned their particular, occasionally identitarian, grievances into a wholesale attack on the instituted order, on the unbridled commodification of urban life in the interests of the few, on the highly unequal socio-economic outcomes of actually-existing representational democracy-cum-capitalism. The particular demands transformed quickly and seamlessly into a universalising staging for something different, however diffuse and unarticulated this may presently be. The assembled groups ended up without particular demands addressed to the elites, to a Master. In their refusal to express specific grievances, they demanded everything, nothing less than the transformation of the instituted order. They staged in their socio-spatial acting new ways of practising equality and democracy, experimented with innovative and creative ways of being together in the city, and prefigured, both in practice and in theory, new ways of distributing goods, accessing services, producing healthy environments, organising debate, managing conflict, practicing ecologically saner life-styles, and negotiating urban space in an emancipatory manner.

These insurgencies are decidedly urban; they may be the embryonic manifestation of the immanence of a new urban commons (see García Lamarca 2013), one always potentially in the making, aspiring to produce a new urbanity through intense meetings and encounters of a multitude, one that aspires to spatialisation, that is to universalisation. Such universalisation can never be totalising as the demarcation line is clearly drawn, a line that separates the us (as multitude) from the them, i.e. those who mobilise all they can to make sure nothing really changes, captured neatly in the slogan of the 99 per cent versus the 1 per cent. The democratising minority stands here in strict opposition to the majoritarian rule of instituted democracy. As much as the proletarian, feminist or African-American democratising movements were (and often still are) also very much minoritarian in terms of politically acting subjects, they nonetheless stood and stand for the enactment of the democratic presumption of equality of each and all. The space of the political disturbs the socio-spatial ordering by re-arranging it with those who stand in for the people or the community (Rancière 2001). It is a particular that stands for the whole of the community and aspires towards universalisation. The rebels on Tahrir Square or Taksim Square are not the Egyptian or Turkish population; while being a minority, they stand materially and metaphorically for the Egyptian and Turkish people. The political emerges, Rancière attests, when the few claim the name of the many, to embody the community as a whole, and are recognised as such. The emergence of political space is always specific, concrete, particular and minoritarian, but stands as the metaphorical condensation of the generic, the many and the universal.

These attempts to produce a new commons offer perhaps a glimpse of the theoretical and practical agenda ahead. Do they not call for an urgent reconsideration of both urban theory and urban praxis? Does their acting not signal a clarion call to return the intellectual gaze, to consider again what the polis has always been, namely the site for political encounter and place for enacting the new, the improbable, things often considered impossible by those who do not wish to see any change, the site for experimentation with, the staging and production of new radical imaginaries for what urban democratic being-in-common might be all about? Re-centring the urban political therefore is for me one of the central intellectual demands adequate to today’s urban life.

Spectres of the urban political re-scripted

For Alain Badiou, the political is not a reflection of something else, like the cultural, the social, or the economic. For him, the social sciences can at best be oppositional, operating within the standard
contestation of ‘democratic’ rule (Badiou 1999: 94), and incapable of thinking of political transformation as the active affirmation of the egalitarian capacity of each and all to act politically. It is a site open for occupation by those who call it into being, claim its occupation and stage ‘equality’, irrespective of the place they occupy within the social edifice. It is manifested in the process of subjectivation, in the ‘passage to the act’. It is precisely this process of political subjectivation that the social sciences rarely capture, if at all. In what follows, I shall further explore the understanding of the political that foregrounds the notion of equality as the axiomatic, yet contingent, foundation of democracy, that considers égalité (Balibar 2010) as an unconditional democratic demand, and that thinks the political as immanent process expressed in the rupture of any given socio-spatial order by exposing a wrong and staging equality. This wrong is a condition in which the axiomatic principle of equality is perverted through the institution of an order – what Rancière refers to as ‘the police’ – that is always necessarily oligarchic.

The political is not about expressing demands to the elites to rectify inequalities or unfreedoms, the daily choreographies of interest and conflict intermediation in public policy arrangements and rituals of governance, or a call on ‘the state’ to undertake action. It is the demand to be counted, named and recognised, theatrically and publicly staged by those ‘who do not count’, the inexistent. It is the articulation of voice that demands its place in the spaces of the police order. It appears, for example, when undocumented residents shout ‘We are here, therefore we are from here!’ and affirm their place within the socio-political edifice, or when the Spanish Indignados demand ‘Democracia real ya!’ and the Occupy movements claim to be the 99 per cent that have no voice. Their performative and localised inscriptions are the evental time-spaces from where a new democratising political sequence may unfold. Insurgent democratic politics, therefore, are radically anti-utopian; they are not about fighting for a utopian future, but are precisely about bringing into being, spatialising, what is already promised by the very principle upon which the political is constituted, i.e. egalitarian emancipation.

Such egalitarian staging of being-in-common, therefore, always operates at a certain minimal distance from the State/the police and invariably meets with the violence inscribed in the functioning of the police. Its spatial markers are not the parliament, meeting room or council chamber, but the square, the housing estate, the people’s assembly, the university campus, the street, the park, the factory or office floor. Insurgent urbanity cannot do other than provoke the wrath of the state and has to confront, stare in the face, the violence that marks such a potential ‘rebirth of history’ as Badiou provocatively calls it (Badiou 2012). Insurrectional interruption precisely incites the objective in-egalitarian violence of the instituted order to become subjective, socially embodied, and visible/perceptible, to render visible the irreducible gap between the democratic as immanent process and the police as instituted and taken-for-granted order (Žižek 2008). Confronting the violence of the police and navigating a course that opens up trajectories of change while preventing the confrontation descending into a spiralling abyss of violence is an urgent and difficult task, one that hinges fundamentally on the process of organisation and the modalities of its universalisation. Politics is indeed the moment of confrontation of the axiomatic assumption of equality, the meeting ground between police and the political, when the principle of equality confronts a wrong instituted through the police order.

Politics understood in the above terms rejects a naturalisation of the political, signals that a political passage à l’acte does not rely on expert knowledge and administration (the partition of the sensible), on re-arranging the choreographies of governance, or on organising ‘good governance’, but on a disruption of the field of vision and of the distribution of functions and spaces on the basis of the principle of equality. This perspective challenges a deep-seated belief that expert knowledge and managerial capacity can be mobilised to enhance the democratic governance of urban space, and that the horizon of intervention is limited to the consensualising post-democratic management of the existing state of affairs (Swyngedouw 2009; 2011). Of course, the above argument begs the question as to what to do. How to reclaim the political from the debris of consensual autocratic post-democracy?

The question of democracy: staging egalitarian dissensus

Rancière’s notion of the political is characterised by division, conflict and polemic (Valentine 2003). For him,

democracy always works against the pacification of social disruption, against the management of consensus and ‘stability’… The concern of democracy is not with the formulation of agreement or the preservation of order but with the invention of new and hitherto unauthorized modes of disaggregation, disagreement and disorder. (Hallward 2005: 34-5)

The politics of consensual urban design in its post-politicising guise, therefore, colonises and contributes to a further hollowing-out of
what, for Rancière and others, constitutes the very horizon of the political as radically heterogeneous and conflicted. Disavowal of the political is pushed to its limits in such processes of foreclosure. Indeed and ironically, by inviting debate and discussion that eschews rupture, the political is de facto foreclosed. Consensus is precisely what suspends the democratic:

Consensus is thus not another manner of exercising democracy ... [It] is the negation of the democratic basis for politics: it desires to have well-identifiable groups with specific interests, aspirations, values and 'culture' ... Consensualist centrism flourishes with the multiplication of differences and identities. It nourishes itself with the complexification of the elements that need to be accounted for in a community, with the permanent process of autorepresentation, with all the elements and all their differences: the larger the number of groups and identities that need to be taken into account in society, the greater the need for arbitration. The 'one' of consensus nourishes itself with the multiple. (Rancière 2000: 125)

Something similar is at work in the micro-politics of local urban struggles, dispersed resistances and alternative practices that customarily suture the field of urban social movements today. These are the spheres where urban activism dwells as some form of 'placebo'-politicalness (Marchart 2007: 47). This anti-political impulse works through colonisation of the political by the social through sublimation. Such urban social struggles identify ruptures, disagreements, contestations and fractures that inevitably erupt out of the incomplete saturation of the social world by the police order with a political act. The variegated, dispersed and occasionally effective (on their own terms) forms of urban activism that emerge within concrete socio-spatial interventions – concerning local pollution, road proposals, urban development schemes, airport noise or expansions, the felling of trees or forests, the construction of incinerators, industrial plants, mining ventures and so on – elevate the mobilisations of localised communities, particular groups, and non-governmental organisations to the level of the political. They become imbued with and are assigned political significance. The space of the political is thereby 'reduced to the seeming politicisation of these groups or entities ... Here the political is not truly political because of the restricted nature of the constituency' (Marchart 2007: 47). The identitarian elevation of matters of fact to matters of concern seems, in such a context, to constitute the horizon of the political, of what is possible, of what can be thought and done. In other words, particular urban conflicts are elevated to the status and the dignity of the political. Rather than politicising, such particularistic social colonisation erodes and outflanks the political dimension of egalitarian universalisation. The latter cannot be substituted by a proliferation of identitarian, multiple and ultimately fragmented communities. Moreover, such expressions of protest that are framed fully within the existing police order are, in the current post-politicising arrangement, already fully acknowledged and accounted for. In fact, these protests, as well as their mode of expression, are called into being through the practices of the existing order. They are positively invited as expressions of the proper functioning of 'democracy', and become instituted through public-private stakeholder participatory forms of governance, succumbing to the 'tyranny of participation' (Cooke and Kothari 2001). If they reject the post-democratic frame, they are radically marginalised and symbolised as 'radicals' or 'fundamentalists', and are thereby relegated to a domain outside the consensus post-democratic arrangement; they are rendered inessential.

The more radical forms of urban activism become 'an unending process which can destabilize, displace, and so on, the power structure, without ever being able to undermine it effectively' (Zižek 2002: 101), and as such are doomed to fail. The problem with these tactics is that they not only leave the symbolic order intact and, at best, 'tickle' the police order (see Critchley 2007), but also, as Zižek puts it, 'these practices of performative reconfiguration/displacement ultimately support what they intend to subvert, since the very fields of such “transgressions” are already taken into account, even engendered by the hegemonic form' (Zižek, 1999: 264). More problematically, the ethical injunction, the humanitarian cause becomes the ultimate horizon of the possible. In other words, such movements point to a humanitarian ethics as the externally legitimising ground for their interventions.

In contrast to these impotent passages of hysterical acting out, the political as conceived in the context of this contribution is understood as an emergent property discernible in 'the moment in which a particular demand is not simply part of the negotiation of interests but aims at something more, and starts to function as the metaphoric condensation of the global restructuring of the entire social space' (Zižek 1999: 208). It is about the recognition of conflict as constitutive of the social condition, and the naming of the spatialities that can become without being grounded in universalising notions of the social (in the sense of an unfractured community or a sociological definition of equality, unity or cohesion) or of a singular notion of 'the people'. The political becomes, for Zižek and Rancière, the space of litigation (Zižek 1998), the space for those who are not-All, who are uncoun ted and unnamed, not part of the police (symbolic or
state) order. A political space is a space of contestation inaugurated by those who have no name and no place.

The elementary gesture of politicisation is thus ‘[t]his identification of the non-part with the Whole, of the part of society with no properly defined place within it (or resisting the allocated place within it) with the Universal’ (Žižek 2006a: 70). Such new symbolisations through which what is considered to be noise by the police is turned into speech signal an incipient re-politicisation of public civic space in the polis. Reclaiming democracy and the insurgent design of democratising public spaces (as spaces for the enunciation of agonistic dispute) becomes a foundation and condition of possibility for a reclaimed polis, one that is predicated upon the symbolisation of a positively embodied egalitarian socio-ecological future that is immediately realisable. These symbolisations start from the premise that equality is being ‘wronged’ by the given urban police order, and are about claiming/producing/carving out a metaphorical and material space by those who are unaccounted for, unnamed, whose fictions are only registered as inarticulate utterances. Insurgency is, therefore, an integral part of the aesthetic register through which the re-framing of what is sensible is articulated and becomes symbolisable. This is a call for a de-sublimation and a decolonisation of the political or, rather, for a re-conquest of the political from the social, a reinvention of the political gesture from the plainly depoliticising affects of post-political and post-democratic policing.

**Incipient urban politicisation**

Alain Badiou has recently explored the significance of these insurrectional events (Badiou 2012). For him, the proliferation of these insurgencies is a sign of a return of the ideas of freedom, solidarity, equality and emancipation (which generically go under the political name of communism, the historically invariant ‘name’ for emancipatory struggle). The historical-geographical experimenting expressed through insurgent activities – that have not (yet) and may never acquire a political name or symbolisation (and surely a return to the name of ‘communism’ to designate these movements is unlikely) – nonetheless expresses for Badiou a certain fidelity to the generic communist hypothesis understood as a fidelity to the truth that a different collective organisation is practicable, one that will eliminate the inequality of wealth and even the division of labour. The private appropriation of massive fortunes and their transmission by inheritance will disappear. The existence of a coercive state, separate from civil society, will no longer appear a necessity: a long process of reorganisation based on a free association of producers will see it withering away. (Badiou 2008: 35)

A range of observers have systematically commented on and argued for a more in-depth theoretical and practical engagement between the insurrectional movements and the experimental practices that articulate around new forms of egalitarian and solidarity-based management of the commons (see, for example, Badiou 2010; Bosteels 2011; Dean 2012; Douzinas and Žižek 2010; Swyngedouw 2010a; Žižek 2013a).

Badiou thinks the recent urban insurgencies as ‘historical riots’ that are marked by procedures of intensification, contraction, and localisation (Badiou 2012: 90–1). First, intensification refers to the enthusiasm marked by an intensification and implosion of time, a radicalisation of statements, and an explosion of activities, condensed in an emblematic space that is re-organised to express and mobilised to relay this enthusiasm. All manner of people come together in an intense explosion, of an intensified process of being that energises and incites others to share the enthusiasm inaugurated by the event. A politics of encounter, of opening up, of joining-up animates such intensification (Merrifield 2013). Radicalising statements, actions and forms of taking sides coincide with an intensification of time in place, creating ‘an active process of correspondence . . . between the universality of the Idea and the singular detail of the site and the circumstances’ (Badiou 2012: 90–91). Such an intense state of collective creation cannot be other than short-lived. Nonetheless, the idea crystallised in the insurrectional event will last long after the return to the ‘normality’ of everyday life. What is at stake, then, is how to organise the energy and to universalise the Idea inaugurated in the originary event, how to engage in the slow, difficult and protracted process of inaugurating a new sensibility, a new common sense, of nurturing fidelity, after the initial enthusiasm that marks the historical moment begins to dissipate.

Second, these enormous vital energies are mobilised for a sustained period of time in a contracted manner. All manner of people come together in an intense explosion of acting, of an intensified process of being-in-common. This intensity operates in and through the collective togetherness of heterogeneous individuals who in their mode of being-in-common, in their multiplicity and process of political subjectivation (that is, in becoming a political actant) and in their encounter, stand for the metaphorical and material condensation of the People (as political category). It is the emergence of a thinking minority that takes the generic position of ‘the people’. In doing so,
they 'replace an identitarian object, and the separating names bound up in it' (like Muslim, Christian, worker, intellectual, young, old, woman, man) with the common name of 'we, the People' (Badiou 2012: 92).

Finally, a political Idea/Imaginary cannot find ground and grounding without localisation. A political moment is always placed, localised, and invariably operative in public space. Squares and other (semi-)public spaces, like picket lines, workers' or women's houses, occupied factories, or the Italian Centri Sociali, have historically always been the sites, the geographical places, for performing and enacting emancipatory practices; these are the sites of existence, of exhibition, of becoming popular. Without a site, a place, a location, a political idea is impotent. The location produces intensity, unity and presence, and permits contraction. However, such intense and contracted localised practices can only ever be an event, originary, but ultimately pre-political. It does not (yet) constitute a political sequence.

In sum, the political emerges when the few claim the name of the many, the community as a whole, and are recognised as such. The emergence of political space is always specific, concrete, particular, minoritarian, but stands, in a sort of short-circuiting, as the condensation of the universal. This has to be fully endorsed and the consequences carefully considered. In particular, it pits a democratising process often against majoritarian, but ultimately passive and objectified, representative democracy. It is worth quoting Badiou at length here:

'It is then much more appropriate to speak of popular dictatorship than democracy. The word 'dictatorship' is widely executed in our democratic environment... But just as movement democracy, which is egalitarian and direct, is absolutely opposed to the 'democracy' of the executives of Capital's power, which is egalitarian and representative, so the dictatorship exercised by a popular movement is radically opposed to dictatorships as forms of separated, oppressive state. By 'popular dictatorship' we mean an authority that is legitimate precisely because its truth derives from the fact that it legitimates itself. No one is the delegate to anybody else.' (Badiou 2012: 59)

Such movement democracy, minoritarian yet presenting and recognised as the general will of the people, destabilises liberal notions of instituted democratic forms and forces us to consider 'the democratic' as process against democracy as constituted arrangement, or, in other words, to think, with Miguel Abensour, 'democracy against the state' (Abensour 2011). Indeed, the ultimate aim of politics is intervention, to change the given socio-environmental ordering in a certain manner. Like any intervention, this is a violent act. It at least partly erases what is there in order to erect something new and different. It is of central importance to recognise that politicking acts are singular interventions that (aspire to) produce particular socio-ecological arrangements and milieus and, in doing so, foreclose (at least temporarily) the possibility of others to emerge. Any intervention enables the formation of certain socio-ecological assemblages and closes down others. The subjective 'violence' inscribed in such choice has to be fully endorsed and its implications teased out. For example, one cannot simultaneously have a truly carbon-free city and permit unlimited car-based mobility, or socio-economic equality with the endurance of hereditary intergenerational wealth transfer. They are mutually exclusive. Even less can an egalitarian, democratic, solidarity-based and ecologically sensible future be produced without marginalising or excluding those who insist on a private appropriation of the commons of the earth and its mobilisation for accumulation, personal enrichment and hereditary transmission.

An egalitarian politics is radically inclusive; 'it is an inclusionary struggle' (Žižek 2013b: 126). Of course, the question then arises of how to confront those who remain on the outside, who will mobilise whatever device to prevent the universalisation of the inclusionary struggle. Against their symbolic and objective violence, it is vital to think about ways to protect and defend the universalising process without descending into abyssal terror, about how to navigate the prospect of failure in the absence of effective defence as experienced by the Paris Commune or in the violence of political terror that marked so many past emancipatory transformations. Such violent encounters, of course, always constitute a political act, one that can be legitimised only in political terms. Neither philosophical musings nor substantive social theory can serve to legitimise such encounters.

Any political sequence is one that re-orders socio-ecological coordinates and patterns, reconfigures uneven socio-ecological relations (while foreclosing others), often with unforeseen or unforeseeable consequences. Consider, for example, how the historical struggle for political emancipation and equality was predicated upon sustained class and political struggle in the face of persistent and occasionally ruthless oppression and opposition. Such interventions that express a choice and take sides invariably signal an autocratic moment and the temporary suspension of the democratic understood as the agonistic encounter of heterogeneous views under the aegis of an axiomatically presumed equality of all. The gap between the democratic as a political given, predicated upon the presumption of the equality on
the one hand and the autocratic moment of political intervention as the (temporary) suspension of the democratic on the other needs to be radically endorsed. While a pluralist democratic politics, founded on a presumption of equality, insists on difference, disagreement, radical openness and exploring multiple possible futures, concrete spatial-ecological intervention is necessarily about relative closure (for some), definitive choice, singular intervention and, thus, certain exclusion and occasionally even outright silencing. For example, tar sand exploitation and ‘fracking’ (hydraulic fracturing) cannot coincide with a climate policy worthy of the name. While ‘traditional’ democratic policies are based on majoritarian principles, the democratic-egalitarian perspectives insist on foregrounding equality and socio-ecological solidarity as the foundational gesture.

A political truth procedure or a political sequence, for Alain Badiou, unfolds when, in the name of equality, fidelity to an event is declared; a fidelity that, although always particular, aspires to become public, to universalise. It is a wager on the truth of the egalitarian political sequence (Badiou 2008). Such a sequence can retroactively be traced through its process of de-localisation from or spatialisation of the originary site, encapsulated when, for example, the Indignados claimed ‘We are here, but anyway it’s global, and we’re everywhere’. While aspiring to universalise, such a spatialising movement can never be totalising; while everyone is invited in, not all will accept the invitation. The repetition of the repertoires of action, the continuing identification with the originary Idea, and the moving-back-and-forth between insurrectional sites, may begin to tentatively open up new spatialities of transformation while prefiguring experimental relations for new organisational forms. Such a process of spatialisation renders concrete, gives content, to the ‘equality’ expressed in the originary event. In the process, equality becomes substantively embodied and expressed; and perhaps a new political name that captures the new imaginary and its associated new common(s) sense may emerge alongside it.

While staging equality in public squares is a vital moment, the process of transformation requires the slow but unstoppable production of new forms of spatialisation quilted around materialising the claims of equality, freedom and solidarity. In other words, what is required now and what needs to be thought through is if and how these proto-political localised events can turn into a spatialised political ‘truth’ procedure; a process that has to consider carefully the persistent obstacles and often-violent strategies of resistance orchestrated by those who wish to hang on to the existing state of the situation. This procedure raises the question of political subjectivation and organisational configurations, and requires perhaps forging a political name that captures the imaginary of a new egalitarian commons appropriate for the twenty-first century’s planetary form of urbanisation. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these names were closely associated with ‘communism’ or ‘socialism’, and centred on the key tropes of the party as adequate organisational form, the proletarian as privileged political subject, and the state as the arena of struggle and site to occupy. The present situation requires a re-imagined socio-ecological configuration and a new set of strategies that nonetheless still revolve around the notions of equality. However, state, party and proletarian may not any longer be the key axes around which an emancipatory sequence becomes articulated. While the remarkable uprisings of 2011 signalled a desire for a different political configuration, there is a long way to go in terms of thinking through and acting upon the modalities that might unleash a transformative democratic political sequence. Considerable intellectual work needs to be done and experimentation is required in terms of thinking through and pre-figuring what organisational forms are appropriate and adequate to the task, what is the terrain of struggle, and what or who are the agents of its enactment?

The urgent tasks now to undertake for those who maintain fidelity to the proto-political events choreographed in the new insurrectional spaces that demand a new constituent politics (that is a new mode of organising everyday environments) revolve centrally around inventing new modes and practices of collective and sustained political mobilisation, organising the concrete modalities of spatialising and universalising the Idea provisionally materialised in these intense and contracted localised insurrectional events and the assembling of a wide range of new political subjects who are not afraid to stage an egalitarian being-in-common, imagine a different commons, demand the impossible, perform the new and confront the violence that will inevitably intensify as those who insist on maintaining the present order realise that their days might be numbered. Such post-capitalist politics is not and cannot be based solely on class positions. As Marx long ago asserted, class is a bourgeois concept and practice. The insurgencies are not waged by a class, but by the masses as an assemblage of heterogeneous political subjects. It is when the masses as a political category stage their presence that the elites recoil in horror.

In the aftermath of the insurrections of the past few years, a veritable explosion of new socio-spatial practices are experimented with, from housing occupations and movements against dispossession in Spain to rapid proliferation of experimenting with new egalitarian life-styles and forms of social and ecological organisation in Greece, Spain and many other places, alongside more traditional forms of political organising. Not all experimentations will succeed.
Many will fail. In the face of inevitable setbacks – like the current catastrophe in Egypt – the fidelity to the democratising process needs to be maintained and sharpened. An extraordinary experimentation with dispossessing the dispossessor, with reclaiming the commons and organising access, transformation and distribution in more egalitarian ways already marks the return to ‘ordinary’ life in the aftermath of the insurgencies. The incipient ideas expressed in the event are materialised in a variety of everyday acts, and in the midst of painstaking efforts to build alliances, bridge sites, repeat the insurgencies, establish connectivities and, in the process, produce organisation, symbolise its practices and generalise its desire. The repetition of heterogeneous situations may well be – as Nick Srnicek argues – what is adequate today to sustain fidelity to the events choreographed by the incipient politisatisations of recent insurgencies (Srnicek 2008). Such procedures require painstaking organisation, sustained political action, and a committed fidelity to universalising the egalitarian trajectory for the management of the commons. While staging equality in public squares is a vital moment, the process of transformation requires the slow but unstoppable production of new forms of spatialisation quilted around materialising the claims of equality, freedom and solidarity. This is the promise of the return of the political embryonically manifested in insurgent practices.

By way of conclusion: from ground zero to enacting the polis

The Real of the political cannot be fully suppressed and is now returning in the form of the urban insurgencies with which I opened this contribution. Yet if the political remains foreclosed, and the polis remains moribund in the face of the post-politicising suspension of the properly democratic, then what is to be done? How can the polis be reclaimed as a political space? How and in what ways can the courage of the urban collective intellect(ual) be mobilised to think through a design of and for dissensual or polemical spaces? I would situate the tentative answers to these questions in three interrelated registers of thought.

The first revolves around transgressing the fantasy that sustains the post-political order. This would include not surrendering to the temptation to act out. The hysterical act of resistance (‘I have to do something or the city, the world, will go to the dogs’) just answers the call of power to do what you want, to live your dream, to be a ‘responsible’ citizen. Acting out is actually what is invited, an injunction to obey, to be able to answer to ‘What have you done today?’ The proper response to this injunction to undertake action, to design the new, to be different (which is already fully accounted for within the state of the situation) is to follow Bartleby’s modest, yet radically transgressive, reply to his Master, ‘I’d prefer not to …’ (Zižek 2006b). The refusal to act, to stop asking what they want from me, to stop wanting to be liked is not only an affirmation that the Master does not exist or, at least, that the emperor is naked, but also an invitation to think, or rather, to think again. The courage of the urban intellect(ual) is a courage to be an organic intellectual of the city qua polis. This is an urgent task and requires the formation of new imaginaries and the resurrection of thought that has been censored, scripted out, suspended, and rendered obscene. In other words, is it still possible to think, for the twenty-first century, the design of a democratic, polemical, equitable, free common urbanity? Can we still think through today the censored metaphors of equality, communism, living-in-common, solidarity, egalitarian political democracy? Are we condemned to rely on our humanistic sentiments to manage socially to the best of our techno-managerial abilities the perversities of late capitalist urbanity, or can a different politics and process of being-in-common be thought and designed? I like to be on the side of the latter.

The second moment of reclaiming the polis revolves around re-centring/redesigned the urban as a democratic political field of disagreement. This is about enunciating dissent and rupture, and the ability to literally open up spaces that permit acts that claim and stage a place in the order of things. This concerns on rethinking equality politically; i.e. thinking equality not as a sociologically verifiable concept or procedure that permits opening a policy arena that will remedy the observed inequalities (utopian/normative/moral) some time in a utopian future (i.e. the standard recipe of left-liberal urban policy prescriptions), but as the axiomatically given and presupposed, albeit contingent, condition of democracy. This must include of course the constitution and construction of common spaces as collectivised spaces for experimenting and living differentially, to counter ‘the hyper-exploitation or the time that is imposed and that one tries to re-appropriate’ (Kakogianni and Rancière 2013: 24). Political space thereby emerges as the collective or common space for the institutionalisation of the social (society) and equality as the foundational gesture of political democracy (as its presumed, axiomatic, yet contingent foundation).

This requires extraordinary designs (both theoretically and materially), ones that cut through the master signifiers of consensual urban governance (creativity, sustainability, growth, cosmopolitanism, participation, and so on) and their radical metonymic re-imagination
(see Gunder and Hillier 2009; Swyngedouw 2010b). Such metonymic re-registering demands thinking through the city as a space for accommodating equalitarian difference and disorder. This hinges critically on creating egalitarian public spaces. Most importantly, the utopian framing that customarily informs urban visioning requires reversal to a temporal sequence centred on imagining concrete spatio-temporal utopias as immediately necessary and realisable. This echoes Henri Lefebvre’s clarion call for the ‘right to the city’ understood as the ‘right to the production of urbanisation’, and urges us to think of the city as a process of collective co-design and co-production (Harvey 2012).

Thirdly, and most importantly, transmuting insurgency into a political sequence poses the need to traverse the fantasy of the elites, a fantasy that is sustained and nurtured by the perversely imaginary of an autopoietic world, the hidden hand of market exchange that self-regulates and self-organises, serving simultaneously the interests of the Ones and the All, the private and the common. The socialism for the elites that structures the contemporary city is Really one that engages the common and the commons in the interests of the elite Ones through the mobilisation and disciplinary registers of post-democratic politics (Beverungen, Murtola and Schwarts 2013). It is a fantasy that is further sustained by a double fantastic promise. On the one hand, there is the promise of eventual enjoyment – ‘Believe us and our designs will guarantee your enjoyment’. It is an enjoyment that is forever postponed, that becomes a veritable utopia, a no-place. On the other hand, there is the recurrent promise of catastrophe and disintegration if the elite’s fantasy is not realised, if one does not surrender to the injunctions of the Master. This dystopian fantasy is predicated upon the relentless cultivation of fear (of ecological disintegration and ecocide, excessive migration, terrorism, economic-financial collapse), fears that are both relayed by and managed through technocratic-expert knowledge and elite governance arrangements. This fantasy of catastrophe has a castrating effect – it sustains the impotence for naming and designing truly alternative cities, truly different emancipatory spatialities and urbanities.

Traversing elite fantasies requires the intellectual and political courage to imagine egalitarian democracies; the production of common values and the collective production of the greatest collective œuvre, the city; the inauguration of new political trajectories of living life in common; and, most importantly, the courage to choose, to take sides. Most importantly, traversing the fantasy of the elites means recognising that the social, economic and ecological catastrophe that is announced every day as tomorrow’s threat is not a promise, not something to come, but is already the Real of the present.

Note

1. This is stunningly captured in the documentary Ecumenopolis: City Without Limits, see http://www.ecumenopolis.net/#en_US (accessed 22 July 2013).

References

Over the past three years I have been working with an urban community organisation called Coexist, based in Bristol, a small provincial city in the United Kingdom. Coexist is a registered Community Interest Company based in Hamilton House, a disused office building in the formerly rundown, but now rapidly changing, inner-city area of Stokes Croft. It was set up to manage spaces in which people can ‘coexist’ with themselves, with each other, and with the environment. Coexist has drawn together a diverse array of artists, crafts people, community groups, health practitioners and social enterprises in their effort to provide a base for innovative and ethical social organisations at below-market rents. Their broader vision includes building networks with a diverse range of local groups and institutions that can be leveraged to create new opportunities for themselves and others. Examples of this wider engagement include engagement with local food restaurants, participation in the establishment of a ‘Creative Commons’ as part of Bristol’s economic development zone, and networking to support Bristol social enterprises and develop a new generation of ‘social entrepreneurs’. The expressed aim of all this activity is to establish Coexist specifically, and the city of Bristol more generally, as a ‘beacon of good practice’ that will enable others nationally and internationally to emulate their grassroots model of environmentally sensitive urban regeneration and social innovation.

At first glance Coexist would appear to be exactly the kind of partnering, networked, post-political and post-democratic initiative that the wider literature on post-politics worries about. While Coexist may think they are working towards a more inclusive and egalitarian future, and are developing novel environmental, economic and social arrangements to underpin their urban experiments in living and working, most commentators on post-politics would argue that grassroots organisations such as these are caught up in depoliticised
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What is This?
Unequal diversity – on the political economy of social cohesion in Vienna

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Abstract
The article reflects on the contradictory dynamics inherent in policies and political strategies to achieve social cohesion in cities, given the current European political-economic conjuncture of multiculturalism as well as increasing socioeconomic inequality. It takes the history of the city of Vienna with its rich story of social cohesion and of a melting pot of cultures as a historic case study, stressing path-dependency and the necessity of path-shaping. Furthermore, it describes two good practices of socially innovative current attempts to achieve social cohesion. The empirical insights, together with a broad overview of different disciplinary and policy discourses, help to problematize social cohesion as a key issue for European urban development. The article closes by proposing three lessons that can be learned from Vienna: to overcome culturalist reductionism, to be aware of scale-sensitive institution-building, and to reflect on the political and economic preconditions for building a European social citizenship.

Keywords
citizenship, diversity, inequality, urban social cohesion, Vienna

Social cohesion has become a key term in the discursive field on multiculturalism, right-wing politics and migration, in addition to the concern with poverty and social exclusion. It gained momentum as a key concept in policy and research after a first wave of pure neoliberalism. In the 1990s, established politics became aware of the necessity to legitimize mainstream policies via strategies of socially embedding neoliberal reforms (Porter and Craig, 2004; Leubolt et al., 2007). At this specific conjuncture, social cohesion became a political issue in Europe because of the failure and contestation of existing, more redistributive integrative mechanisms, but also the denial of alternative mechanisms. To grasp the inherent dynamics of the term ‘social cohesion’ and the related discursive and policy strategies, a historical perspective is needed.

This article reflects on social cohesion as a key problematic of current urban development by focusing on Vienna, because it is a city with a rich history of social cohesion. This will help to exemplify the contradictions inherent in the attempt to foster social cohesion in cities. Vienna, capital city of Austria, occupies a peculiar position in Europe. It is a city with a rich historical legacy, from the multicultural fin de siècle to the social reformism of inter-war Red Vienna. It is a city at the heart of Europe that once
was the capital of an empire that paradigmatically represented centre–periphery relationships – an East/West divide – within its border. In addition, it was a creative and lively city, before Nazi fascism killed Jews, other minorities and the city’s intellectuals or forced them into exile.

Coming closer to the present, Austria has also contributed to urban and regional development theory through the work of Walter Stöhr, one of the key people to promote ‘development from below’, ‘endogenous development’ and ‘local initiatives’ from the 1970s onwards, in clear opposition to top down planning and in favour of alternative, even to some extent romantically anti-capitalist, development (Stöhr and Tödtling, 1978; Stöhr and Taylor, 1981: 62; Friedmann, 1992; Moulaert, 2000). My first scientific article was published in a book by Walter Stöhr called Global Challenge and Local Response, an early version of which later became the paradigm of glocalization, the interplay of global dynamics and reactive local agency (A. Novy, 1990). This emphasis on local and urban development as a panacea to solve problems of cohesion has gained momentum together with the emergence of a global perspective on urban development (Swyngedouw, 1992). This article reflects on this emerging glocal paradigm self-critically.1 It begins by dwelling on the highly ambivalent concept of ‘social cohesion’ and proposes a political-economic approach to frame the issue. The second section focuses on key periods of urban development and portrays their respective relationship to cohesion. I conclude by drawing some rather unconventional lessons for shaping socially cohesive cities.

The problematic of social cohesion

In the 1990s, the European Union’s ‘First Cohesion Report’ still recognized that ‘the promotion of social cohesion requires the reduction of the disparities which arise from unequal access to employment opportunities and the rewards in the form of income (CEC, 1996: 14). At that time, cohesion still referred to the territorial dimension only. Cohesion Policy was the explicit and visible expression of solidarity within the European Union (EU). In 2000, social cohesion became part of the Lisbon Agenda, an achievement that was Janus faced, because social policy was reduced to a functional role to support and maintain competitiveness (Van Apeldoorn et al., 2009). It meant bringing cohesion to cities by creating more and better jobs, and improving the employability of people wanting work (CEC, 2005). This embodied a new compromise between competitiveness and social cohesion (Boddy and Parkinson, 2005), creating a ‘de-socialized’ and a ‘de-politicized binary’ that left no room outside its own rationale (Maloutas et al., 2008: 260).

Being such an important policy concept, it is astonishing that, analytically, the term has remained chaotic, ‘a hybrid mental construction’ (Bernard, 1999: 65), which refers to a state in which components ‘stick’ together to form a meaningful whole (Chan et al., 2006: 289). In line with Durkheim (1893a, 1893b), the city as a ‘whole’ is the place where weak ties of organic solidarity build bridges between social groups and territories, while strong ties of emotional bonding erode, a phenomenon he called mechanical solidarity.

Currently, there are many usages of social cohesion and little common understanding. In a generic but helpful approximation, to foster social cohesion in cities means creating neighbourhoods and agglomerations where people ‘live together differently’ (Patsy Healey) or – more precisely – ‘have the opportunity to be different and yet be able to live together’ (Mikael Stigendal).2 It is about a sense of belonging and identity as well as citizenship. Social cohesion is a nodal point in the discursive field that dwells on the contradictions of equality and diversity, unity and autonomy. It is a key concept for those concerned with building social order and repairing the damage caused by capitalist modernization. From this perspective, problematizing social cohesion draws attention to the danger of urban disorder inherent in the modernization of capitalist societies based on class cleavages and the constant transformation of economic activities and their resources. Marx and Engels described the disruptive modernizing forces as follows: ‘all that is solid melts into air’ (Marx and Engels, 1986), an idea taken up and elaborated further by Schumpeter as ‘creative destruction’ (Schumpeter, 1947: Ch. 7). It was the
bleak side of progress, the ‘terrible and tragic convergence, sealed with victims’ blood’ (Berman, 1988: 75), from poverty to unemployment and social disintegration, that gave rise to the idea of shaping development as conscious human intervention to correct these disruptions (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). The visible hand of human actors, collective civic agency, social movements and the state shapes modernization and urbanization, with profound effects on the life of urban inhabitants. Criticism of decay, exploitation and urban disorder (Engels, 1999) resulted in a long history of urban reform to heal the city of the harms of capitalist progress, marrying nature with the city, restoring harmony and achieving ‘wholesome’ living (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Heynen et al., 2006). Reflecting on social cohesion today relates precisely to this problematic. If cohesion is a problematic instead of a clearly definable concept, research and policymaking have to focus more on understanding and accommodating the inherent contradictions instead of offering quick solutions. The tensions resulting from the inherent but unsolvable contradictions in human conviviality can be addressed only by grasping the complexity of historical-geographical development and looking for context-sensitive solutions. How much social mix and homogeneity does a neighbourhood need to be cohesive (Murie and Musterd, 2004) and how much diversity and how much cohesion does a city need to be creative and innovative?

An important step in comprehending the problematic of social cohesion is to perceive its multidimensionality (Jenson, 1998; Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Kearns and Forrest, 2000; Maloutas and Malouta, 2004). In policymaking as well as in academic research, there are two main fields dealing with social cohesion, one cultural and the other socioeconomic. The first field of policymaking and research can best be understood by taking the case of the Netherlands as emblematic. A liberal country that embraced multiculturalism in the 1990s has turned towards a rigid understanding of the host–foreigner relationship. Important everyday and political discourses are based on a crude essentialist understanding of autochthonous and migrant populations. In more than one country of Europe, democratic majorities have been formed based on solving social cohesion issues via ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’, forcing ‘them’ to adapt to ‘us’. The desire to belong to an imagined national community seems to be stronger than awareness of the existential diversity of human beings. Needless to say, this essentialist understanding of culture is against everything that cultural studies, post-colonial studies and urban and regional studies have postulated over recent decades (Simonsen, 2008a, 2008b; Spivak, 2008; Perrons, 2009). But its everyday and political relevance has not been impressed by overwhelming academic insights and politically correct discourses. This is strongly related to a mono-dimensional perspective that explains a cultural phenomenon by cultural causes. If the multidimensionality of the problematic is acknowledged, then other explanations emerge. Instead of denouncing people for irrational or morally wrong behaviour, the various intertwined issues that increase social stress and insecurity have to be taken into consideration. To return to the Dutch ‘clash of culture’ disputes, it is helpful to remember the social liberal policies in welfare and the labour market that have been implemented since the 1990s, because these policies increased social inequality and thereby interpersonal competition (Van Apeldoorn, 2009). Social closure via national identity affirmation seems to be an attractive way of improving personal assets against potential competitors.

The second field of concern with social cohesion is socioeconomic: a good life and secure employment for all are intimately related to social cohesion, which has been researched under the labels of poverty, social polarization and social inclusion. From a more radical perspective, David Harvey has drawn attention to the underlying political objective of neoliberalism – to build a more unequal society (Harvey, 2005: 15). In the recent past, equality has returned as a key element in discussions about the lack of social cohesion (Sennett, 2003; Judt, 2010) as well as economic instability. Moss (2009) and others have stressed the impressive coincidence between financial turbulence and social inequality in the United States over the past 100 years. The greatest degree of inequality was achieved in 1928 and 2008, which highlights the systemic instability caused by income concentration. There are no comparable data available for Vienna, but the European trend of the last 30
years is similar (Perrons and Plomien, 2010), as Unger demonstrates with respect to the development of the Gini coefficient of income (Unger, 2010). Furthermore, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) show the stress-inducing implications of inequality resulting from status competition. Based on long-term data compiled over decades for the rich countries, they reveal a consistent correlation between well-being and cohesion with more social equality. Equality is better for everyone (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010).

If these stylized facts are correct, what does this mean for the persistent normative emphasis on diverse cities? How is the benevolence of equality reconciled with the fact that all, or at least most, of us enjoy diversity? If you could have seen Vienna in the 1980s, it was much less lively and a greyer and more uniform city than today. Vienna, owing to migration and a liberal turn, has become more diverse and continues to be a lively city not only for tourists but also for the majority of the inhabitants. To sum up, social cohesion needs to be re-problematized by considering a wide spectrum of processes and outcomes, causes and effects relating to urban inhabitants’ lives. But, because concepts and reality are related, defining a social object never lies ‘outside’ the object (Bhaskar, 1998). They are part of the ongoing sociopolitical struggle about the future of European cities and the accommodation of the incommensurable but related issues of diversity and equality – unequal diversity.

Viennese urban development

Viennese history offers insights into the dilemmas related to this problem of human conviviality. Urban development over the past 150 years can be divided into three main periods: fin de siècle Vienna before 1914; the Vienna of the short 20th century that ended with the fall of the Iron Curtain; and the re-Oriented Vienna that emerged in the decades of European neoliberalization. These periods coincide with three regimes of accumulation, as conceptualized in regulation theory (Becker and Novy, 1999), and with relatively long periods of crisis in the transition, which are especially open to social innovations, experimentation and creativity (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vienna Period</th>
<th>National regime of accumulation</th>
<th>National mode of regulation</th>
<th>Local regime of accumulation</th>
<th>Local mode of regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fin de siècle Vienna: dynamic centre of an empire</td>
<td>Extensive accumulation</td>
<td>Persistent strong influence of feudal interests</td>
<td>Outward oriented – with a large hinterland</td>
<td>From a passive to an active state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Vienna: centre of a depleted nation-state</td>
<td>Crisis of accumulation</td>
<td>Orthodox stabilization policies</td>
<td>Outward oriented – without hinterland</td>
<td>Local socialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Austro) German fascism</td>
<td>(Increasing isolation)War economy</td>
<td>(Authoritarian) Fascist state</td>
<td>Insignificant role in war economy</td>
<td>Loss of local autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Orientation: geographic centrality in a neoliberalized Europe</td>
<td>From 1989 onwards</td>
<td>Extensive accumulation (finance capital, East European FDI)</td>
<td>Embedded neoliberalism</td>
<td>(South)Eastward orientation; finance and real estate capital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration, based on Becker and Novy (1999).
In the transition from outward-oriented accumulation during the Habsburg empire to national Fordist development in period following the Second World War, inter-war ‘Red Vienna’ was a local pilot project that became a success story nationally after the war. In the transition from national welfare capitalism to neoliberal outward-oriented accumulation from the 1980s onwards, pilot projects of social innovations emerged again, this time as an innovative response to gentrification and sociospatial polarization in the city.

**Vienna fin de siècle – Centre of a multicultural empire (1867–1914)**

Starting this historical journey, it is important to take the geographical location of Vienna into consideration as this has shaped its internal contradictions. The Habsburg empire was a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic hybrid, containing elements of the liberal, industrialized and urbanized West and the state-centred and agrarian East (Anderson, 1978, 1980). Civil society was weak: the state was the main agent of modernization and Viennese finance capital the main actor in capitalizing the hinterland of the empire.

Before the First World War, Vienna was a lively city and hosted one of the most creative milieus at the time, ranging from music (Mahler and Schoenberg), to painting (Klimt and Schiele), from Freud to logical positivism (Mach, Neurath). But the cosmopolitan city was not without its underbelly. Socioeconomically, the growth of Vienna from 400,000 inhabitants to 2 million in the 50 years before the First World War was accompanied by horrific living conditions for migrant workers: rents were high and without any legal regulation, 95 percent of apartments in 1912 had no WC or running water and 97,000 people were homeless (Förster, n.d.). In 1890, 65 percent of the population were threatened with repatriation to their home village if they were in need of social assistance, a right that was tied to the place of birth (*Heimatrecht*) (Komlosy, 2004: 110) – which is similar to what happened to the Roma in France in 2010. In 1910, 48.8 percent of the inhabitants had not been born in Vienna (Stimmer, 2007: 13).

After the stock exchange crash in 1873, liberal free trade cosmopolitism was on the retreat. Even liberal city administrators who governed Vienna until 1897 had to increase the role of the local state, constructing a public water and sewerage system and municipalizing gas plants, because the social costs of progress called for more interventionism. Bourgeois liberals started to cling to the Crown and a restrictive electoral law to secure power, thereby turning democracy and liberalism into opposites (Schorske, 1982: 130). To secure cultural liberty and private socio-economic privileges, an authoritarian state was accepted as a protector against formally independent petty-commodity producers, denounced as the ‘culture-averse masses’ (Schorske, 1982: 132). This strengthened Karl Lueger’s Christian-Social movement, which united nationalism with clericalism, democracy with anti-liberalism, anti-capitalism and anti-Semitism. Against the will of the Emperor and the enlightened liberal elite, Lueger became mayor of Vienna, governing from 1897 to 1910. He created labour offices, constructed a second water pipeline and municipalized the tram system.

To sum up, *fin de siècle* Vienna was a city of diversity without equality and exemplifies the tension between elitist liberal cosmopolitism and the life-world of the majority of ‘ordinary people’. If the latter experience ‘personal and social life as a maelstrom’ (Berman, 1988) and feel threatened by the ‘creative destruction’ of capitalist modernization, they will call for ‘embedding’ destructive capital and market forces, if necessary by authoritarian and exclusionary means (A. Novy et al., 2012).

**‘Red Vienna’ and the national welfare regime (1918–89)**

After the war, Austro-Marxist social democracy came to power at a time of widespread revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. This softened the opposition of conservative and reactionary forces, as they allied with Austro-Marxist social democracy against left revolutionaries in 1918. In democratic elections, conservatives won in Austria, whereas social democrats won in Vienna. Therefore, all intellectual and political efforts of the Social Democratic Party and the labour movement concentrated on the city, a financially well-funded ‘red island’ in the ‘black sea’ of the Austrian hinterland (Öhlinger, 1993: 12f.).
Diverse bottom-up initiatives by the workers’ movement – from schools to social assistance, culture and housing – were taken up and institutionalized (Achs, 1993; Böck, 1993). Using progressive local taxation, within 14 years the city constructed 61,175 apartments in housing estates, 5257 houses by the settler movement and 2155 commercial premises (Förster, n.d.). In addition, the city provided public leisure and cultural facilities. However, social democracy, although committed to parliamentary democracy, was paternalist and top-down oriented. It continued to sympathize with a model of development via trusteeship, of modernization from above but in favour of the masses. This became especially clear with respect to housing, where self-organization was replaced by large-scale public housing (Pirhofer, 1993). Cooperative housing emerged out of necessity (1918–21), resulting in the dynamic creation of cooperative settlements (1922), the municipalization of the settlers’ movement (1923–30) and an emergency programme organized from above during the depression (1930–4). Thereby, step by step the settlers’ movement lost its dynamism and the unity between architectural and sociocultural innovation was lost (K. Novy, 1993: 24).

‘Red Vienna’ influenced the thinking of Karl Polanyi on embedding market societies. Indeed, the key achievement of ‘Red Vienna’ was to give the proletarians dignity and turn workers into citizens as a result of the creation of a local welfare state. In 1927, social democracy obtained 60 percent of the votes. From then onwards, the conservative national government applied a deliberate strategy of destroying ‘Red Vienna’, which was a dissuasive example for Friedrich August von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, founder of the Austrian school of economics (Peck, 2008). Their neoliberal conviction can be summarized as combating all forms of ‘Red Vienna’ social reformism and restoring an elitist status quo. In 1929, the national government reduced transfer payments to Vienna (Melinz, 1999: 19). In 1933, the Christian-Social national government dissolved parliament. In 1934, a short civil war resulted in the creation of a dictatorship inspired by Italian and Portuguese fascism and based on Catholic corporatism (Becker et al., 1999: 4). In 1938, this was displaced by Nazi fascism. Vienna became the experimental field of Aryanization (Aly and Heim, 1993). Around 200,000 people were either deported to concentration camps and killed or had to flee the country (Faßmann, 1995: 14).

After the war, conservatives and social democrats opted for a consensual one-nation strategy of a Keynesian welfare state, ‘in which the support of the entire population is mobilized through material concessions and symbolic rewards’ (Jessop, 1990: 221). ‘Social partnership’ was based on the accommodation of antagonistic class interests through negotiation between conservatives and social democrats. The boundaries between government, parties and civil society were unclear and civil society was never able to develop an autonomous sphere (Novy and Hammer, 2007: 212). Social innovations as bottom-up initiatives were limited, co-opted or repressed: ‘Vienna is a literally lethal atmosphere for critical minds’, as Klaus Novy, a leading researcher of the cooperative movement, described his city before the fall of the Iron Curtain (K. Novy, 1993: 194). But sustained growth, full employment, the national welfare state and its local implementation permitted social cohesion to a degree unknown in previous capitalist development. Between 1970 and 1999 the average rate of unemployment in Europe was 6.4 percent; in Austria it was only 3.3 percent (Unger, 2006: 68). To sum up, in the 20th century the pendulum swung from diversity to equality within a culturally homogenized nation.

**Re-Orienting Vienna: the opening to the East (from 1989 onwards)**

The isolation of the Austrian nation-state nearly coincides with what Hobsbawn called the short 20th century, as the nation was only created out of what was left from the Habsburg empire in 1918. In 1995 it became part of the EU, thereby giving up substantial parts of its sovereignty. Although Austria strengthened its internal market during Fordism, it was increasingly integrated as a supplier for West European, especially German, industry. From 1989 onwards, the Viennese population started timidly to open itself to the East, and Austrian capital, especially finance and retail capital, was quick to use the opportunity to capture those markets that were lost.
after the dissolution of the Habsburg empire. Foreign direct investments (FDI) from Viennese firms increased dramatically, creating a new pattern of inward investment from the West and outward investment to the East (see Figure 1; Musil, 2005). Looking at the main cities of origin and destination for FDI from and to Vienna in 2001, there is a clear dominance of Central Europe: Munich, Paris, Budapest, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, London, Prague, Madrid, Milan and Bratislava – and no non-European city (Musil, 2009).

In the labour market, employment became increasingly precarious and unemployment increased. In the Vienna region, unemployment rose from 5.8 percent in 1987 to 9.5 percent in 2002 (Lengauer, 2004, 2006). Around 16,000 employees had extremely insecure employment with four or more jobs per year, and 60 percent of all labour contracts were renewed each year. The income difference between the top quartile and the lowest increased 5 percent since 1999 (Mayerhofer, 2007).

Of households coming from Turkey, 39.2 percent have to live in unsafe apartments, whereas only 4.2 percent of inhabitants with an Austrian passport have to choose such apartments (Kohlbacher and Reeger, 2007: 316). Furthermore, poverty is spreading, threatening the lower middle class: ‘112,000 Viennese inhabitants receive social assistance, 270,000 are at or below the poverty line and 3 out of 10 youth live in poor households’.3

Up to Austria’s entry into the EU in 1995, Vienna relied on a defensive Keynesianism, with communal

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**Figure 1.** Origin/destination of FDI (balance of capital-based control, based on equity capital), Vienna, 2001

*Source:* Musil (2005), based on Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB).
enterprises and public employment as decisive elements of local economic policy, thereby cushioning the effects of national neoliberal policies (Becker and Novy, 1999). Over recent years, Vienna has privatized the city administration and made it more flexible, encouraged real estate capital and private development projects and focused on supply-side economic policies. Most of these policies are financed publicly but executed by non-governmental bodies serving private interests, without parliamentary or public accountability (Novy and Hammer, 2007). Experiments with innovative forms of participatory and democratic governance have been limited to integrated area development, where the objective was explicitly to foster cohesion at the grassroots level. These policies are discussed below, beginning with Local Agenda 21.

**Local Agenda 21.** Local Agenda (LA) 21, originating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 and the Aalborg Charter of 1994, has been an innovative policy instrument to mobilize local activities for global sustainability. In Vienna, implementation started with a pilot project in the district of Alsergrund. Local social democrats tried to overcome centralist top-down models of technocratic planning and experimented with an open space of participatory democracy, which became a reflexive, socially innovative and self-organized space moulding decision-making and co-participation. It was during this pilot period that LA 21 was a key player in grassroots mobilization against a real estate project in a densely populated area. By organizing residents and articulating their interests, LA 21 contributed to a constructive culture of conflict resolution, resulting in adaptations of the real estate project as well as more democratic procedures in Viennese planning regulations (Novy and Hammer, 2007).

From 2002 onwards, LA 21 was extended to other districts, getting a new, more centralized, organizational structure, in line with New Public Management. This new structure centralized control of the process, while decentralizing and outsourcing execution to the districts. Increasingly, LA 21 has tried to avoid strengthening any form of citizen initiative that might challenge the city administration. Whenever a local situation became conflictive, the administration forced the LA 21 staff to withdraw. This undermined the legitimacy and relevance of LA 21, because it was exactly those conflicts that citizens wanted to get involved in, as in the case of a parking project under the Bacherpark, a green area. Bacherpark was occupied by residents, who left only after the city administration agreed on a plebiscite, which voted against the underground parking project.

**Local Area Management (Grätzelmanagement).** Since 1974, soft urban renewal has supported neighbourhood improvement without gentrification, resulting in an upgrading of the housing stock in many of the most densely populated parts of the city. This has been coordinated by Area Renewal Offices and had an annual budget of €218 million to finance a subsidy system (Fürster, n.d.). Over the years, more than 170,000 apartments have been refurbished.

In 2001, two pilot projects aimed at creating new soft urban renewal policies. Local Area Management was explicitly linked to labour market, training and social programmes via an integrated area development approach in disadvantaged neighbourhoods – ‘managing new problems in new ways’ (Breitfuss and Dangschat, 2001: 1; Dangschat and Breitfuss, 2001). It gained considerable appeal for district politics because of the possibility of linking it to EU funding under the 2000–6 Objective2 programme. Because EU funding required flexible structures, the pilot projects were managed and implemented by the Vienna Business Agency (Wiener Wirtschaftsförderungsfonds), an organization owned by the municipality and targeted towards business and location promotion. As there was no transparent decision-making structure and EU rules offer space for interpretation, residents’ suggestions in the Neighbourhood Advisory Council were welcome only so long as no key stakeholder interests were affected. This indicates the rapid shift from a primary concern with social cohesion to business entrepreneurship (Redak et al., 2003). The pilot projects expired in 2006, but they influenced the reform of Area Renewal Offices, which continue to shape neighbourhood development in Vienna. The promotion of local business survived the exhaustion of EU resources. The Vienna Business Agency has created Mingo and BRC (Business and
Research Center) Hochstädtplatz to support local start-ups and micro and migrant enterprises.

To summarize the two experiences, the most important difference from ‘Red Vienna’ is the scope of the social innovations, which are modest, even marginal, in LA 21 and Local Area Management. There was little upscaling of the innovative practices, and they remained limited to specific areas, and the really important development projects, such as the construction of Donau City at the edge of the Danube river or the new Central Railway Station and the Aspern project have been implemented with hardly any public participation and following the conventional real estate logic of private developers. The commitment to sustainability and participation, as expressed in the pilot projects, therefore, remains de-linked from the decisive, future-shaping urban planning and development. Local Area Management (as an experiment in integrated area development) was not sufficiently equipped with resources and competences to combat increasing unemployment and poverty. And LA 21 (with its focus on sustainability) was not allowed to tackle the conflicting issues of traffic and energy policies, the two most important policy fields for low-carbon cities. To sum up, the pilot projects were innovative in themselves, but they did not overcome and, in some respects, even fragmented policies by reinforcing a hierarchy: participation on secondary issues but no participation with respect to important issues.

**Lessons learned**

After this quick historical journey, I will try to draw conclusions on how to shape socially cohesive cities. My narrative has been framed by three related stories: the first exposed the problem of social cohesion in Vienna as an unresolvable tension between equality and diversity; the second reflected on the shift of attention from local experimentation to creative solutions for scale-sensitive and place-based institutions, an issue related to the third and concluding argument about the lack of European social citizenship as a hindrance to progressive policies to foster cohesion in European cities.

**Social cohesion revisited**

Europe has been experiencing severe ruptures over recent years. If perceived as a threat to everyday routines, identity and social order, such turmoil might strengthen conservative responses. Culturally, it might increase the appeal of essentialist concepts of citizenship. Socially, it might increase the insecurity of the middle class and deepen the divide between those inside and those outside the system. Therefore, the first historical lesson is that support for innovation, diversity and creativity must not be put in opposition to policies that are concerned with equality and social cohesion. In the absence of deliberate interventions in favour of universal welfare, capitalist modernization results in reduced wages and increased migration. In *fin de siècle* Vienna, the cultural elites did not notice the underlying social tensions caused by capitalist progress in the vibrant city. They remained prisoners of a culturalist perspective, very much like defenders of multiculturalism today. Back then and again today, this deepens the cleavage between the elite and the masses based on ‘fine distinctions’ (Bourdieu, 1982) in cultural attitudes, thereby neglecting the way that increasing social insecurity affects the lower as well as the middle classes. From an analytical as well as a political perspective, it is of the utmost importance to accept the multidimensionality of social cohesion and to implement the necessary social and political policies in favour of equality.

This has led to a left liberal, rather elated attitude towards multiculturalism, as well as a right-wing backlash that embraces the host/foreigner dichotomy, making cultural diversity the culprit in social disintegration. Exploiting these cultural misunderstandings, the right-wing populist FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) emulates the anti-Semitic strategies of *fin de siècle* Vienna and mobilizes popular and democratic resentment against the cultural and intellectual elites as well as arbitrarily chosen ‘minorities’, be they Slav, Turkish or African. They deliberately reduce the multidimensionality of social cohesion, opposing Europe-wide solutions. In the October 2010 municipal election in Vienna, the FPÖ got 26 percent of the votes.
In liberal capitalism, progress and growth result in ‘social costs’, the wounds of modernity (Cowen and Shenton, 1996), be it precarious employment, reduced wages or the transformation of neighbourhoods. All this is perceived and lived as creative destruction by urban inhabitants and mobilizes resistance of the real and potential victims as well as the threatened winners, if there are no countervailing efforts to shape a more convivial urban development. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) show that high inequality increases social stress and status competition. In such situations, the most disastrous political strategy is to oppose liberalism, cosmopolitism, creativity and innovation to nationalism, mass culture and democracy. ‘Red Vienna’ did the opposite of fin de siècle Vienna. It distanced itself from both liberalism as the ideology of the elite and anti-Semitism as the ideology of the middle class and created bonds via public services and infrastructure, offering social mobility to workers and transforming them into citizens. ‘Red Vienna’ built social cohesion by creating public institutions and stressing equality, swinging the pendulum of diversity and equality in the other direction. It thereby also integrated migrants into the Viennese population, while remaining open to Southeast European and Jewish culture. But its conception of integration remained assimilationist, based on German culture instead of ‘inter-culture’ (Terkessidis, 2010).

Creating scale-sensitive European public institutions

I started the article with a reference to Walter Stöhr’s book Global Challenge and Local Response as an early study of what later became the hegemonic discursive field of globalization, stressing current global economic and/or technological linkages as unique (Borja and Castells, 1997; Swyngedouw, 1997; Friedmann and Wolff, 2006). Although raising awareness about the politics of scale as a crucial element in social struggle as well as in political economy, glocalization studies have suffered from a lack of concern with mediating from the local to the global, especially what concerns institutions at the regional, national and continental level. Therefore, research on social cohesion in cities focuses on the neighbourhood and the city as a whole, but rarely takes the supra-local framework into consideration.

Local Agenda 21 and Local Area Management are examples of community-centred localism that tries to overcome the localist trap of solving local problems at the local level alone (Moulaert et al., 2010: 6ff.). In an articulated spatiality, the neighbourhood is not only the site of existence of a proactive community to accommodate diversity and equal rights but also the appropriate scale to drive their general recognition and institutionalization into effective social cohesion policy. In the above-described cases, there was a concern with new planning procedures, new forms of governance, empowerment and participation, without, however, being able to upscale and broaden the experiences. Therefore, they were not effective in changing the dominant political outlook, which is increasingly outward and competitiveness oriented.

Today, creative urban research and policy have to reflect and create democratic multi-level public institutions that are European but sensitive to the territorial and cultural diversity of the continent. This is compatible with place-based development strategies (Barca, 2009) that mobilize local potential but see it nested within supra-local dynamics. If path dependency is relevant, Vienna has the potential to become a good experimental field, just as ‘Red Vienna’ was a local experiment in social reformism, with Neurath and Schütte Lihotzky as key advocates of rational and democratic planning. Policies were conceptualized ‘from above’ and put into context-sensitive practice by professionals. Over the decades, however, this has often led to a paternalist, sometimes even authoritarian, attitude of trusteeship of the elites over the masses (Cowen and Shenton, 1996: 4). This is one of the main weaknesses of Viennese public institutions.

The Fordist city, with its homogenizing and control-focused tendencies, cannot and should not be revived. Today, progressive local policies have to be applied context specifically and give voice to inhabitants, stressing diversity without abdicating equality. A socially cohesive city where inhabitants are citizens and allowed to ‘live together differently’ (Patsy Healey) requires an adequate multi-level institutionalization that overcomes adherence to a
single-language, mono-ethnic norm. Of crucial importance in this respect is the political challenge to advance from an essentialist and exclusionary concept of national citizenship that creates outsider/insider and host/foreigner dichotomies towards a scale-sensitive and inhabitant-centred conception of European citizenship, which embraces civic, political and social rights. This is possible only in a ‘negotiated city’, a democratic city that accepts conflict as unavoidable, but offers arenas of negotiation where citizens from the middle and working classes participate on an equal footing with investors, politicians and professionals (Abers, 2000; Kesteloot, 2004).

European social citizenship

The most important challenge for current urban development does not reside in the city itself, but refers to the fate of Europe, whose internal contradictions have severely increased with the crisis in 2008. The results of the past 20 years of export-oriented accumulation under neoliberal governance are, even according to neoliberal good governance’s own criteria, modest for some, disastrous for others. With exploding public deficits, soaring household indebtedness and low growth, the current economic policies have made Europe the world economy’s tail-light (Küblböck et al., 2010). While the emerging economies – from China to Brazil (Fernandes and Novy, 2010) – are constructing their own form of welfare capitalism, Europe’s austerity policy since the adoption of the Maastricht criteria has slowly, but persistently, undermined the foundations of cohesive and coherent development: these required a flourishing internal market, high-quality public and social services and infrastructure (EuroMemorandum-Gruppe, 2010). If these do not recover, strategies to foster socially cohesive cities will remain at best palliative.

The unique achievement of universal social rights was linked to a specific form of territory, the nation, and a specific public institution, the state, which was the nodal point of regulation. Like the owl of Minerva, which flies only in twilight, the real achievements of nation-based social reformism are acknowledged fully only afterwards, as the late Tony Judt, an angry dying man, reminds us in his last book about current collective amnesia: ‘Ill fares the land. … Where wealth accumulates, and men decay’ (Goldsmith, 1770; cited by Judt, 2010).

So, how to recover the cohesiveness and social mobility of the postwar epoch? The granting of rights has been eked out in a long political struggle. From the French revolution onwards, step by step the range of issues ruled by rights instead of privilege and money was enlarged. It culminated in Keynesian welfare capitalism and social citizenship after the Second World War, a process described for Britain by Marshall (1950). Differences in housing, education and health were seen no longer as private concerns, but as public responsibilities. Diversity in access to health, education and housing was denounced as inequality (Klinger, 2010). The public sphere was widened and the private domain of difference restricted. It was a huge step towards a society that gives the equal right to be different to all its citizens. This progressive outcome was facilitated by the lessons learned in two wars (Canfora, 2006) and the coming together of political and economic space in the national power container during Fordist regulation, a coherence that has been achieved neither before nor since and that gave the working classes unprecedented bargaining power (Becker, 2002).

The current European model of neoliberal and export-oriented governance lacks this coherence and is inherently unstable. If we look at the European geography of power we perceive that the economic space has been Europeanized, with a common market and a common currency, leading to transnational dynamics in the form of continentalization, while the social space has remained national. To be more precise in describing this contradictory, highly conflictive institutional order: there are a European consumer market, common European civic rights and an increasingly integrated judiciary system, together with an ambivalent distribution of democratic power and military cooperation, but hardly any Europeanization of social citizenship (Anderson, 2009). Yet it is social citizenship that Marshall correctly identified as the crucial element for embedding liberal capitalism and creating social cohesion.

There is more than one reason to be pessimistic about Europe’s future – be it with respect to current efforts to reinstall ‘competitiveness’ as the
sole objective of European integration, to the economic shape of its periphery (Becker, 2010), to the only rudimentary democratic, but still highly fragmented, form of European government, or to the rapidly declining geopolitical and geo-economic position (Dunford and Yeung, 2011). But decay is not inevitable. If there is hope, it lies in Europe’s rich legacy. ‘Red Vienna’ innovated in the creation of a local welfare state, but it was the universalization of welfare nationally that permitted the leap forward in standards of living and social security in the 20th century. Taking up the analogy, the way forward in the 21st century has to focus on the creation of a European social citizenship as a prerequisite for social cohesion in European cities. This does not mean a uniform Europe-wide system of entitlements, but entails a place- and inhabitant-based arrangement that allows a good life for all, embedded in democratically decided Europe-wide regulations based on the principles of a mixed economy. This is utopian but in tune with Ernst Bloch, who ended his magnum opus on the ‘Principle of Hope’ with a plea for concrete utopias identified not in an inaccessible future but in a radical temporal-spatial return – ‘in creating something in the world that shines back to childhood and where nobody has yet been: Home’ (so entsteht in der Welt etwas, das allen in die Kindheit scheint und worin noch niemand war: Heimat) (Bloch, 1959: 1628).

Notes

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3 Personal information from David Ellensohn, leader of the parliamentary group of the Greens in Vienna.

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