

# Triangulating utopia: Benjamin, Lefebvre, Tafuri

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## Abstract

Assuming merit both in critiques of utopianism, such as those leveled by Jane Jacobs, and defences of utopian visions by David Harvey among others, this paper addresses what seems the dilemma that one must choose between visionary but unrealistic utopianism and stultifying submission to a status quo in the interests of realism and draws a solution from aspects of the views of Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre and Manfredo Tafuri. Key dimensions of their approaches employed are, respectively, the 'dialectical structure of awakening', 'transduction' and the ideological dimension of utopianism. The paper concludes by indicating implications for urban theory and practice suggested by its putative escape from a realism/visionary dilemma.

If there is a generic fault line in approaches to urban theory, planning, philosophy and design it is that between utopian and anti-utopian thinking. Thus Jane Jacobs introduced her seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1992), by setting herself against what she saw as the dominant and for her pernicious legacy of Le Corbusier and Ebenezer Howard, whose work she placed in the utopian tradition. That she correctly located these urban planners there can be no doubt. Le Corbusier's Marseille showcase, l'Unité d'Habitation, almost exactly follows the forms and functions prescribed by Charles Fourier for his Phalanstery. Howard's Garden City plan and the more recent New Urbanist thinking that echoes it are foreshadowed in the views of yet earlier utopians, such as Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella.

As to the antipathy of Jacobs and others toward utopian-inspired urban theory and practice, there is much to agree with. Such approaches can be sterile and stultifying, and typically they try to force urban citizens into preconceived moulds, often responding to technocratic, bureaucratic and economic exigencies. The positive side of utopian thinking, that which prompted Henri Lefebvre to ask 'Who [of progressive thinkers] is not a utopian today?' (1996, p. 151), is its rejection of fatalistic or, as in the case of too many urban planners, politicians and architects, opportunistic acceptance of a status quo. Proactively, utopian thinking is implicated in the formulation of radical goals. As David Harvey puts it: '[W]ithout a vision of utopia there is no way to define that port to which we might want to sail' (2000, p. 189). Critical urban theorists such as Harvey and Peter Marcuse react to this situation by the dual exercise of exposing ways that existing urban realities support oppressive and exclusionary social structures and practices while at the same time projecting alternative visions.

One challenge for the critical theorist is to articulate visions while avoiding the negative potentials of utopianism. A typical strategy for doing this is expressed by Marcuse. General features of a desirable future are negatively identified by reference to oppressive characteristics of the present—justice instead of injustice, community spirit instead of profit seeking, and so on—while more concrete prescriptions are 'left to the democratic experience of those in fact implementing the vision' (Marcuse, 2009, p. 194).<sup>1</sup> This is an attractive strategy, but it faces the problem that a campaign to unseat existing oppressive urban arrangements must include at least some concrete alternative recommendations on pain of being rejected as simple negativity, and this raises another problem. Unless the recommendations are radical they will fail to project a genuine alternative to what critical urban theorists see as cities flawed at their very core, most prominently due to their implication in capitalistic structures.<sup>2</sup>

The critical theorist thus cannot avoid a measure of utopianism. But this raises the core challenge to all utopianisms that the more radical their visions are, the more vulnerable they become to dismissal as unrealistic. Classic utopians were not much bothered by this problem, since their aim was just to describe radically different futures leaving it to others to figure out whether or how to try attaining them. But this stance is not acceptable to the critical theorist who wants to contribute to actual urban change. Such a theorist confronts the utopian visionary/realism dilemma that in virtue of its very radicalness utopianism offers no realistic means for realizing the futures it projects.

A putative solution to this problem was famously expressed by Marx (1968):

Mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve, since looking at the matter more closely it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. (p. 183)

Marx's specific deployment of this perspective—where a proletariat with revolutionary values and potent resources to realize them is dialectically generated within capitalism—will be returned to, but first the general contours of such a solution will be interrogated. It should be added that the perspective is not unique to Marxism. The perspective is also central to Deweyan Pragmatism, and Neil Brenner lists as one of the four defining characteristics of critical urban theory the project to 'excavate' possibilities for 'radically emancipatory forms of urbanism that are latent, yet systematically suppressed, within contemporary cities' (2009, p. 204).

But, unless one assumes an implausible teleology in which radical tasks and the materials for their realization are historically guaranteed, any such thesis is in danger of falling victim to the charge of acquiescence to a status quo, where identification of what tasks can arise is conditioned by existing values, habits and institutions, and the importance of given tasks is not itself challenged.<sup>3</sup> An instructive attempt to avoid this danger is that of Harvey. In his *Spaces of Hope* he draws out of Marxism a 'dialectical utopian' perspective the aim of which is to combine projected visions (the 'spatial' dimension of the perspective) and recommendations for the 'temporal' dimension of radical political

processes, where the latter recognizes the limitations and takes advantage of opportunities of a given circumstance. The ground of possibility for this is that as a species humans are by nature 'curious and transformative beings endowed with vivid imaginations' (Harvey, 2000, p. 208).<sup>4</sup>

Harvey makes out a persuasive case that humans have always been imaginative creatures ('architects' by nature), and his recommendations for radical activity make good dialectical sense, for example, to promote collaborative action without falling into traditional communitarianism or self-consciously to take account of how the individual is both created by and creates his or her circumstances (2000, chap. 12).<sup>5</sup> He also offers some attractive menus for what radical visions should aim at, including: promoting liberal-democratic freedoms (seen as one of capitalism's false promises); environmentalist commitment (which, like imaginativeness, is a part of the human 'species being'); and championing rights to such as equal life chances and good governance, which, with other rights, he sees as the universal moments in personal political activity.<sup>6</sup>

Harvey's effort represents a nuanced expansion of the Marxist orientation. It defends the view that people can and should engage in visionary radical activity and that, having embarked on courses of action, these should be conducted in dialectically sophisticated ways. These are broad-stroke theses. Still wanting is a focus on the narrower question of how one can find realistic potentials in the present for a radical future. Whether failed promises of capitalism are realizable goals rather than empty rhetoric, or, indeed, whether they ought to be valued at all,<sup>7</sup> are contested questions. Similarly, while attention to human species characteristics reveals a potential for environmentally friendly behaviour, alone it does not suggest how or in what circumstances this potential can be realized, and it might be noted as well that such attention also reveals less appealing potentials.

This paper's primary hypothesis is that some version of the claim exemplified in the passage from Marx and expanded on by Harvey can be sustained by appeal to key aspects of the approaches to utopianism by three proto-typical critical urban theorists—Walter Benjamin, Manfredo Tafuri and Henri Lefebvre. The focus of the paper is methodological. That is, it will draw from these classic radical thinkers conceptual tools requisite for escaping a visionary/realism dilemma lacking in Marx and other theorists who agree with the contours of his solution to this problem. Substantive views about the content of a utopian vision, such as those articulated by Harvey, will not be developed, though at the end of the paper some implications of this exercise for specifically urban theory and practice will be noted.

Of the three thinkers in question, Tafuri is the most critical of utopianism. He shares most of the criticisms of Jacobs, but with an emphasis on urban architecture rather than planning. Benjamin was less hostile to utopianism, adopting a dialectical orientation toward it and anti-utopianism. Lefebvre mainly criticized the deployment in class-divided societies of urban planning and policies that claim utopian credentials while not condemning utopianism as such. All three place themselves in a Marxist tradition, but within it all are heterodox thinkers, and, unlike Marx himself, they all focus on cities.

## The vertices of a triangle

The main thrust of Tafuri's critique of utopianism is that it participates in a symbiotic way with avant-garde art and architecture in expressing contemporary capitalistic ideology regarding cities. He sees the utopian attempt to impose order on the chaos of modern urban life as reflecting one side of the unavoidable combination of ordered cycles of capitalist production and the chaos of market irrationality (Tafuri, 1980, p. 52).

A key concept in Lefebvre's approach to utopianism is 'transduction', or the intellectual construction of possible objects. Like Tafuri, he sees utopian visions as ideologically infused, but they can also serve in an 'experimental' way to prompt challenges to existing structures, functions and forms, thus also challenging the ideological rigidity of exclusively structuralist, functionalist or formalist thinking (Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 151-155).

Benjamin saw the arcades of Paris as forward looking—architecturally ('glass before its time, premature iron') as well as being sites for working-class community building (analogues of 'the drawing rooms of the bourgeoisie')—and in these respects utopian (1999, pp. 870 and 879).<sup>8</sup> But at the same time the arcades were tradition-bound, at the micro level by preserving retail trades and professions (including the world's oldest) and in their ensemble by contrast to Baron Haussmann's radical reconstruction of the city. Borrowing from an interpretation by Max Pensky (2005), the concept I draw on in Benjamin's approach is the 'dialectical structure of awakening' prompted by the arcades where dream and cognizance of existing circumstances intersect (Benjamin, 1999, p. 884).

## Time

When More coined the term, he thought of utopias as out of space, being u-topic or existing nowhere. But it is more challenging for one who wants utopian visions to motivate political activity if they are also atemporal. If, by contrast, they are thought of as existing in some (non-mythical) future time, then the possibility of tracing paths from the present to them is at least left open. It is therefore apt with respect to this paper's project to focus on the *temporal* emphases of Tafuri, Benjamin and Lefebvre. For Tafuri, utopian views have more in common with rival social and political orientations than the utopians themselves wish to acknowledge. Like mainstream social scientists and economic planners, they are motivated by fear of an uncertain future:

For all these men [Weber, Keynes, Schumpeter, Mannheim] the dominant theme is that of a future into which the entire present is projected, of a "rational" domain of the future, of the elimination of the risk it brings with it. (Tafuri, 1980, p. 52)

The key question to ask of Tafuri is whether such fear is endemic to utopianism. It is true that Fourier's Phalanstery is highly structured and in this way confines and makes predictable human interactions within it; however, at the same time among the passions by reference to which he organized his communities, was *le papillonnage*—the passion which 'holds the highest rank' and 'is the need for periodic change, contrasting situations, changes of scene, piquant incidents, [and] novelties apt to create illusions' (Fourier, 1972,

pp. 219-220). But even if Fourier's views were especially suited to the rigid structures of Taylorist social planning and of what was to become the New Objectivist strand of urban architecture, there are alternative visions, such as those of the Situationist, Constant Nieuwenhuys' New Babylon premised on play and essentially changeable and unfinished.<sup>9</sup>

Though famous for his focus on urban space and its often oppressive constructions, in one way Lefebvre saw time as the most crucial category:

Space is nothing but the inscription of time in the world, spaces are the realizations, inscriptions in the simultaneity of the external world of a series of times, the rhythms of the city, the rhythms of the urban population, and in my opinion as a sociologist, I suggest to you the idea that the city will only be rethought and reconstructed on its current ruins when we have properly understood that the city is the deployment of time, and that it is this time ... of those who are its inhabitants, it is for them that we have to finally organize in a human manner.<sup>10</sup>

The point is emphasized by Eduardo Mendieta that the production of space for Lefebvre 'should never be dissociated from an analysis of the production of time' (2008, p. 151). Any urban space will be the locus of an indefinite number of sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting, in some ways cohering, in some ways chaotic features, the simultaneous presence of which makes the space a potential locus for transformation into one of several alternative future spaces.<sup>11</sup> To view such a space as a 'deployment of time' is to recognize that while conditioned by their past histories, the features of a common urban space are also conditioned by anticipations of alternative futures.

Benjamin's dialectics of awakening pertain to the related interfaces of past and present and of dream and waking life. The arcades are 'galleries leading to the city's past' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 885) which kindle dream-like reveries, as in the case of the *flâneur*—an 'idle dreamer' who plays the role of everyman in the *Arcades Project*. One aspect of these reveries is that, in the fashion of dreams, they conflate the multitude of events that have taken place through time in the same places. Striking examples are the wax museums which were found in some of the arcades, where historical figures from many epochs stood side by side in the same place. The result is that the spaces of the arcade are 'ambiguous' with respect to their contents (Benjamin, 1999, pp. 887-888). A second aspect is that the arcades call to mind the collective lives of past peoples who, moreover, are anonymous to living dreamers. The *flâneur* is led 'into a past that can be all the more profound because it is not his own, not private' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 880). Awakening, then, brings the erstwhile dreamer to an awareness of a present that is public and, though conditioned by the past, underdetermined by it, being itself an ambiguous space. The resulting shock is the recognition of the responsibility for future-shaping collective action, that is, of politics:

The Copernican revolution in historical perception is as follows: Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in 'what has been,' and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this

ground. Now this relation is to be overturned.... Politics attains primacy over history. (Benjamin, 1999, p. 883)

## **Ideology, urbanity, agency**

How, then, might the stances of these authors help to address the visionary/realism dilemma? An answer, or at least elements of one, can be arranged under three headings.

### **Ideology**

Tafuri makes out a good case that utopianism can be ideological. Any political-economic and historical study of utopian visions, starting with the *Republic*, will certainly yield examples. He views Dadaist and other forms of surrealist art as uncritical reflections of the chaos of life as experienced on a daily basis as people are buffeted by the anarchy of capitalist market forces and the New Objectivist architecture (Bauhaus, De Stijl) as reflections in urban design and built forms of Keynesian efforts to preserve capitalism by means of economic planning. Both movements are ideological in their effect of internalizing within a population submission to capitalism—acceptance of chaos, on the one hand, and willing subordination to machine-like plans, on the other (Tafuri, 1980, pp. 92-93). Utopianism mainly participates in the latter of these ideological efforts, in authors like William Morris and (Tafuri's main target) in the Objectivist urbanism of such as Le Corbusier.

Persuasive as many of his observations are, Tafuri has not, however, demonstrated, as Fred Jameson argues in a sustained critique (2000), that all utopian thought is ineradicably ideological in a negative sense. On the contrary, one cannot accept his criticism of utopianism without also challenging ideological support of the status quo itself, thus opening space for anti-status quo visions. More profoundly, Tafuri's depiction of New Objectivist architecture and urban design as built-form expressions of ideology marks a departure from typical approaches where ideology is thought of as ideational imposition on people's values and worldviews. Rather, he sees it as embodied ideology: 'Ideology [from the Bauhaus constructions on] was no longer superimposed on activity ... but was inherent in the activity itself (Tafuri, 1980, p. 98). This means that unless an oppressive ideology totalistically overwhelms all aspects of people's lives (as Tafuri seems to assume) counter-ideological impulses can also be inherent in human experiences, including those implicated in built forms, as the left-wing of the Bauhaus movement intended.

As noted earlier, Tafuri identifies fear of an uncertain future as one feature of utopianism that marks it as ideological. The reason that this anxiety involves ideological thinking is that the latter is fixated on stability. The implication is that threats to an established order are dangerously subversive of normal life. Utopianism is ideological when its future visions are projections of an ideal of order already embedded in contemporary society. If, then, one rejects a totalistic perspective on ideology, room is made for the contrary stance that Lefebvre's multiple possible futures or the ambiguity of spaces central to Benjamin's thinking can be preserved in radical future visions. It is in this spirit that Lefebvre

describes Fourier as a 'subversive', if not as a revolutionary in the Marxist sense (1975, p. 18).

The conceptual tools useful for addressing a visionary/realism dilemma suggested here are essentially Gramscian. In his critique of Tafuri, Jameson sees the latter as supposing a narrowly materialist theory wherein urban-architectural projects of the kind Tafuri subjects to critique are nothing but ideologically infused expressions of oppressive hegemonic forces. To this Jameson opposes Gramsci's notion that counter-hegemonic visions are themselves motivating forces as opposed to superstructural reflections of such (Jameson, 2000, p. 454). This perspective is inspired by Gramsci's view (1971) that those embroiled in hegemonic struggles strive both to take advantage of opportunities existing within an existing order and also to forge a new collective will as the 'Jacobin' moment in counter-hegemonic undertakings. As to where the elements of such a collective will come from, Gramsci's view was that these exist at least in germ within people's life activities. Like Tafuri, Gramsci saw ideology as embodied in such activities.

## Urbanity

As has often been noted, utopian schemes not infrequently betray nostalgia for an agrarian past and are modeled on pastoral life. The perspectives of the theorists reviewed in this paper, by contrast, are resolutely urban. Among the characteristics of cities is that due to their complexity, dynamism and the ambiguity of urban spaces, they provide the bases for a number of possible futures, and which futures will be strived for are not determined by tradition or habit but must be actively pursued. Lefebvre's view about space being infused with time presupposes a general ontology, akin to Alfred North Whitehead's thesis (1957) that the present should be understood as an extended complex implicating or 'prehending' both past paths and future directions. Focus on cities throws this feature of present circumstances into relief and in this way provides an alternative to a teleological or fatalistically deterministic reading of the passage from Marx.

Placing cities at the centre of one's analyses invites attention to the actual loci of life, work and politics rather than exclusively to historical periods and class relations in general, as Lefebvre thought Marx did in largely ignoring the realm of the urban.<sup>12</sup> This attention reveals a difference between urban and rural settings. Urban dynamics are not primarily functions of seasonal cycles or of tradition. Cities, on Lefebvre's view, are works in progress (*oeuvres*) and 'places of the possible' (1996, pp. 149 and 156). Unless utopianism is thought ineradicably agrarian (Bacon's New Atlantis stands as a counterexample to such a claim), it can participate in this work, at least by playing a subversive role or by proffering, in Lefebvre's phrase, 'experimental utopias' (1999, p. 151). Also, just as the Arcades are both forward and backward looking, so cities in general cannot disown their unique pasts as these provide the points of orientation and bases from which social, political, economic and cultural life departs, but nor do these pasts entirely dictate cities' futures.

The advantage of looking to cities for posing visions that are simultaneously radical and realistic is, therefore, that it focuses attention on the details of a complex domain (rather

than on abstract historical or economic laws). Moreover, part of the complexity of cities is that they do not present themselves as static or homogenous, but as dynamic and, in a dialectical sense, contradictory resources for dramatic change as for perpetuation of an oppressive status quo.

## **Agency**

Lefebvre seems to be echoing a traditional Marxist claim in his view that 'only groups, social classes and class factions capable of revolutionary initiative can take over and bring to fruition solutions to urban problems' (1999, p. 154). This apparently reductionistic claim is muted by insistence that working-class activity is only necessary and not also sufficient to this end, but, more importantly, his orientation toward the question of agency is different than Marx's. (Whether it is incompatible with Marxism is an interesting question not pursued here.) The point is germane, indeed crucial, to the present discussion if one accepts in the spirit of Benjamin that political activity displaces an opposition between past-boundedness or rootless utopianism: by whom and how are the relevant politics to be undertaken?

In one of his discussions of Marx, Lefebvre relates the agency question to utopianism through his notion of 'the possible-impossible' that reverses the emphasis of the perspective summarized in the quotation from Marx above. He interprets Marx, along with Fourier, as endorsing utopian visions the social and technological prerequisites for which already exist in capitalist society—and hence they are possible visions—that are rendered impossible by capitalism itself (Lefebvre, 1972, p. 155). To make the possible actual large-scale collective political action is required. One requisite for such action is collective consciousness and another is that the political activity be efficacious.

Marx saw trade unions as the training grounds for a revolutionary proletariat, and no doubt this is still crucial for certain kinds of radical collective action. But at a more elementary level, collective consciousness requires that people who might be capable of taking unified action see themselves as members of an anonymous collective. Mass action is not appropriate to village-like communities, but requires people from a variety of different backgrounds and not otherwise relating to one another to gel into political collectives. Benjamin suggests a way that city life itself nurtures this collective consciousness. City streets, he maintains, 'are the dwelling place of the collective' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 879). Essential to collectives in urban environments is that the people who make them up are for the most part anonymous to one another and thus, unlike collectives in rural environments, do not form communities, but rather 'publics' in the sense of John Dewey (1927), that is, relatively large constellations of people who interact through time within shared environments and confront common macro problems.

The main feature of the working class that makes it efficacious according to Marx is its latent power—whether to strike, to vote in mass or to take up arms. While the element of power is, of course, not at all an irrelevant component of effectiveness, there are other components which, again, the authors here addressed, and in particular Lefebvre, suggest. The working class of his time and certainly today goes far beyond industrial workers to

include such as service workers, government employees, construction workers, technicians, clerks and secretaries who overwhelmingly live in or around urban centres. The main problems for which Lefebvre sought solutions were urban problems, and insofar as the conditions of life and work enjoyed or endured by most people are largely urban related these are not at all marginal problems. They are encountered by nearly everyone in the city on a daily basis who must address them in concrete, varied and often imaginative ways.

On Lefebvre's view, contrary to elitist urban reformers, working people have both the interests and the street knowledge requisite for profound and lasting urban vitalization. While the elites advocate startling architectural and high-end entertainment facilities to make their cities world-class competitors, ordinary citizens are better situated to understand the urgency of building or rebuilding physical and social infrastructures. While the wealthy see it as in their interests to protect themselves from the effects of poverty or urban squalor (as in gated communities or security-heavy condominiums), it is in the interests of the majority of working people in a city to resist gentrification and to secure affordable social services and accessible public spaces.

The aspirations of urban dwellers are for obviously possible reforms, but when resistance to them on the part of entrenched interests is fiercely obdurate, the demand by urban citizens for a 'right to a city' is seen, as Kanishka Goonewardena puts it, as demand for 'a right to a radically different world' (2009, p. 217, italics omitted). The 'factors' to employ Marx's terminology, requisite for the 'task' of achieving this world already do exist in the cities, where urban activism is motivated by the urge to achieve the cities' unrealized potentials.

To summarize, this exercise in triangulation suggests the following concepts for buttressing Marx's attempt to address the visionary/realism dilemma:

- A general conceptual orientation centred on time, where past and present are dialectically related (Benjamin) and the present prefigures ('prehends') possible futures (Lefebvre).
- Exposure of ideology in the manner of Tafuri's critiques supplemented with a Gramscian focus on revolutionary alternative visions found within the very life activities within which ideology is embodied and functioning as themselves material motivations.
- Focusing attention on the details of the complex dynamics of resistance to radical change and the articulation of such change ('experimental utopias') in cities regarded as works in progress (*ouvrés*).
- Looking to the potentials for radical change striven for by urban citizens 'awakened' to the need and possibilities for such by the conditions of life and work within cities.

## Urban implications

There is no inevitability that radical potentials will be realized. Among other things, what Benjamin calls 'the last dinosaur of Europe [as elsewhere]: the consumer' is not yet extinct (1999, p. 874). As the history of Marxist-inspired activism clearly demonstrates, theoretically identifying a potential agent of social change does not by itself activate this potential. An underlying theme in utopian thinking is that properly structured cities will mold the personalities of urban citizens to be consonant with utopian values. This hope was a motive behind Fourier's design of the Phalanstery to facilitate harmonious coordination of the senses and passions (1972, chap. 1).<sup>13</sup> A strong version of such an aspiration—that urban design, architecture and politics in and of themselves will inevitably yield the desired transformations—seems unwarranted. But perhaps the weaker claim can be sustained that some approaches to things urban are more conducive to this end than others.

In this connection a somewhat surprising conclusion can be drawn from the triangulation of urban utopianism suggested above. In extricating utopianism from a visionary/realism dilemma (if, of course, this extrication has been achieved), recommendations are endorsed for urban design, planning and politics closer to those of anti-utopians like Jane Jacobs than to the pro-utopian orientations she opposes. Explicating Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991), Mendieta writes that emancipation must occur 'at the mundane and trivial levels' affecting 'the way we walk, have sex, eat and engage in the feast of social coexistence' as well as at the levels of production and ideology (2008, p. 150). This is consistent with Jacobs' thesis that urban change must come from the bottom up, that is, from the evolution of neighbourhoods and neighbourhood activism.

Both classic urban utopians and the authors surveyed here emphasize the importance of public spaces within cities, but the character of these spaces differ. On the utopian model, such spaces are formally structured places, dedicated to specified activities (recreation, public discourse and deliberation, festivals), and are designed to be in aid of designated economic, political, familial, etc. functions. Public spaces on the alternative model are places of opportunistic fun, which, moreover, is fun for its own sake. As in the vision of Constant Nieuwenhuys' New Babylon earlier referred to, such spaces permeate a city.<sup>14</sup>

Cities planned in the tradition of Le Corbusier's Radial City or the suburban enclaves of the New Urbanism, are internally compartmentalized into areas of commerce, residence and industry, of public recreation and private dwelling, of rich neighbourhoods and poor ones. Principles of design and architecture as well as zoning by-laws function to wall these compartments off from one another. This is quite in keeping with the models of utopian cities (in every depiction of which actual walls prominently feature). The contrast is a city the diverse parts of which are distinguished by what Richard Sennett calls 'borders' as opposed to walls. Echoing Lefebvre, he urges that: 'to permit space to become encoded with time, the urbanist has to design weak borders rather than strong walls' (Sennett, 1990, p. 190). Unlike walls, borders are permeable, often overlapping, and relatively easy to change. Bordered sites in a city are open to interaction with adjacent sites, and their forms are compatible with changing functions through time.

Urban design, architecture, politics and planning that take the daily activities of urban citizens as their touchstone, that protect and prompt open-ended public spaces, and that avoid walls in favour of borders are, like their analogues in classic utopianism, guided by visions: to pry city form away from capitalist markets and ideology (Tafuri), to make the city a place where people can negotiate the transitions from past traditions to future transformations (Benjamin), and to honour people's right to a city that keeps their life options open (Lefebvre). Such visions are more pragmatic than the rationalism favoured in classic utopianism, and their results are messier, but they are radical visions nonetheless and in this respect, themselves, utopian.

## Notes

1 A useful overview of the main tenets and figures of critical urban theory is provided by Neil Brenner in his contribution to the same issue (2009, pp. 198-207).

2 Thus Marcuse: '[T]he claim is a claim to a totality, to something whole and something wholly different from the existing city, the existing society' (2009, p. 194).

3 Robert Cox levels this criticism at Pragmatism (with reference to international application) in *Approaches to World Order* (1996, pp. 87-91).

4 His touchstone Marxist text, kindred to the one highlighted in this paper, is: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Selected Works*, pp. 93-180, at p. 97).

5 Harvey lists seven such dialectical mandates for radical activity, which he calls 'theatres of insurgent activity' (2000, p. 234).

6 Respectively these values are advanced in Harvey (2000, pp. 193-196, chap. 11 and pp. 248-252).

7 The contrary view is that such things as liberal-democratic values and institutions are nothing but celebration of and support for an individualism supportive of capitalism. I'm on Harvey's side here in favour of 'retrieving' such values in non- or post-capitalist environments, but the point is debated, in fact hotly so, among radical theorists, as is the question even within the retrievalist camp about what versions of such institutions and values are worth retaining. I discuss this question at length in *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (Cunningham, 1987, chap. 8).

8 The themes from Benjamin referred to in the paper are found repeated many times in his massive work; however, nearly all his main points are conveniently found in a précis of the work he prepared in 1929, 'A Dialectical Fairyland', appended to the Harvard University Press edition.

9 Constant Nieuwenhuys, 'The New Babylon', in notes for a museum display in The Hague, 1974, and available at: <http://www.notbored.org/new-babylon.html>

10 From a debate with Jean Ballardur and Michel Ecohard, in 'l'Urbanisme aujourd'hui: Mythes et réalités, *Les Cahiers du Centre d'Études Socialistes* (1967, pp. 72-73). Reproduced in English translation in the Kofman and Lebas collection in their introductory essay, 'Lost in Transposition', pp. 3-60, at pp. 16-17.

11 Harvey's criticism of Lefebvre for attending only to the temporal dimension of experimental processes and avoiding commitment to future visions (the spatial dimension) as an embrace of 'agonistic romanticism of perpetually unfulfilled longing and desire', at p. 183, is unwarranted. Lefebvre projected an urban space free of capitalist impediments to people exercising a right to the fruits of city life and to opportunities actively to participate in urban politics, planning and culture.

12 As in a 1980 interview reproduced in English translation in the Kofman and Lebas collection, at pp. 205-206.

13 The passions are for intrigue (cabaliste), the joy of 'meshing' the five senses (composite) and the love of variety (papillon).

14 Public places for Constant, and in keeping with Fourier's passion of the butterfly, are places of a subversive culture of *homo ludens*. I discuss this conception in 'Public Spaces and Subversion' (Cunningham, 2009, pp. 85-99).

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