Publications

Foreword: Rethinking Housing, Citizenship, and Property
Teddy Cruz

Introduction
Andrea Phillips and Fulya Erdemci

Setting the Housing
/Capital Context

From Revanchism to Securitized Public Space
Neil Smith

The Residualization of the Social
Doreen Massey interviewed by Andrea Phillips

Unitary Urbanism: A Citizens’ Occupation
Miguel Robles-Durán

Self-Organization:
Collusion or Opposition to Neo-Liberalism?

The Artist Will Have to Decide Whom to Serve
Jeanne van Heeswijk

Empower People to Make the City
Adri Duivesteijn

Open Coop: A Manifesto About the
People We Have Met
Partizan Publik

OpTrek in Transvaal
Floor Tinga on the work of Sabrina Lindemann

Non-Capitalist Economic Practice in Catalonia
Amalia Cardenas, Joanna Conill, and Manuel Castells
I want to recollect two inspirational texts, each written forty years ago, which can help us to reflect on our precarious contemporary condition. These texts can help us to relate to a seemingly close revolutionary past. A past not only haunted by terrors in triumphant struggle, but also assembled better moments, when the collective consciousness directly challenged the capitalist State and the production of knowledge helped to uncover the complex web of power of the social, spatial, economic, and political abstractions that even now continue to subjugate our daily lives through the planned control of our living environment.

As the dominant economic regime (urban mass urbanization) upon us, and as capital’s mobility demanded more ‘space’ to occupy at an unprecedented scale, a radically different mode of critical thinking began to emerge. Contrasting the prevailing positivist logic of developing more specializations for working on the complexity produced by intensified urbanization, two radical thinkers began in the late 1960s to challenge the normative-oriented disciplinary apparatus which still today, struggle to understand and explain the broad constructions and consequences of the production of postmodern space. These two thinkers were the British geographer David Harvey and the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre.

Undoubtedly, many of the capitalist constructions gained in both Harvey’s and Lefebvre’s critiques have changed in the last four decades. But to say the most structural of these remains the same, or has become worse as they have been reinforced by the processes of neo-liberalization. In this essay, I will focus on one of the capitalistic conditions that have not changed. In fact, it is one of those that has been reinforced, and most importantly, it is a condition that addresses the reader in a very direct way as an example of the division of intellectual labor that is, the continuing fragmentation of disciplinary apparatus in relation to the “urban.” This structural problem was the despairing critique of one of Lefebvre’s most influential texts, *La production de l’espace*, first published in 1974. Coincidentally (or not), it was also the common critical thread of the first essay of David Harvey’s seminal book: *Social Justice and the City* compiled and published in 1977.

Even though these books have now become better known for other critical, theoretical, or methodological sections, the argument of this essay expands on the opening chapters of both books, which, together with Lefebvre’s other seminal book, *La Révolution urbaine*, address the structural wrenches of our “urban” disciplinary apparatuses, and construct the greatest operative critique for a radical transformation. This is not the type of desired transformation that we—urban critics—necessarily write about, which more of the time we assume is beyond our control. Here I will argue that all people engaged in urban practice can control and lead the transformations that Lefebvre and Harvey imagined in theory.

In the fourth section of the introductory chapter—called “Plan of the Present Work?”—of *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre writes that there is a “very strong tendency within present day society and its mode of production” in which “intellectual labor, like material labor, is subject to endless division.” Almost a century before, Marx began to construct this argument in his critique of the capitalist division of labor, its relationship to machinery, and its exercise forms of alienation. “The life-long specialty of handling one and the same tool, now becomes the life-long specialty of serving one and the same machine.” In his many critiques on specialization, Marx always drew attention to the consequential simplification and abstraction of the labor process as well as the worker’s adaptation to repetitive and very simple operations, which allowed the worker to lose sight of the complex processes of exploitation in which he was embodied.
In this dividing logic, anyone taking part in the capitulation mode of production would be “subject,” through the division of labor, to the tool of their function,” and this obviously includes us “intellectually,” as it was later argued by Friedrich Engels in his Anti-Dühring of 1879: “the ‘educated classes’ in general to their manifold species of local narrow-mindedness and one-sidedness, to their own physical and mental short-sightedness, to their stunted growth due to their narrow specialized education and their being just used to life to this specialized activity.”

Many of you reading this short text, like me, have been trained as a kind of “urban” specialist. Whether our knowledge originates from the many divisions of the social sciences, the many study fields of the arts, design, or engineering, our base knowledge of the city comes from the reduction of complex processes into a narrow disciplinary perspective. “Clearly, the city cannot be conceptualised in terms of our present disciplinary structures. Yet, there is very little sign of an emerging interdisciplinary framework for thinking, let alone theorizing about the city.” wrote Harvey in 1973. That year, both Harvey and Lefebvre were pointing at the structural and consequent problem of contemporary urban knowledge: the increasing fragmentation, separation, and disintegration of understanding and operating in the city, indicating the lack of a unitary knowledge or theory about how urban space is used and produced.

“The aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between fields that are apprehended separately,” argued Lefebvre. But as we advance into the next phase of capitalist urbanization, the formal apparatus of new specializations continues to fragment; new specializations in the “urban” proliferates, from landscape urbanism, ecological urbanism, to urban tanks in foreign affairs programs. In our common disciplinary structures, architecture claims expertise in the smallest built environments, urban designers assert their domain on the larger scale of urban form, while planners, geographers, and economists aggregate territorial and global spaces. Urban sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists attend specialized knowledge of human behavior, lawyers and policy makers take on the legal limits of city management and growth engineers, environmentalists, and technicians assume responsibility of the functional and systemic aspects of the city, and so on. At times, Lefebvre notes, “these specializations are telescoped into one another under the auspices of the privileged science, the politician. At other times, their respective domains fail to overlap at all, so that neither common projects nor theoretical continuity are possible.”

In reality, these dislocated urban disciplines hastily construct not construct cooperation. However, the major problematic consequence to the urban realm arises from the lack of understanding between each fragmented disciplinary view, direction, and mode of operation. “Rarity do they agree on the words and terms they use,” wrote Lefebvre in the third chapter of The Urban Revolution, “and even less rarely do they agree upon the underlying concepts. These assumptions and theories are for the most part incompatible. Confrontation and disagreement pass for success.”

For some areas of study, such as structural mechanics, quantum chemistry, criminal psychology, or product engineering, specialization enables a functional form of autonomous work where isolation and the pursuit of a specific focus allows for a particular kind of innovation. These disciplines are conceived from the start as determinate; in their quest to pursue singular lines of research and independent from the dynamic complex of capitalist relations. In contrast, “urbanism” should have been conceived as the diachronic opposite of a specialized discipline, simply because the urban realm is the dynamic complex of capitalist, material and immaterial, social and spatial, political and economic, environmental and technical, historical and theoretical relations, as both Lefebvre and Harvey remind us in many instances throughout their works. “The urban phenomenon is known as a whole cannot be grasped by any specialized science.”

Lefebvre declares in The Urban Revolution: “specialism can only comprehend such a synthesis from the point of view of their own field, using their data, their terminology, their concepts and assumptions. They are demented without realizing it, and the more competent they are, the more demented…. Every scholar finds other scholars ‘discipline’ are his auxiliaries, his vessels, his servants.”

Further on, “the specialist affirms the exclusive validity of science, sweeping aside other disciplines or reducing them to his own.”

In today’s highly developed capitalist complex of fragmented and isolated knowledge, it seems impossible to conceive of a real shift from the tradition of specialized urban practice. As capitalism demands, architects will continue to design habitable objects; geographers will continue to map economic flows; planners will continue to zone; and environmental engineers will continue to address renewable energy and the many problems of pollution. There is no doubt in my mind that fragmented urban practices will remain and proceed to develop into more sub-specializations (as do not worry, intellectuals will continue to thrive!). However, my dear reader, something else has been forming out there, something outside of our controlled world of specializations, out of the ashes of decades of continuous urban crisis, a radically different form of urban practice is being fought for and produced in the streets.

Here, I am hitting at what has been the slow but inevitable formation of a parallel urban world. What was imagined by cyberpunk restless more than twenty years ago is now becoming a palpable reality: an urban world with parallel economies, underground solidarity, collective service exchanges, alternative housing models, cooperative factories, localized agriculture, and alternative poststructural strategies, produced by the people. And all of this occurs side by side with a gigantic, more well-established government apparatus that aims to control urban processes for the sake of sustaining the large mobility of capital required for the reproduction of an evolved financial system. We must come to terms with the fact that the urban hegemonic project—in which the state and/or corporations, together with specialists, property, plan, control, and define the models of urbanization for all citizens to follow—is not operative in the majority of urban spaces, whose degradation, abandonment, segregation, decay, predatory speculation, hunger, pollution, congestion, and homelessness are part of every day life. No longer can inhabitants of these urban spaces imagine a future that comes out of a specialized disciplinary tradition, nor can they foresee a change within that old project, even though this is the direction in which most governments continue to work. Our governments have gone “as far as possible in externalizing the costs that capital never seems to bear to the costs of urban/environmental degradation and social reproduction.” Harvey noted at the beginning of 2010. “The assault on the environment and the well being of the people is predatory and it’s taking place for political and class, not economic reasons. … The only question is when will the people start to wage class war back?”

By mid 2010, many of us citizen began to wage organized class war. “It’s a frighteningly long road just to reach the starting points of earlier attempts to build a new world,” Mike Davis argues, “but a new generation has at least bravely initiated the journey.” And none, I want to do it by us, urbanists? Faced with this question, Lefebvre suggested “urban strategy” to work towards the urgent re-integration of social practice and urban practice, towards an “urban society.” Perhaps Lefebvre was right in pointing out the importance of social practice in the urban realm, but Lefebvre, in his constant demand for building a new science of the urban, could not envision that this re-integration was going to be led by the people and not by those intellectuals committed to the new science. This [new] urban scientists that Lefebvre was characterizing, as he relevant and operative (if he or she ever existed), now has to dissolve into the civic and become the commons.

On December 17, 2010 Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in a desperate act of protest, a human spark that triggered a world uprising of historical proportion. In different forms, the

---

2012 - Social Housing - Housing the Social: Art, Property and Spatial Justice, “Unitary Urbanism: A Citizens’ Occupation”

7 Friedrich Engels, Text-Dühring” (formerly: Dühring) (1877-78), part 2, chapter 51.
8 David Harvey, Social Justice and the City (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 22.
9 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, op. cit., 12.
10 Ibid.
11 Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution, op. cit., 83.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid, 83.
Icelanders, Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, Syrians, Greeks, Spanish, Italians, British, Americans, and now Russians (to mention a few) have taken to the streets since then with numerous simmering issues civil mobilizations against the non-liberal opposition and the global economic catastrophe that has produced, drastically altering the urban reality on its field of action. Hidden behind decades of market-driven urban practices, another way of practicing is emerging defiantly as part of the global uprising: from the large-scale politics of urban political economy; advocate for the right to the city; and experiment with non-speculative property systems, speculative models, and socio-spatial relations to production, to mention a few. These practices have recognized that a large part of the knowledge they acquired in their classical disciplinary training a overly deterministic, futile, and useless to actively respond to the urban state of our urban environment. They have understood that new forms of knowledge are needed for the struggle against the social, financial, economic, and political dictators of capitalism and its many negotiators. The question for you, would you choose to continue to struggle with deterministic knowledge, or would you choose to engage in the development of the urban urban knowledge for which our cities are crying out?

To all the non-conforming, critical, and disenchanted readers of this text, the theoretical distance produced inside the ivory towers of “urban” practice, together with its small pedagogy of glorious resistance and its production of the safe criticality that has dominated the last three decades of endless manifestos—containing analyses is now irrevocable. The time has come to finally dissolve our “urban” practices into the civic, to understand that a critical spatial practice can only be achieved if it resides itself inside the active dimensions of a larger urban movement—15-M and the Indignados. Occupy Wall Street, The Arab Spring, Swaziland Soil Yet, and others. There are more such groups yet to be formed in solidarity, waiting for us to take part and stretch a red and active construction of other possibilities, of structural change. The time has come to get our hands in the dirt of all that has been established by neo-liberalism. It’s not about architecture, planning, sociology, or geography; we must struggle to destroy our centuries-old disciplinary ideas, emerge them in the dynamic ecological totality of civic action and into our precarious daily lives. Only then might we be able to conceive a socially relevant, critical urban practice.

2012 - Social Housing - Housing the Social: Art, Property and Spatial Justice, “Unitary Urbanism: A Citizens’ Occupation”