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INTRODUCTION

Matthew Gandy

Urban Constellations brings together five years of work and ideas associated with the UCL Urban Laboratory, which was set up in 2005 as a unique collaboration between four different faculties for urban teaching and research. This collection reflects an array of disciplines at UCL that have engaged with the Urban Laboratory, ranging from architecture and engineering to anthropology and film studies. It also reflects the international profile of the Urban Laboratory in terms of its networks of expertise and its attraction of exceptional graduate students, some of whose work is included in this collection. This is not the first time such an initiative has emerged at UCL—in 1958 the sociologist Ruth Glass and her colleagues set up The Centre for Urban Studies—and this volume builds on these earlier interdisciplinary dialogues. “London can never be taken for granted,” wrote Glass in 1964, “the city is too vast, too complex, too contrary and too moody to become entirely familiar.”¹ These sentiments might apply to any city at any time: the tenor of this collection is contemplative and reflective; there are no bullet-point lists of what should be done, no definitive answers, but rather an opening up of discussion and the identification of critical themes.

The book is divided into five sections. Part one, entitled “Urban lexicons,” reflects on a range of key ideas that have been the focal point of recent discussions about the future of cities and urbanisation. In part two, “Crises and perturbations,” we turn to processes and developments that are shaping contemporary cities such as the effects of financial instability, the housing crisis, and the emergence of new social formations. In part three, “Excursions,” we show some examples of work by young artists and photographers, who have been exploring different facets of contemporary urbanisation and urban life. In part four, “Places and spaces,” the emphasis shifts to a range of specific locales to explore concrete examples of urban change, such as the impact of specific projects, the political ecology of urban nature, and the presence of collective memory in urban culture. Finally, in part five, “Projections,” we link urban discourse to the visual arts and consider various vantage points from which artists, film makers, photographers, and others have sought to critically engage with processes of urban change.

The title chosen for the collection—Urban Constellations—relates to Walter Benjamin’s use of the term “constellation” as a way to combine ostensibly disparate elements into a historically and intellectually intelligible schema. This implicit lineage to Benjamin’s work underpins a close attention to the details and textures of everyday life in the modern city. It informs an understanding of the term “constellation” as a metaphor for context, historical specificity, and multi-dimensionality; it works against sameness, stasis, and reductionism. In Benjamin’s hands, a materialist historiography “explodes the homogeneity of the epoch.”²

The emphasis on small essays draws on Siegfried Kracauer’s use of “urban vignettes” to explore specific facets of city life where even small observations are woven into a sophisticated cultural and political critique. This is not a book aimed at a narrowly specialist readership, nor is it some kind of text book containing attenuated distillations of more interesting things that lie elsewhere. Many of Kracauer’s original observations on Weimar Berlin and other cities were written for newspapers rather than scholarly journals though this does not reduce their perspicacity or sophistication in any way.³ This essay collection is aimed beyond the academy to a larger cultural arena of thinking, writing, and acting; a space in which all can play a role in the intellectual project of reimagining urban possibilities.

The authors have responded very differently to the challenge of writing small essays, ranging from the use of imaginary scenarios to more experimental forms of writing. Some essays are more personal or autobiographical in tone whilst others adopt a more distanced position in relation to their subject matter. Different writing strategies and methodological approaches are also matched by a diversity of locales extending from long-standing foci of urban research such as Berlin, Chicago, and London, to less extensively studied cities such as Chennai, Jakarta, and Lagos. The essays illuminate an interconnected skein of developments that blur both disciplinary boundaries and schematic distinctions between global North and South.

1

URBAN LEXICONS

PLANETARY URBANISATION

Neil Brenner
Christian Schmid

During the last several decades, the field of urban studies has been animated by an extraordinary outpouring of new ideas regarding the role of cities, urbanism, and urbanisation processes in ongoing global transformations.¹ Yet, despite these advances, the field continues to be grounded upon a mapping of human settlement space that was more plausible in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than it is today.

The early twentieth century was a period in which large-scale industrial city-regions and suburbanising zones were being rapidly consolidated around the world in close conjunction with major demographic and socio-economic shifts in the erstwhile “countryside.” Consequently, across diverse national contexts and linguistic traditions, the field of twentieth-century urban studies defined its theoretical categories and research object through a series of explicit or implied geographical contrasts. Even as debates raged regarding how best to define the specificity of urban life, the latter was universally demarcated in opposition to a purportedly “non-urban” zone, generally classified as “rural.” As paradigms for theory and research evolved, labels changed for each term of this supposed urban-rural continuum, and so too did scholars’ understandings of how best to conceptualise its basic elements and the nature of their articulation. For instance, the Anglo-American concept of the “suburb” and the French concept of *la banlieue* were introduced and popularised to demarcate

further socio-spatial differentiations that were occurring inside a rapidly urbanising field.² Nonetheless, the bulk of twentieth-century urban studies rested on the assumption that cities—or, later, “conurbations,” “city-regions,” “urban regions,” “metropolitan regions,” and “global city-regions”—represented a particular *type* of territory that was qualitatively specific, and thus different from the putatively “non-urban” spaces that lay beyond their boundaries.

The demarcations separating urban, suburban, and rural zones were recognised to shift historically, but the spaces themselves were assumed to remain discreet, distinct, and universal. While paradigmatic disagreements have raged regarding the precise nature of the city and the urban, the entire field has long presupposed the existence of a relatively stable, putatively “non-urban” realm as a “constitutive outside” for its epistemological and empirical operations. In short, across divergent theoretical and political perspectives—from the Chicago School’s interventions in the 1920s, and the rise of the neo-Marxist “new urban sociology” and “radical geography” in the 1970s, to the debates on world cities and global cities in the 1980s and 1990s—the major traditions of twentieth-century urban studies embraced shared, largely uninterrogated geographical assumptions that were rooted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ geohistorical conditions in which this field of study was first established.

During the last thirty years, however, the form of urbanisation has been radically reconfigured, a process that has seriously called into question the inherited cartographies that have long underpinned urban theory and research. Aside from the dramatic spatial and demographic expansion of major mega-city regions, the last thirty years have also witnessed several far-reaching worldwide socio-spatial transformations.³ These include:

- *The creation of new scales of urbanisation.* Extensively urbanised interdependencies are being consolidated within extremely large, rapidly expanding, polynucleated metropolitan regions around the world to create sprawling “urban galaxies” that stretch beyond any single metropolitan region and often traverse multiple national boundaries. Such mega-scaled urban constellations have been conceptualised in diverse ways, and the representation of their contours and boundaries remains a focus of considerable research and debate.⁴ Their most prominent exemplars include, among others, the original Gottmannian megalopolis of “BosWash” (Boston-Washington DC) and the “blue banana” encompassing the major urbanised regions in western Europe, but also emergent formations such as “San San” (San Francisco-San Diego) in California, the Pearl River Delta in south China, the Lagos-centred littoral conurbation in West Africa, as well as several incipient mega-urban regions in Latin America and South Asia.
- *The blurring and rearticulation of urban territories.* Urbanisation processes are being regionalised and reterritorialised. Increasingly, former “central functions,” such as shopping facilities, company headquarters, research institutions, prestigious cultural venues, as well as spectacular architectural forms, dense settlement patterns, and infrastructural

“EVERY REVOLUTION HAS ITS SQUARE”: POLITICISING THE POST-POLITICAL CITY

Erik Swyngedouw

“... the people is those who, refusing to be the population, disrupt the system.”¹

Tiananmen Square, Place de la Bastille, Red Square, Alexanderplatz, Tahrir Square, Assah-al-Khadra, Syntagma Square, Green Square, Wenceslas Square: these are just a few of the public spaces that have become engrained in our symbolic universe as emblematic sites of revolutionary geographies. Their names stand as *points de capiton* that quilt a chain of meaning through signifiers like democracy, revolution, freedom, being-in-common, solidarity, emancipation. The emergence of political space, these examples suggest, unfolds through a political act that stages collectively the presumption of equality and affirms the ability of “the People” to self-manage and organise its affairs. It is an active process of intervention through which (public) space is reconfigured and through which—if successful—a new socio-spatial order is inaugurated. The taking of urban public spaces has indeed always been—from the Athenian *ochlos* demanding to be part of the polis to the heroic struggle of the Tunisian people—the hallmark of emancipatory geopolitical trajectories.

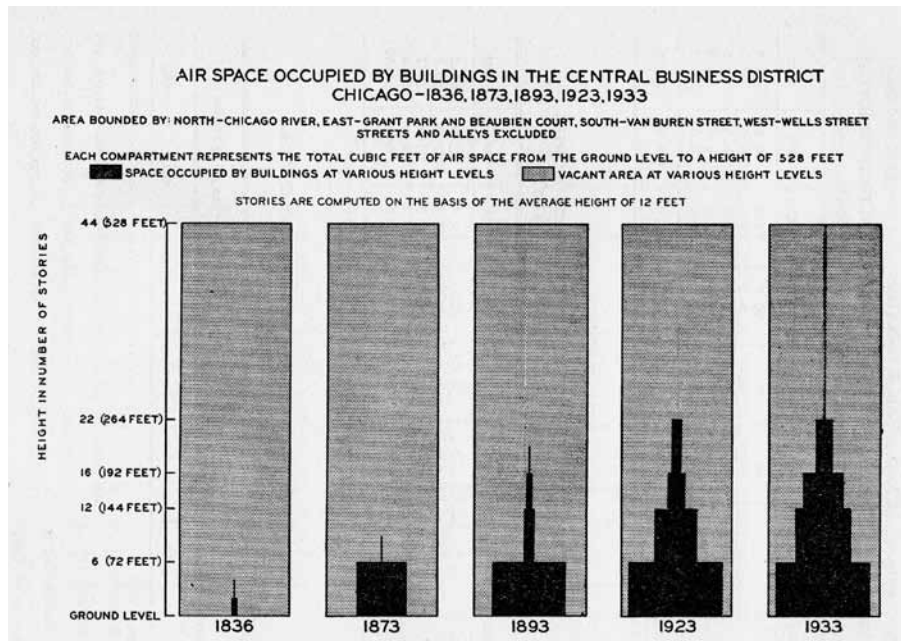
Emblematically starting with the French urban revolts during the autumn of 2005, retaking streets and squares choreographed political struggle over the past few years as protests jumped around from Copenhagen to Rome and from London to Riga. In the spring and summer of 2011, *los indignados* [the outraged] occupied central urban squares in Madrid, Barcelona, and Athens, among other cities, to demand “democracy now.” Urban revolts and passionate outbursts of discontent have indeed marked the urban scene over the past decade or so. Rarely in history have so many people voiced their discontent with the political and economic blueprints of the elite and signalled a desire for an alternative design of the city and the world, of the polis.

These urban insurrections are indeed telltale symptoms of the contemporary urban order, an order that began to implode, both physically and socially, with the onslaught, in the fall of 2007, of the deepest crisis of capitalism in the last seventy years, a crisis that finally exposed the flimsy basis on which the fantasy of a neoliberal design for the city and the world of the twenty-first century was based. We shall argue that, while the city is alive and thriving, at least in some of its spaces, the polis as the site for public political encounter and democratic negotiation, the spacing of (often radical) dissent, and disagreement, and the place where political subjectivation emerges, is performed and thus literally takes place, seems moribund. In other words, the polis as a “political” space is retreating while social space is increasingly colonised or sutured by consensual neo-liberal techno-managerial policies. Urban insurrections are the flipside of this evacuation of the properly political dimension from the urban—what will be described below as the post-political condition—and constitutes what I define as the ZERO-ground of politics.² The leitmotif of this contribution will indeed be the figure of a de-politicised post-political and post-democratic city and the retreating of the political through new forms of urban insurgency.

The contemporary urban condition is marked by a post-political police order of managing the spatial distribution and circulation of things and people within a consensually agreed neo-liberal arrangement.³ Jacques Rancière associates this condition with the notion of *la police*, conceived as a heterogeneous set of technologies and strategies for ordering, distributing, and allocating people, things, and functions to designated places. These managerial practices and procedures colonise and evacuate the proper spaces of the political; *la police* is about hierarchy, ordering, and distribution.⁴ Spatialised policies (planning, architecture, urban policies, etc.) are one of the core *dispositifs* of *la police*.

Politics, in contrast, inaugurate the repartitioning of the logic of *la police*, the reordering of what is visible and audible, registering as voice what was only registered as noise, and reframing what is regarded as political.⁵ It occurs in places not allocated to the exercise of power or the instituted negotiation of recognised differences and interests. As Badiou insists, politics emerge as an event: the singular act of choreographing egalitarian appearance of being-in-common at a distance from the state.⁶ Whereas any logic of *la police* is one of hierarchy and inequality, *le politique* is marked by the presumption of equality within an aristocratic order that invariably “wronged” this presumption.

It is within this aporia between Rancière’s distinction of *la police* from *le politique* that urban insurrections can be framed. While much of the state’s attempts to reorder the urban through mobilising discursively a set of signifiers of inclusiveness (social cohesion, inclusion, emancipation, self-reliance), well-worn clichés of urban doom (exclusion, danger, crisis, fear) are reproduced in practice. Attempts to produce “cohesive” cities revolve around choreographing distribution and circulation of activities, things, and people such that *la police* remains intact. While the state’s discourse and policy recipes frame particular trajectories of “inclusion,” they shy away from acknowledging division, polemic, dissensus and, above all,



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The passion to sell ... is the impelling power of American life. Manufacturing is subsidiary and adventitious. But selling must be based on a semblance of service—the satisfaction of a need. The need was there, the capacity to satisfy was there, but contact was not there. Then there came the flash of imagination which saw the single thing. The trick was turned and there swiftly came into being something new under the sun.¹⁴

Rowe suggested that just as the column generated the Classical temple, and the Gothic cathedral sprung from the extension of the vaulting bay, the Chicago frame was the “constituent element” of a new urban order. “The frame has been the catalyst of an architecture; but one might notice that the frame has also *become* architecture, that contemporary architecture is almost inconceivable in its absence.”¹⁵ By contrast, the European frame, Rowe argued, had a very different project and destiny. Free of the commercial compulsion of the American architecture of “the Loop,” Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse* was to be a revolutionary model of social reform. But, so the story goes, this vision was obliterated with the destruction of Pruitt Igoe on 15 July 1972 at 3:23 pm (or thereabouts).¹⁶ However, in Rowe’s terms what had fallen away was merely the moral pretensions of the International Style. From its inception, concluded Rowe, the frame was never social architecture, it was economic engineering.

1 The creeping monetisation of oxygen: Hoyt’s graph demonstrates the way Chicago Loop

buildings “tapped” the value of “successively higher layers of air” (1933: 329).

Source: Hoyt (1933: 332). Reproduced courtesy of University of Chicago Press.



2

Contradicting the assertion that American lives have no second act, Chicago modernism was resurrected almost as soon as the International Style was pronounced dead. In 1973, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill’s 108-storey Sears Tower re-engineered the Chicago frame for a new era of capitalism. So successful was the Chicago growth machine that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, Fazlur Khan’s neo-Chicago frame was exported worldwide, actuating the record-breaking altitude of Burj Khalifa (another SOM product). But, according to office architect Frank Duffy, the by-product of the frame’s ease of replication is the emergence of an “intellectually bankrupt” global city form. Looking at contemporary Shanghai, Duffy despairs that in spite of the epochal transformation Chinese urbanisation represents, the city’s fabric “is a ghost of the explosion of innovation in those [US] cities 100 years ago. Exhaustion and entropy have become the norm. ... The city’s future is being compromised by an ... office typology that is in terminal decline.”¹⁷

Synthesising the analysis of Hoyt and Rowe, we can piece together a pathology for this structural inertia. Ever since the steel frame was erected on the Chicago corner of LaSalle and Adams Street, the culture of architecture was suborned to the culture of economic growth. The real objective, the *ethos* of the frame, was to fuel capital accumulation by ac-

2 Bank of China Tower, Hong Kong, architect I.M. Pei
Source: Jun Keung Cheung (2009)

VERTICAL ACCUMULATION AND ACCELERATED URBANISM: THE EAST ASIAN EXPERIENCE

Hyun Bang Shin



1

1 Seoul, South Korea (2006)
Source: Photo by Hyun Bang Shin

When visitors from outside East Asia arrive at a city like Seoul or Hong Kong, a short drive from the airport takes them to a cluster of high-rise buildings, giving the impression that they have arrived at the city's central business district. They soon realise, however, that they are mistaken; continuing their drive, they face more, sometimes endless, strings of high-rise building clusters. What has driven this overwhelmingly vertical cityscape is a decades-long compressed urban accumulation process built upon massive investment in property development in many East Asian economies that share some particular characteristics: strong developmental states; weak civil societies; export orientation; rapid industrialisation and urbanisation; and heavy investment in human and fixed capital.

Those highly industrialised East Asian economies, which rose from poverty-stricken conditions, have been heavily dependent on the real-estate sector, resulting in often speculative property development booms. This phenomenon prevails not only in advanced capitalist cities like Seoul, but also in mainland Chinese cities in transition. For nearly three decades since China opened its door for economic policy experimentation, Chinese cities have also found themselves at the heart of a property boom. The frenzy of property development initially occupied cities in eastern provinces,¹ but the zeal has spread out to other inland cities such as Nanjing and Chongqing. A favourable environment for sustained investment has been sought after by strong states in East Asia, which support the promotion of urban development and accelerated urbanism.

From this perspective, it may be possible to draw out distinctive commonalities to establish some sort of "Asian urbanism" in the shaping of East Asian urban morphology. Despite each city's disparate political, economic, and socio-cultural backgrounds compounded by historic events and institutional innovations, the neo-Marxian political economic perspective on capital accumulation processes provide the following three aspects that stand out prominently as East Asia's shared urban accumulation experience: (i) the acquisition of property-related revenues; (ii) strong developmental states; and (iii) the prominence of real-estate capital built on speculative home-ownership aspirations.

The finance of city development in East Asia relies heavily on the use of property-related revenues. This is particularly obvious where state ownership of urban land has been firmly established. In Hong Kong, for instance, studies suggest that between 1970 and 1991, land and lease revenues accounted for 20 per cent of the total government incomes and financed 80 per cent of the total infrastructure expenditures. In Singapore, these rates were about 19 per cent and 62 per cent respectively.² Chengri Ding reports that the revenues generated from land conveyance fees and loans from using land as collateral "accounted for 40 to 50 per cent of the municipal government's Year 2002 budget in Hangzhou, a city located south-west of Shanghai; in turn these revenues were used to fund more than two-thirds of the city's investments in infrastructure and urban services."³

East Asian states have been known for their developmentalist approaches to economic development, with heavy investment in the built environment.⁴ The developmental states

LONDON FOR SALE: TOWARDS THE RADICAL MARKETISATION OF URBAN SPACE

Michael Edwards

London is the capital of the most class-stratified (unequal) nation-state in western Europe, second only to Portugal.¹ Britain never experienced the bourgeois or socialist revolutions that modernised the state and land ownership elsewhere, and it pioneered capitalism through a distinctive evolution of earlier feudal relations, expelling the people from the land and forging the first urban working class. The elite of Britain became dominant over a vast empire and that dominance has evolved into a powerful set of financial, professional, and cultural institutions that still exercise influence (and make money) on a world scale. London is a place where the world's elite come for education, medical treatment, shopping, consultancy advice on privatisation, money laundering, and business management: important parts of the city's economy make up a global clearing house for the practices of neoliberalism.²

London is characterised by the dominance of landed interests. The Crown and the aristocratic Westminster and Grosvenor Estates act alongside corporate giants such as Land Securities and British Land in the control and management of London's land. The dominance of property has recently been reinforced by the unintended consequences of an urban planning system that protects areas of "high amenity" for property owners—an owner-occupying majority in the housing system as well as hereditary, corporate, and developer owners—allowing house building companies to build at the (slow) rate that best suits their profitability. Through the decades since 1975, when salaried workers in all the OECD countries have received declining shares of the growing social product, the flow of funds into land and property acquisition has been boosted, especially since 2000, to the point where the "value" of housing, commercial properties, land, and infrastructure reached 87 per cent of the national stock of tangible assets in the UK economy.³ This process has been

fuelled by easy credit for households and corporate buyers, and was reinforced by the collapse of confidence in collective forms of pension provision, which led families to pour their savings into housing as an individualised strategy of wealth accumulation. The geography of this process has focused land value growth increasingly in London and in the surrounding regions so that the lower quartile price of a dwelling in London reached nine times the lower quartile London household income by 2008.⁴

A third particularity of London has been crucial in helping to bridge the contradiction of low-paid people surviving in a high-rent city: the struggles for housing in the twentieth century, which led to a large stock of social housing, publicly owned and let at manageable rents to nearly half (at peak) of ordinary Londoners—three quarters in some districts. Along with rent controls on private landlords, this had stabilised the patchwork of fine-grain social (and ethnic) mixing across more of the city than would be expected. If the phrase "sustainable communities" has meant anything in London it has been the scope for working class, as well as richer communities, to reproduce themselves from generation to generation in most neighbourhoods.

That has all been changing since the 1980s, as the social housing sector has shrunk through privatisation, incomes have increasingly polarised, de-industrialisation has destroyed mid-level jobs and an unregulated private landlord sector has captured a quarter of the stock. This private stock houses high-, middle-, and low-income people offering flexibility to the growing flows of educated migrants and students, but also some of the worst value-for-money and most crowded conditions for the poorest households.

In the labour market millions are employed at (or below) the national minimum wage, on which it is not possible to live decently in London. This has prompted a strong movement, London Citizens, linking local and religious organisations with precarious and low-paid workers' groups to demand a "London living wage." The campaign has brought gains to workers, initially in public bodies, then to some of the banks and universities who were shamed into compliance.

The labour market requires far more, both in quantity and quality of workers, than can be reproduced within London, sucking in 750,000 daily commuters and major migration flows of qualified and other workers from other regions, from the rest of Europe, and the world. It is an economy sustainable only by denuding other regions and nations of their expensively trained people.⁵

The third sphere where stresses are powerful is in the welfare system, which covers much of the gap between low income and high London rents for working and non-working households, private and social tenants. These benefits have become a target for the new Conservative-led coalition government at national level and their proposed cuts would greatly shrink the proportion of London in which lower income people can afford to live. Tens of thousands will have to move to the cheapest parts of the city, or to other towns and regions. The more central or salubrious districts will become entirely unaffordable and homelessness will escalate. The city will rapidly become even more segregated.⁶



Restgrün (2006)

Ulrike Mohr's investigations of the ecological dimensions to urban entropy raise important questions about the intersection between science and aesthetics. Mohr plays on the boundary of human intervention in nature in two ways: first, by simply observing nature its meaning and significance change; and second, by focusing on one element of nature and performing simple modifications, we contend with the scope and complexity of our relations with nature as an extension of ourselves.





Laura Oldfield Ford's drawings, mainly from London but also featuring other British cities, combine seemingly disparate elements into a form of collage as cultural critique. There is a particular emphasis on places or communities that have been cut adrift or face erasure though processes of urban regeneration and speculative development.





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2

1 An empty terrain in the Dan-shui River, Taipei (2008)

2 To open a wasteland, Brussels (2000)



3

3 A Guide to the Wastelands of the Lea Valley. Twelve empty spaces await the London Olympics (Barbican Gallery 2009)



4

4 A wasteland in Rotterdam port (2003–2018)

All photographs by Lara Almarcegui

LAGOS: CITY OF CONCRETE

Giles Omezi

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PLACES AND SPACES

“... Elvis did not pay too much attention to the cars that in spite of their speed wove between each other like careful threads of a tapestry. The motorways were the only means of getting across the series of towns that made up Lagos. Intent on reaching their destinations, pedestrians dodged between the speeding vehicles as they crossed the wide motorways. It was dangerous, and every day at least ten people were killed trying to cross the road. If they didn't die when the first car hit them, subsequent cars finished the job. The curious thing, though was that there were hundreds of overhead pedestrian bridges, but people ignored them. Some even walked up to the bridges and then crossed underneath them.”¹

Lagos sits on topography dominated by ubiquitous marshlands and a vast lagoon draining several rivers north of the city. It thus presents the road engineer with the dilemma of how to stitch this rapidly expanding city together to aid movement between its constituent parts over such challenging terrain. Over twenty-five years, specifically between 1967 and 1992, the combined efforts of the Federal Government and Lagos State roped the city together using a system of fast expressways, which were viewed as the solution to the traffic problem that was becoming apparent as a major issue as far back as the late 1950s. At this point, the population of the city hovered just below the million mark, today estimates put it at close to eighteen million people.²

The city's expressway system consists of three north-south axial roads that connect the island of Lagos with the mainland of Lagos and sets up a language that fuses a vocabulary of multiple lanes, cloverleaf interchanges, and bridges to aid mobility of the car. The most westerly arterial road, known as the Western Avenue System begins at the western tip of Lagos Island as the Eko Bridge, rising over the swamps of Ijora and Iganmu, through the residential district of Surulere and heads off north. After a kink in its alignment, it passes through

Mushin becoming the ten-lane Agege Motor Road, which leads eventually to the old town of Abeokuta north of Lagos. The next arterial is the Ikorodu Road, which as a continuation of the Carter Bridge and Murtala Mohamed Way, cuts through the older districts on the mainland and beyond on its way to Ikorodu and the Ijebu towns north of the Lagos Lagoon. The last of these arterial roads is the Third Mainland Bridge, which floats over the Lagos Lagoon detached from the its western bank. Described as the longest bridge in Africa at twelve kilometres, the Third Mainland Bridge enables the affluent residents of the districts of Ikoyi and Victoria Island to bypass much of Lagos as they head north via Ibadan and Ilorin, or to the ancient city of Benin, and the merchant cities beyond the River Niger to the east. At the foot of Lagos, a western corridor of development spawned by the Badagry Expressway takes traffic to the border town of Seme. This horizontal band of city hemmed in by marshlands and creeks is balanced by the Lekki Expressway system east of Victoria Island, which has similarly fuelled a corridor of linear developments comprised mainly of large residential estates. The latter road opens up the reclaimed sandbar of the Lekki peninsula arching up over a relatively short span bridge over the eastern reaches of the lagoon at Epe to complete a ring road of sorts around the Lagos Lagoon. The former straddles the creek system leading to the old slaving port of Badagry and Porto Novo in Benin Republic vividly rendered in *The Water House*, Antonio Olinto's novel on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lagos.

Two ring-road systems traverse the east-west and north-south roads; the Apapa Oworonshoki looping westwards from a spur off the Third Mainland Bridge, intersecting Ikorodu Road, Agege Motor Road, Badagry Expressway, terminating at the port complex in Apapa. Here, the ring road seems caught in decades of indecision on the best way to bridge the gap between the Quays at Apapa and the ghosts of the old wharves along Marina Street on Lagos Island. The unbuilt city plans hesitantly pondered this gap, proposing a tunnel in one iteration and bridges at different locations to complete the ring. A German-built inner ring road system encircles the island in a necklace of fast, elevated, concrete road sections, interrupted by complex interchanges that appear to have been configured to connect strategic destinations when Lagos still held sway as the federal capital. Short bursts of speed are interrupted by sweeping intersection after intersection, as the road is elevated above the corrugated asbestos roofscape of old colonial offices and the tropical patina on the modernist buildings of the post-colonial state. The destinations are the old Federal Secretariat, the short spurs leading into Ikoyi Road and the old seat of government, Dodan Barracks, tucked behind Obalende, the commercial district of Lagos Island, and the leafy residential areas of Ikoyi. The latter area, a layout planned on Garden City principles, quietly morphed in description from an exclusive *European Reservation Area* to a post-independence *Government Reservation Area*. The exclusivity maintained in classic Fanonesque terms for the new ruling elite or as Fanon puts it “the petit bourgeoisie.”

The inner-ring-road system—built in the 1970s to relieve traffic—obstructs and obliterates the once picturesque promenade of Marina Street, which was reconfigured as the northern



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realm. Marked by visible displays of chaos and disorder, there is a suggestion of a subaltern public sphere as elaborated by Nancy Fraser, which is clearly undermined through a stereotypical representation of a counter-public that is dominated by the irrationality of a violent crowd.⁵

More importantly, the populist commercial overlaps with a particularly bourgeois moment in the city when an officially sanctioned drive was launched to remove all “unauthorised” hoardings in the city. In the post-independence period, hand-painted plywood cut-outs had come to relay specific messages about film, politics, and religion—one that was specific to Dravidian urban culture.⁶ Organising the city’s spaces in less mundane and more spectacular ways, the surreal landscape of cut-outs served as makeshift mimics of the real, integrating images of popular culture into the conventional paradigm of urban landscape. For years, Chennai’s “urbanscape” was dominated by the text and images of cut-outs of all sizes, which rarely read coherently as text but nevertheless offered a fascinating commentary about the city. However, since the 1990s with the launch of neoliberalisation policies, a yearning for a bourgeois urbanism of orderly, regulated spaces has triggered an aversion to what is now considered not local culture but urban graffiti. Thus, located in the fuzzy boundaries of public/private spaces, this landscape involving a lucrative enterprise of rentals and taxes is condemned as an urban scourge that has recklessly mushroomed across the cityscape.⁷ In 2008, coinciding with the release of *A day in the life of Chennai* was a Supreme Court verdict

1 Changing geography of cut-outs in Chennai (aerial view of Anna Flyover Junction) (2007)
Source: *Dinamalar*, Chennai



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banning unauthorised hoardings in the city, after which more than half of the cut-outs in the city were promptly removed.

Anchored in the *Times of India* film is a phantasmic understanding of Chennai’s socio-political geography, which brushes aside much of the emerging challenges associated with the Dravidian city’s efforts to juggle the tensions of the local, the national, and the global. Instead, a rhetorical reimagining of the cityscape is produced where the interpretation of the local is mired in a parochial understanding of the city. Thus, at one level there is an urge to reject the advertisement’s patronising fervour amidst a concern that more than stereotyping, these images stigmatise the city. While it is easy to dismiss the images as perhaps a north Indian newspaper’s clichéd imagination of Chennai as a Tamil/Dravidian city, their visual aesthetics are however useful in furthering a discussion about the essence of contemporary Chennai that extends beyond the imagined into the real world. At a time when a new identity of a globalising city is being carefully constructed and staged with the city’s public spaces projected as ideal circuits for the flow of global capital, the film’s exorcism of a violent subaltern Other from the underbelly of these spaces is not gratifying. Nevertheless, it reveals in unexpected ways the disjuncture between Chennai’s image and reality as a Dravidian capital, and hence is useful in challenging some of the recent development aspirations based on an agenda of sanitised aestheticisation that ironically involve the removal of cut-outs from the cityscape.

2 Changing geography of cut-outs in Chennai (aerial view of Anna Flyover Junction) (2010)
Source: The Hindu Photo Archives



INTERSTITIAL LANDSCAPES: REFLECTIONS ON A BERLIN CORNER

Matthew Gandy

It is then that they feel unhindered and unthreatened by people. The night is when the day turns black and this is the moment they feel they can strike back.

In *The Ecology of Stray Dogs: A Study of Free-Ranging Urban Animals* (1973), the ethologist Alan Beck suggests that stray dogs “provide insight into the effects of urbanisation on man. Once their ecology is understood, urban dogs may serve as indicators of stress, pollution, and environmental deterioration, and as models for behavioural adaptations to urban life.”³ There are indeed apparent parallels between the human and canine inhabitants of Bucharest, as has been explored in the work of documentary filmmaker Alexandru Solomon. Referring to the situation in Bucharest at the end of the 1990s, Solomon’s film *A Dog’s Life* (1998) tells how “man and dog are two species intimately mingled into one another like the damned souls of Dante’s inferno. Here, the human-eyed dog daily confronts the dog-eyed human. Our city has a population of over 200,000 dogs. There are rich and poor dogs, dogs of the street and dogs that go to the hairdresser. This film documents the life of this parallel society, which is a mirror of the human society in Bucharest.”⁴ Recently, artist Călin Dan explored the parallel and similar destinies of humans and dogs in the Romanian context in his play *Ca(r)ne: This is Our City* (2007) and film *Wings for Dogs* (2009), where he exposes in a potent manner the legacies of Ceaușescu’s palace, the waste of ordinary lives, and the injustices it has produced and still engenders.⁵

The erasure of the historical parts of the city has entered a new stage with the demolition of *Hala Matache*, one of the oldest Bucharest market halls, which stands in the way of a new thoroughfare and boulevard being developed into the new business district of Bucharest; it connects Victoria Square (the government headquarters) with Ceaușescu’s palace (the seat of parliament). The process has been accompanied by evictions of Roma and other urban poor from the dilapidated houses that were left to decay over the last two decades. Most of them are homeless again, building improvised shacks on wastelands in other parts of Bucharest or on the city’s periphery. In another random part of Bucharest, people are reported to have poisoned the stray dogs that were living in front of their apartment blocks. The dogs have disappeared.

Endnotes

- 1 Maria Raluca Popa, “Understanding the urban past: the transformation of Bucharest in the late socialist period,” in: Richard Rodger and Joanna Herbert (eds.), *Testimonies of the city: identity, community and change in a contemporary urban world* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 159–186.
- 2 Adriana Mica, “Moral panic, risk or hazard society—the relevance of a theoretical model and framings of *maidan* dogs in Chișinău and Bucharest,” in *Polish Sociological Review*, 1/169 (2010), 41–56, here 48.
- 3 Alan M. Beck, *The ecology of stray dogs: A study of free-ranging urban animals* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press e-books, 1973), viii.
- 4 www.alexandrusolomon.ro/a-dog%E2%80%99s-life-1998/ [accessed 10.04.2011].
- 5 Călin Dan, *Emotional Architecture 3*. (Bucharest: MNAC, 2011).



1 The Chausseestrasse site in July 2009. Photo: Matthew Gandy

EVICIONS: THE EXPERIENCE OF LIEBIG 14

Lucrezia Lennert

On the morning of 2 February 2011, twenty-three people were evicted from their home at Liebigstrasse 14 in Berlin's Friedrichshain district. As part of the post-unification urban renewal of former East Berlin, this once dilapidated area has seen rapid transformation since the 1990s as a result of a growing tourism, retail, and nightlife-based economy and waves of property redevelopment. The forced removal of lower-income residents to allow for profit-maximisation on property is an all too common story in gentrifying inner-city neighbourhoods such as Friedrichshain. What was unusual in the case of Liebigstrasse 14, however, was the refusal of the inhabitants to leave their home, the 2,500 police mobilised for the eviction, the thousands who took to the streets in protest, and the subsequent reprisal actions by protesters targeting the local economy through street blockades and damage to banks, shopping centres, and government offices throughout Berlin. "Liebig 14" was a "*Hausprojekt*" (house project), a collective living and alternative cultural project that had existed for over twenty years. For many in Berlin, the eviction of Liebig 14 came to represent the damage wreaked by uncontrolled gentrification as it displaces lower-income residents and forces the closure of alternative subcultural spaces.



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The eviction of Liebig 14 also resonated internationally as a loss in the struggle for autonomous spaces. As with the “nomadic war machines” described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,¹ these spaces develop through anarchic multiplicity: their horizontal collective structures and consensus-based organisation ward off hierarchies within the group, while practices of self-reduction of costs and non-commercial production resist further capture into flows of value production and extraction. Living in Liebig 14 in its last year of existence, I joined an eclectic constellation of people: an international mix including musicians, students, carpenters, social workers, and the unemployed. Politics was deeply engrained in everyday life and the house was a meeting space for a spectrum of left activists, from antifascist to queer, community gardeners to anarcho-syndicalists. The project organised itself through consensus decision-making and a weekly house meeting, while materials, skills, and knowledge were shared and one could learn how to play an instrument, speak a language, organise a demonstration, or repair a toilet from any given housemate. Liebig 14 formed part of an alternative infrastructure in Berlin made up of legalised squats, bookshops, info-shops, and non-commercial bars and event spaces. In Berlin, these spaces are becoming islands of resistance to the logic of capital accumulation as their relative withdrawal from the urban economy grows increasingly incompatible with the intensified economic exploitation of the surrounding areas. Liebig 14 was originally squatted in 1990 and was the product of a second wave of the German squatters movement, when—seizing a moment of political vacuum after the fall of

¹ Liebig 14 in 2009. Source: Christian Hetey.

FACES, STRUCTURES, WORDS, AND COLOURS: COLLAGES AND DÉCOLLAGES OF BERLIN AND OTHER CITIES IN THE WORK OF POLA BRÄNDLE

Joachim Schlör

The idea that the big city is, in some ways, a *palimpsest*—a collection of different layers of historical meaning, a means of memory storage—may already have become a cliché. But stereotypes do contain occasional glimpses of truth. Contemporary archaeological diggings in Berlin’s central district, brought about by the building of a new underground line from Alexanderplatz to Brandenburg Gate—a project related to the future and the technological and ecological development of a twenty-first-century city—revealed Berlin’s medieval street grid, the earliest matrix that has been built over time and again and long been deemed completely vanished. But there it is for all to see, and so strong in the manifestation of its importance for local memory that the new underground station “Rotes Rathaus” (the name is in memory of Kaiser Wilhelm’s dislike of democratic institutions so close to his palace, which itself is another vanished building that will soon re-emerge in a different form) will

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1 Pola Brändle: *Wiener Blut*, Collage/Decollage, 40 x 95 cm, 2008 Source: Courtesy of the artist.

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2 Pola Brändle: *Caught in my Dreams*, Collage/Decollage, 100 x 55 cm, 2010 Source: Courtesy of the artist.

URBAN VISTAS AND THE CIVIC IMAGINATION

Rebecca Ross

“Three rooms were erected for us there on the roof where the draftsmen and every person who touched this plan could look out from the windows and see the problem laying right before him, the problem of the lake front and looking in the other direction the problem of the great city itself.”¹

So was described the small structure atop the seventeen-storey Railway Exchange from which the 1909 *Plan of Chicago* was prepared under the direction of Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett.² The purpose-built addition to the north-east corner of the roof, paid for by the Commercial Club at Burnham’s request, echoed that of a previous workspace shared by Burnham and Bennett in 1904 in San Francisco, “Willis Polk was putting up a shack at Mr. Burnham’s request to be high up on Twin Peaks where it commanded a view of the entire city.”³ Polk had been commissioned by the Association for the Improvement and Adornment of San Francisco, a group of elite businessmen who had invited Burnham to develop a comprehensive plan for the city in an effort to, as in the later case of Chicago, “stimulate the sentiment of civic pride.”⁴

These heightened vantage points cum workspaces, “selected to command the panorama of the city and to permit uninterrupted study,”⁵ invited contemplation of and fascination with the unfathomability of the early twentieth-century American city. They engendered feelings of wonderment at the same time that they underscored anxieties about an ever complexify-



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ing urban landscape and the desire to bring it to order. This experience of the view was amplified through its inscription in extravagant volumes dedicated not only to comprehensive plans seeking to intervene in the future of each city but also to the establishment of city planning itself as a new category of professional practice. These volumes featured sketches and photographs taken from the specific perspective of the workspaces. The *Report on a plan for San Francisco*, in particular, begins with an eighty-five-centimetre-wide fold-out panoramic photograph taken from the exterior of the Twin Peaks bungalow. Mostly though, the dramatic views served as backdrops to a variety of activities carried out by commercial artists, draftsman, illustrators, and writers with occasional visits from members of the commissioning associations. Jules Guerin, perhaps the most notable of Burnham and Bennett’s hired craftsmen, was well known for his ability to create fully resolved and complete looking bird’s eye views whilst stripping away all but the most crucial details and rendering them in muted tones.

Burnham’s insistence on panoramic workspaces as a precondition for comprehensive planning presumes seeing the “whole city” as an obvious prerequisite to interposing in its future. It literalises, perhaps to the point of absurdity, a variety of metaphors invoking views from above employed within many brilliant critical engagements with empiricism and ideology.⁶ However, rather than retrace the dangers and limitations of conflating purportedly sweeping vision with presumed omniscience, here I will explore the role of vantage points in facilitating a shared sense of what I will refer to as the “civic imagina-

1 Burnham at the Twin Peaks Cabin likely to have been taken by Edward Bennett, circa 1904. From Lake Forest College

Library Archives and Special Collections, Marcia O. and Edward H. Bennett III Collection.