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MARXISM AND THE CITY: A HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE*

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EL MARXISMO Y LA CIUDAD: UNA PERSPECTIVA HISTÓRICA Y CONCEPTUAL

Abstract
The contemporary city, as David Harvey argues, is the privileged place that permits the realization of surplus value through continuous processes of reorganisation of urban space. Metropolises play a key role as nodes in global value chains, and this aspect brings to the surface the function that the medieval city played in facilitating the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Space has long been the forgotten dimension of Marxism; the following article will therefore attempt to emphasise the function that urban spaces have played in facilitating the industrialisation process of modern society. Finally, the article will attempt to reformulate the question of the "right to the city," considering the break between the idea of city and the idea of metropolis.

Keywords
medieval city; Engels; *ville; cité; polis; civitas*

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Resumen

La ciudad contemporánea, como sostiene David Harvey, es el lugar privilegiado que permite la realización de la plusvalía a través de procesos continuos de reorganización del espacio urbano. Las metrópolis desempeñan un papel clave como nodos de las cadenas de valor mundiales y este aspecto pone de relieve la función que desempeñó la ciudad medieval para facilitar la transición del feudalismo al capitalismo. El espacio ha sido durante mucho tiempo la dimensión olvidada del marxismo; por ello, el siguiente artículo intentará hacer hincapié en la función que han ejercido los espacios urbanos en facilitar el proceso de industrialización de la sociedad moderna. Por último, el artículo intentará reformular la cuestión del "derecho a la ciudad", considerando la ruptura entre la idea de ciudad y la idea de metrópolis.

Palabras clave

ciudad medieval; Engels; *ville; cité; polis; civitas*

The Medieval City as a Take-off of Commercial Society

The reflection on the contemporary city is set in the context of an increasingly multipolar and globalised world. The computerisation of productive relations, developments in telecommunications, and the expansion of the information industry make it possible to work at any point on the globe and instantaneously transmit information across territorial boundaries. However, this representation of globalised reality characterised by the spatial dispersion of economic activities is only partial. National and global markets require centres capable of concretely directing and coordinating globalisation; the information industry wants essential infrastructures to realise productive activity. Consequently, the spatial dimension and, most of all, that particular space represented by the city constitute a vital element for reproducing social and economic relations (Harvey, 2013). The enormous concentration of capital and material infrastructures in cities demonstrates the role played by metropolises in the context of globalisation, which increasingly appear as command centres in the organisation of the world economy and seats of technological innovation:

> It is precisely the combination of the global dispersal of economic activities and global integration—under conditions of continued concentration of economic ownership and control—that has contributed to a strategic role for certain major cities. These I call global cities. (Sassen, 2000, p. 4)

Global cities are thus recognised as the driving forces behind the restructuring of the economy and cultural innovation, the centres of the global world: They are the protagonists of change and are breaking free from the traditional chains hinged on national governments. By framing the city's problem from a historical perspective, focusing particularly on the medieval city, we will discover that the city we live in today can be thought of beyond the state precisely because its origin preceded it. Likewise, the fact that today's metropolises play a key role as nodes in global value chains draws attention to medieval cities' role in providing the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In general, we affirm that the historical evolution of urbanisation constitutes the secret of industrialisation; it informs its meaning. On the other hand, industrial production shapes urbanisation, provides its conditions, and establishes its possibilities. The issue then becomes one of urban development (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 130).

For Adam Smith, the city's development throughout history is deeply embedded in a larger theory of the progress of the division of labour between agricultural producers and manufacturers, the latter concentrated in town. According to Smith, this process

was characterised by a progressive commercial expansion of the urban economy over the countryside. The social division of labour marked the spatial division of labour: merchants and artisans, when the link with the land gradually broke down, found it convenient to concentrate in the urban space to organise their craft skills:

> Without the assistance of some artificers, indeed, the cultivation of land cannot be carried on but with great inconveniency and continual interruption. Smiths, carpenters, wheelwrights, and ploughwrights, masons, and bricklayers, tanners, shoemakers, and tailors are people whose service the farmer has frequent occasion for. Such artificers, too, stand occasionally in need of the assistance of one another; and as their residence is not, like that of the farmer, necessarily tied down to a precise spot, they naturally settle in the neighbourhood of one another, and thus form a small town or village. The butcher, the brewer, and the baker soon join them, together with many other artificers and retailers, necessary or useful for supplying their occasional wants, and who contribute still further to augment the town. (Smith, 1977, p. 503)

Smith underscores that a pivotal precondition for developing medieval towns is producing an agricultural surplus. The augment of the surplus fostered exchange processes with the manufacturing products of the cities. The demand for manufactures created by this new surplus made it possible to extend the division of labour, increasing productivity in several spheres. The division of labour and the increased productivity permitted to absorb the higher transport costs of long-distance trade, enabling an increase in commercial transactions and allowing the system to be reproduced on an ever-expanding scale.

The surplus that settles and grows in cities is explained by Smith on the basis of the division of labour, which enables the needs of each individual to be met. Thus, the surplus deposited in medieval cities arose from the marked human tendency to exchange and barter and the development of the division of labour to satisfy diversified individual needs.

However, the agricultural surplus cannot be explained simply by referring to the division of labour as a "transcendental category" divorced from social and, above all, geographical conditions. For the process of capital accumulation in cities, David Harvey argues that "the role the city plays in this process depends upon the social, economic, technological and institutional possibilities that govern the disposition of the surplus value concentrated in it" (2009, pp. 232–233). The spatial organisation of the medieval city, namely its natural resources, infrastructure, geographical position, and, in general, the

control of space, played a fundamental role in the development of the commercial society. In this sense,

> this conception of the space economy is more instructive than the conventional one extant in geography and regional science which rests on Adam Smith's notion that everything can be explained by an insatiable consumer demand and mutual gains from trade. (Harvey, 2009, p. 238)

The method of the "division of labour," which Smith places as a determining factor of the historical course, fails to capture the historical development of the city in all its complexity; however, he underlines the capacity of physical geography to influence the fluctuation of economic surplus: The city's location, navigable rivers or canals, transportations costs, climate, and soil have a crucial role as factors of economic growth, including the determination of profit and prices[1] (Smith, 1977, pp. 500–555).

In the urban context, spaces of freedom gradually opened up for their inhabitants, which "became really free in our present sense of the word Freedom" (Smith, 1977, p. 526). The condition of freedom from feudal obligations was instead achieved thanks to economic and political conjunctures. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the European cities were mainly inhabited by merchants and artisans, who were in servile conditions and legally dependent on the feudal lord. They made up a very poor section of the population, used to travel and move from one fair to another, and for their travel, they were forced to pay taxes imposed on physical persons and goods (Smith, 1977, p. 524). Taxation became later collective, no longer a tax on the physical person, and the cities themselves were charged with collecting taxation. They were thus authorised to create magistracies, at first with purely fiscal functions and later also with functions of administration of justice, constituting themselves into guilds and endowing themselves with their own municipal council and army. In addition to the economic factor, there was also the political issue: At least initially, European sovereigns saw the city dwellers as allies against the feudal lords. In the cities, "order and good government" (Smith, 1977, p. 531) were established, and the capital formed on the land, as well as that deriving from foreign trade, flowed into the city.

"A revolution of the greatest importance" (Smith, 1977, p. 549) happened. Exchange and commerce had succeeded where the king's action had failed. The dissolution of the

[1] For an analysis of the reflections on economic geography present in the work of Smith, see Arrighi (2007) and Ioannou and Wòjcik (2022).

feudal system and the progressive erosion of the indiscriminate power of feudal lords, who from masters became customers for their inclination to dissipate goods and who, in order to guarantee an adequate income, were forced to accept long leases on their lands and eventually "sold their birthright […]. They became as insignificant as any substantial burgher or tradesman in a city" (Smith, 1977, p. 548). The exchange, apparently harmless and beneficial for both parties, contributed to upset pre-existing power relations, succeeding where even the sovereign's strength had been shattered: "What all the violence of the feudal institutions could never have effected, the silent and insensible operation of foreign commerce and manufactures gradually brought about" (Smith, 1977, p. 543).

Adam Smith's analysis highlights the intertwining of the division of labour and the economic division of town and country. This aspect constitutes a significant caesura point in the medieval context because it is at this stage that the juridical, as well as economic, separation between city and country occurs.[2]

In this regard, Max Weber, in his work *The City* (1966),[3] emphasises the role of the city walls, which separated those living within the walls, the *burgenses*, from the *rurales*. This separation was still unknown in antiquity. The function of the walls is therefore relevant in highlighting the discontinuity of the medieval city from the ancient city. Obviously, walls were also present in ancient cities; what changes is the symbolic meaning: Medieval fortresses divide man from the land, making it possible to increase manufacturing and craft activities within the city walls and contributing increasingly to the decoupling of social reproduction from land management (Weber, 1966, p. 71). Emancipation from the bond with the land sets in motion a process of change in collective and individual identities. In the feudal system, the land is the dominant social synthesis. Therefore, it makes possible forms of sociability (*Vergesellschaftung*) and commonality (*Vergemeinschaftung*). The expression *Nulle terre sans seigneur* precisely emphasises that the feudal lord's role of power and honorary titles were based on the possession of the land. Not only that: The land, as a dominant social synthesis, defines roles and functions within the associated life, fundamentally marked by the immobility of the countryside, by patriarchal relationships, and above all by the fact that it is the ownership of a plot of land that defines the figure of the feudal lord.

On the contrary, inside the medieval walls, with the development of commercial trade, social identities become increasingly mobile. These are no longer constituted from the

[2] On the juridical and economic separation between city and countryside as an innovative element within the medieval context, see Brunner (1968).

[3] I have largely based my analysis on Max Weber's text through the study of Basso (2020).

reference to the land, but they are shaped by the *commercium* (Basso, 2020, pp. 69–93): It is the mobility of city life that makes it possible to affirm that "city air makes free."

The land in the urban space is no longer treated solely as a place of sustenance, but now becomes an "accessory" element: it constitutes an object of exchange on which commercial activities are established (Weber, 1966, p. 74).

The emergence of a world centred on objects and no more on land defines individuals no longer through ties of land, blood, and family membership but rather through juridical abstraction; they begin to be considered as proprietary individuals capable of producing and selling things. Thus, we arrive at a time when it is possible to be part of the urban space as an individual citizen, regardless of family or land ties. As Weber affirms:

> In new civic creations, burghers joined the citizenry as single persons. The oath of citizenship was taken by the individual. Personal membership, not that of kin groups or tribe, in the local association of the city supplied the guarantee of the individual's personal legal position as a burgher. (1966, p. 102)

The revolutionary character of the medieval city is based on an oath, a conjuratio (*Verbrüderung*), which arrogates to itself the right to violate seigniorial law. It configures a new type of law, a law proper to the city and exclusively typical of the Western city, a conscious, illegitimate, and revolutionary political association:

> The urbanites therefore usurped the right to violate lordly law. This was the major revolutionary innovation of medieval occidental cities in contrast to all others. In Central and North European cities the principle appeared: 'City air makes man free.' The time period varied, but always after a relatively short time, the lord of a slave or bondsman lost the right to subordinate him to his power. (Weber, 1966, p. 94)

Citizenship becomes a right common to all those who legitimately inhabit the city, a common right that coexists with the pre-existing differences, for example, differences of corporative affiliation or religious confraternity.

The town soon becomes "an autonomous and autocephalous institutional association" (Weber, 1966, p. 106). The characteristics of autonomy and independence to which Weber refers are the consequence of a "revolutionary usurpation" that adds elements of incalculability, indefiniteness, unpredictability, and irrationality to the definition of the city: irrationality that is, however, paradoxically intertwined with the process of rationalisation.

According to Weber (1966), it is the distinctive element that marks Western development and the city represents the privileged point where this occurs.[4]

The traffic triggered within the urban context reached such an expansion that cities would no longer be able to govern. A broader, extra-city political structure was needed to manage the city's network of powers in a unified manner: the State.

European cities, on the basis of historically and economically differentiated processes, will progressively lose their autonomy and independence. In central Europe, city autonomy was largely eroded as early as the 16th century: the flow of taxation from city administration to state administration and the loss of an autonomous city army constituted crucial factors in the dissolution of municipal independence. Those aspects that Weber indicates as characteristic of "municipal autonomy" (autocephaly, namely own courts and autonomous administrative capacities, an autonomous capacity for taxation, the presence of a market, and autonomous forms of association) became the prerogative of the State (Weber, 1966, pp. 181–192).

The medieval city was destined to lose not only its economic autonomy, but also its political autonomy to the benefit of the State and the market, a combination that, as Weber (1966) points out, has its genesis in the city. The process that arose in the urban space was, in any case, irreversible: The city economy (*Stadtwirtschaft*)[5] is preserved and will even expand.

In this regard, Henri Lefebvre speaks of the city as a "projection of society on the ground" (1996, p. 109): modern society will be constituted as such in the form of the city, and the space becomes the symbolic materialisation of the social order. The medieval city, Lefebvre (1966) notes, still retains the character of a work (*oeuvre*), When we talk about the production and circulation of objects in the medieval city, we mean *das Ding*, not the commodity, *die Ware*. *Das Ding* is still a hybridisation of man and thing; in the object, the medieval craftsman deposits a "piece of soul," his capacities and abilities, because it is an individual work through his means of production and personal working techniques (Sombart, 1902, p. 116). *Das Ding* does not yet have that fetishist character proper to the commodity (*die Ware*), narrated by Marx in *Capital,* which has a life independent and separate from the producer.

The generalisation of the commodity form produced by industrialisation will transform the city from work (*oeuvre*) to product (*produit*); exchange value will tend to subsume and subordinate the city and urban reality (Lefebvre, 1966, p. 67).

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[4] On the problem of the city as a symbol and contradiction of rationality, see Domingues (2000) and Gianola (2021).
[5] About the concept of *Stadtwirtschaft*, see Bruns (2014).

From Commercial Society to the Spatial Division of Social Classes

It would now be interesting to thematise the historical process that would lead commercial society to transform into a capitalist society, divided into social classes, and the role that cities played in this historical "transition." In the 1950s, there was an important debate on the question of the "transition" from the feudal to the capitalist economy, with Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb as the main protagonists. Continuing the analyses of Adam Smith and Max Weber, Paul Sweezy (1978) emphasises the commercial development of cities and, therefore, the work of dissolution that the growing circulation of goods and money would have brought about on the feudal system (pp. 33–56). Sweezy's analysis has been criticised by Maurice Dobb, who stresses instead that the feudal system would have imploded for "internal" causes due in particular to the "class struggle" between feudal lords and peasants and not through "external" elements such as the development of monetary and commercial transactions. The reasons for the disintegration of the feudal economy are, therefore, to be found within the feudal system, taking into account the resistance and revolts of the rural world and the struggle of small producers to loosen the constraints of feudal exploitation (Dobb, 1950, pp. 33–82).

Aside from the strictly historical debate, it is certainly crucial to stress that the model based on the commercial development of cities does not explain why we arrived at a political and social system based on the class division of society, the private appropriation of the means of production, and the extraction of surplus value based on free wage labour. On the other hand, the model of historical development based on the simple contradiction between capital and labour poses the risk of outlining a historical determinism that prevents us from highlighting the plurality of political, cultural, economic, geographical, and urban elements that have determined the conditions for the development of a society based on the division into social classes and on the extraction of surplus value.

Analysing the historical picture of the English cities of the nineteenth century, it is evident that the concentration of capital has by now accompanied the concentration of the proletariat within the urban space. The idea of conceiving urban space as a political stake in the conflict between social classes emerges in the work of Marx and Engels, although not systematically.

In the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,* in the notebook focused on land rent, Karl Marx describes what has already been emphasised above: the fundamental bond, in the feudal age, of individuals with the land, the subservient relations of serfs with landowners, immediately transparent and "intimate" (Marx, 1988a, p. 64). This personal and transparent relationship between landowners and peasants ceases when

the land is reduced "to the status of a commercial value, like man" (Marx, 1988a, p. 64). The process of industrialisation supplants the economy based on land ownership; the land is fragmented and exposed to competition, continually sold to different owners, and its productivity is increased in order to export agricultural products in international trade.

Moreover, there are references to the phenomenon of urbanisation linked to the transformation of the production process, dependent above all on the peasants who, in the cities, constituted the first nucleus of the working class. The German philosopher also describes the malnourished conditions of workers in the Irish cities (Marx, 1988a, p. 117).

In *German Ideology,* Marxian reflection on the city is set in the broader context of the division of labour. As Adam Smith had already pointed out, the separation between industrial and commercial labour on the one hand and agricultural labour on the other leads to "the separation of town and country and to the conflict of their interests." (Marx, 1998b, p. 38) Reflecting on the role of cities, Marx stresses that everything necessary for the reproduction of social life, both politically and economically, is condensed in them:

> The advent of the town implies, at the same time, the necessity of administration, police, taxes, etc., in short, of the municipality [*des Gemeindewesens*], and thus of politics in general. Here first became manifest the division of the population into two great classes, which is directly based on the division of labour and on the instruments of production. The town is in actual fact already the concentration of the population, of the instruments of production, of capital of pleasures, of needs, while the country demonstrates just the opposite fact, isolation and separation. The contradiction between town and country can only exist within the framework of private property. (Marx, 1998b, p. 72)

Marx recognises the associative capacity of medieval cities, especially when they emerged from their isolation and began to enter into relations with each other: products, new needs, and thus trade developed, but also knowledge, techniques, and inventions of various kinds. The development of social traffic (*Verkehr*) will lead to the emergence of manufacturing.[6] The conflict between city and country, which reflected that between the city bourgeoisie and landed gentry, would drive many cities to unite (but also to fight each other). Out of this complex and tortuous historical process would arise something larger

[6] The notion of *Verkehr* captures both the economic and communicative dimensions of the social relationship. Within *German Ideology*, it plays a fundamental role. For further deepening, see Basso (2012, pp. 76–103) and Ricciardi (2019, pp. 42–48).

and more far-reaching than the cities: on the economic level, big industry, and on the political level, the State.

The work that nevertheless remains pioneering in Marxist studies on the urban question is Friedrich Engels' *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1987). Despite the embryonic stage of a materialistic theory of history, the novelty of this work lies in the fact that it analyses the condition of the working class in England not through a mere sociological survey but provides a general theoretical framework of the development of capitalism, the impact of technological innovations on the population, and the political and social implications. Engels gives us above all a picture of 19th-century urban space: The dissolution of the feudal economy generated an influx of huge numbers of peasants in English cities, who formed the first nucleus of the working class together with immigrants from Ireland. The cities were thus characterised by an enormous concentration of population and capital. What makes Engels' writing interesting is the fact that he describes the exploitation of the urban proletariat not only in the places of production (the factory), but also in the *ensemble* of everyday life in urban space. Engels based his investigations on official records, parliamentary commissions, statistics, newspapers, and factory inspectors' reports.[7] In addition to studying archive material, he immersed himself in the everyday life of English working-class people by walking along the streets, little travelled by the well-to-do class, walks that allowed him to become intimate with the domestic life of the urban proletariat.

Walking through the streets of London, Engels was fascinated by the grandeur of the English capital, the majesty of the naval buildings, and the majesty of the palaces. The price of all this splendour, however, is hiding the mass of people living in the working-class neighbourhoods from the eyes of the regulars in the city centre and the more upmarket districts. The best forces, those who helped build London's urban splendour, "have been suppressed in order that a few might be developed more fully" (Engels, 1987, p. 106). The walks make Engels discover the emotional tones of metropolitan life: isolation, indifference, selfishness, a sense of frustration due to the lack of recognition from other inhabitants of the metropolis, the loss of the social dimension itself caused by the feeling that metropolitan individuals have

> nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keeps to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. (Engels, 1987, 106)

[7] The fullness of Engels' insight into the nature of the capitalist method of production has been shown by the factory reports, the reports on mines, etc., that have appeared since the publication of his book (Marx, 1973, p. 240).

Engels introduces the theme of the "lonely crowd," the sense of loneliness multiplied in the relations mediated by money that unites and divides individuals at the same time.[8] Feelings of indifference and loneliness, for Engels, depend first and foremost on the mechanism of competition, which involves especially the working class, in order to be able to obtain a wage to reproduce its life (Engels, 1987, p. 177). The spatial division of the city reflects the tendency of the bourgeoisie to "shut out of the working class from the thoroughfares, so tender a concealment of everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie" (Engels, 1987, p. 139).

Urban development was possible through a spontaneous and "unconscious" removal of working-class neighbourhoods. Space is organised according to a "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2004) that divides the complex of individuals according to what can be seen, said, and done, distinguishing social subjects worthy of being seen and heard when they take the word and those who do not have this privilege so that it is impossible "to catch from the street a glimpse of the real labouring districts." (Engels, 1987, p. 139) The "crowd" inhabiting the metropolis is forced to live in the same space, but this promiscuity is a diriment fact capable of transforming social relations: The urban proletariat and the bourgeoisie are two antithetical worlds,[9] forced to share one, the same city. Despite the division of spaces and functions, Engels (1987) affirms that the proletariat and bourgeoisie share not only the same space but also the same capacities, the same right to speak and be heard, the same right to decide on the city, as well as the same right to personal fulfilment:

> After roaming the streets of the capital a day or two, making headway with difficulty through the human turmoil and the endless lines of vehicles, after visiting the slums of the metropolis, one realizes for the first time that these Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilization which crowd their city; that a hundred powers which slumbered within them have remained inactive, have been suppressed in order that a few might be developed more fully and multiply through union with those of others. The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes

[8] The questions of metropolitan habits and emotional experiences in the town will be developed in particular by George Simmel (1971) and Walter Benjamin (2002).

[9] "The enemies are dividing gradually into two great camps—the bourgeoisie on the one hand, the workers on the other." (Engels, 1987, 253). The radically binary schema opposing the proletariat to the bourgeoisie becomes a dichotomous schema between what is defined by Engels as opposing "races." On the problematic intertwining of class struggle and race struggle and, in general, on the problem of "race" in the Engelsian text, see Kouvélakis (2018, 207–211).

> and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy? And have they not, in the end, to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? (106)

Engels' investigation of the working-class condition in city life captures another interesting aspect: Exploitation continues well beyond the time spent within the enterprise, extending into the ensemble of everyday metropolitan life. "The manner in which the need of a shelter is satisfied furnishes a standard for the manner in which all other necessities are supplied" (Engels, 1987, p. 164).

Engels emphasises the high cost of living that consumes wages, poor housing and hygienic conditions, and unsafe dwellings, forcing families to live in cramped spaces where diseases proliferate. The unstable wage conditions of the workers and the destitution of the unemployed Irish immigrants foster phenomena of delinquency and criminality, which Engels does not analyse from a moralistic point of view but sees as a result of the way cities are organised in economic and spatial relations.

However, the workers' condition can only be transitory insofar as it is untenable and impossible to bear; the struggle for emancipation aims at liberation from this impossibility, not on the basis of a moral imperative, but because of this internal impossibility of existing social relations (Engels, 1987, p. 356). The workers realise that both crime and revolt against the machines only contribute to keeping alive the very structure of social injustice they are protesting against. The unique stratagem the proletariat adopts to disidentify itself from its assigned social role, the only way to demand a dignified human condition is to organise itself into associations, the "trade unions". These associations do not only have as their aim the economic struggle for wage improvements; the economic demands are combined with political demands that aim to radically transform social relations by abolishing competition in general (Engels, 1987, p. 367).

In this way, workers "begin to perceive that, though feeble as individuals, they form a power united" (Engels, 1987, p. 239). According to Engels, cities play a crucial role in emancipatory struggles because "in them the workers first began to reflect upon their own condition, and to struggle against it; in them the opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie first made itself manifest" (Engels, 1987, p. 367).

From the City to the Metropolis

Engels thus traces two fundamental lines of research: the becoming-world of philosophy as a critique of everyday life, that is, a critique of the everyday dimension, and a

critique of the social and individual experience produced by capitalism in its spatial dimension (Brenner, 2009). The second aspect is that urban space is where class conflicts appear, manifest, and materialise.

These two lines of development were developed systematically in the 20th century by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who assumed the urban space to be the privileged point from which to observe the evolution and restructuring of capital (Lefebvre, 2016).

Through the analysis of the expansion process of the city that materialises its contradictions in space and, above all, through the gaze cast on the degraded conditions of the Parisian proletariat, Lefebvre formulates his proposal of the "right to the city."

> C'est en pensant à ces habitants des banlieues, à la ségrégation, à l'isolement que je parle dans un livre du 'droit à la ville'. Il ne s'agit pas d'un droit au sens juridique du terme, mais d'un droit semblable à ceux qui sont stipulés dans la célébré Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme constitutive de la démocratie. (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 144)[10]

Lefebvre places the question of the "right to the city" in continuity with Marxian reflection, seeking to test Marx's categories within the social laboratory constituted by urban space. The "right to the city" is a political-philosophical question that Lefebvre poses only after having problematised the "Marxian proletariat," which, in the eyes of the French philosopher, no longer coincides solely with the space of the factory, but exudes from the place of production and disperses in the places of the metropolis, in the suburbs and in particular in the neighbourhoods deprived of access to essential services. "Right to the city" then means, first and foremost, a theoretical and practical battle for emancipation conceived from the spatial context, as the urban has always stood for Lefebvre as a place of expression of social conflicts.

> Cette expansion des villes s'accompagne d'une dégradation de l'architecture et du cadre urbanistique. Les gens sont dispersés, surtout les travailleurs, éloignés des centres urbains. Ce qui a dominé cette extension des villes, c'est la ségrégation économique, sociale, culturelle. La croissance quantitative de l'économie et des forces productives n'a pas provoqué un développement social, mais au contraire une détérioration de la vie sociale. Les banlieues sont des villes éclatées et ruralisées. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de Paris. L'urbanisation de la société s'accompagne

[10] "It is with these suburbanites, segregation, and isolation in mind that I am writing a book on the 'right to the city.' This is not a right in the legal sense of the term, but a right similar to those set out in the famous Declaration of Human Rights, which is the foundation of democracy."

> d'une détérioration de la vie urbaine : éclatement des centres, désormais privés de vie sociale — gens répartis ségrégativement dans l'espace. Il y a là une véritable contradiction. Je l'appelle une *contradiction de l'espace*. D'un côté, la classe dominante et l'État renforcent la ville comme centre de puissance et de décision politique —de l'autre, la domination de cette classe et de son État fait éclater la ville. (Lefebvre, 2000, pp. 144–145)[11]

According to the French philosopher, urban space is a social product; it cannot be thought of simply as an epistemological condition of departure detached from social reality. Physical and material space is always the entirety of social relations; it is the ground for unfolding the "common being" of the human species. Space is a "product" but also a "precondition" of social relations, as it makes possible encounters and clashes of individuals, composition and decomposition of bodies and discourses (Lefebvre, 1991). The city represents "the projection of society on the ground"; it is a social totality (*ensemble*) that captures society in its entirety, in spatial declination.

For Henri Lefebvre, the Paris Commune of 1871 represented the most concrete attempt at a political struggle for space, the figure of a political action rebelling against a class-based spatial organisation and the discursive-ideological space represented by the functionalist architecture of Georges Eugène Haussmann. Haussmann's architecture is the perfect expression of a process of abstraction from concrete space, reducing the concreteness and vitality of urban spaces in favour of homogenisation of the urban territory, functional to facilitate the unity of the process of production, distribution, and consumption of commodities[12] (Stanek, 2008).

As Engels had already pointed out, the "Haussmann method" was also intended to prevent the construction of barricades after the insurrections of' 48 (p. 71).

In *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,* Walter Benjamin comprehends that the desire for balance and rationalisation of urban space pursued by Haussmann implies

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[11] This urban expansion was accompanied by a deterioration in the architecture and urban environment. People are dispersed, especially workers, far from urban centres. Economic, social and cultural segregation dominated this urban expansion. The quantitative growth of the economy and productive forces has not led to social development, but on the contrary to a deterioration in social life. The suburbs are fragmented, they are rural towns. It is not just about Paris. The urbanisation of society is accompanied by a deterioration in urban life: the fragmentation of centres, now deprived of social life—people spread segregated across the space. There is a real contradiction here. I call it a contradiction of space. On the one hand, the dominant class and the state strengthen the city as a centre of power and political decision-making—on the other, the domination of this class and its state causes the city to break up.

[12] See Stanek (2008, pp. 62–79), who underlines the intrinsic connection between the notion of abstract work, historically determined by the development of the commodity form and the process of homogenisation of space carried out by functionalist architecture.

an attempt to defuse the conflicts and collisions that run through Paris. The philosopher speaks of "strategic embellishment" to indicate a precise urban planning strategy that assumes political aims of social stabilisation to guarantee security through the imposition of a new urban order:

> The true goal of Haussmann's projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in Paris impossible for all time. With the same end in mind, Louis Philippe had already introduced wooden paving. Nonetheless, barricades played a role in the February Revolution. Engels studies the tactics of barricade fighting. Haussmann seeks to neutralize these tactics on two fronts. Widening the streets is designed to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets are to furnish the shortest route between the barracks and the workers' districts. Contemporaries christen the operation "strategic embellishment." (Benjamin, 2002, p. 12)

What is at stake has become, for the Parisian insurgents in 1871, the capacity to organise a constituent power, that is, a new way of organising city spaces and, therefore, a new way of relating to urban space (Lefebvre, 1965). The Vendôme column was the symbol of Bonapartist's power: the Communards, by knocking down the column, realised what Marx had predicted in 1852: "When this imperial mantle falls at last onto the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze of Napoleon, high on the column in the Place Vendôme, will plunge to the ground" (Marx, 2002, p. 109). Revolutionary urbanism imagines an environment aimed at producing a continuous hub of possible encounters, organising space as an opportunity for play and festival rather than as a function of exchanges and goods. A social space that enhances the realisation of the individual requires an adequate symbolic articulation. Fighting for the "right to the city" also means taking into account the psychic effect that certain architectural and urban planning theories have on the inhabitants.

In her analysis of the days of the Paris Commune, Kristin Ross (2015) calls "Communal Luxury" the process of

> transforming the aesthetic coordinates of the entire community […]. The demand that beauty flourishes in spaces shared in common and not just in special privatized preserves means reconfiguring art to be fully integrated into everyday life […]. It means an art that will no longer live 'this poor thin life among a few exceptional men.' […] Making art lived, not superfluous or trivial, but vital and indispensable to the community. (pp. 91–92)

The social imaginary of space and time draws the horizon of meaning, hopes, and contradictions of the Communards. Therefore, Marx defines the experience of the Commune as a "working existence" (Marx, 2009, p. 46) because it displaces

> political onto seemingly peripheral areas of everyday life […]. Revolutionary struggle is diffuse as well as specifically directed, expressed throughout the various cultural spheres and institutional contexts, in specific conflicts and in the manifold transformations of individuals rather than in some rigid and polar opposition of capital and labor. (Ross, 1988, p. 33)

Lefebvre recounts the last days of the Commune, writing that the Parisian people, now overwhelmed by Thiers counter-revolutionary forces, decided to *"mourir avec ce qui est pour lui plus qu'un décore et plus qu'un cadre: sa ville, son corps"*[13] (Lefebvre, 1965, p. 22). The Parisian proletariat has the same relationship with its city that the artist has with his own work: a relationship of hybridisation, in which the city stands as an extension of the human body, in the sense of a city that takes on a body, becomes a body, with cells and tissues that continually regenerate, as new places of experimentation, as a response to the uses and needs of the rising urban proletariat.

The metaphor of the city as an extension of the human body also renders the image of cities marked by wounds and scars as a place of profound inequalities, discrimination, and proliferation of diseases (Harvey, 2003, pp. 25–46).

Lefebvre defines the city as a work of art (*oeuvre*) to describe the continuous process of hybridisation between the city and its inhabitants. The city as an oeuvre is distinct from the city as a product (*produit*), which instead suggests the reduction of urban land to mere exchange value, leaving it to the manipulation of technique and calculating rationality (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 66).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2002), in *The Social Contract*, poses a distinction between the "*ville*" understood as a mere material space and the "*cité*" as a place of citizenship and political rights.[14] This distinction is borrowed from Richard Sennett, and it is useful to grasp the consequences on the style of life of citizens when we conceive the city not as an *oeuvre* but as a product.

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[13] "Parisian people decided to die with what is for them more than a decoration and more than a frame: their city, their body."

[14] "The real meaning of this word has been almost completely erased among the moderns; most people take a town (*ville*) for a city (*cité*), and a burgess for a citizen. They do not know that houses make the town (*ville*), and that citizens make the city (*cité*)" (Rousseau, 2002, p. 164).

Sennett interprets the *ville* as the built physical space of the territory and the *cité* as the lived space of citizens, namely the way citizens inhabit and experience this territory (Sennett, 2019).[15] Haussmann's urban design, for Sennett, is a perfect example of strategic intervention "from above" on the *ville* in order to modify the *cité:* Haussmann places mobility at the centre of the project, the inhabitants' movements must be as fluid as those of commodities (Sennett, 2019, p. 42). Places thus become the intensification of the *Nervenleben*, the nervous life of the city—the planning of physical space influences lived space.

The Rousseauian distinction between *ville* and cité is also taken up by Etienne Balibar (2004), who reformulates the proposal of the "right to the city," meaning not only the processes of material re-appropriation of urban spaces (in the sense of the *ville*) by the urban proletariat but also the recognition of "the part of those who have no-part" within the public sphere, the active transformation of processes of exclusion into processes of inclusion within the city (*citè*).

The question of the "right to the city," for Balibar (2004), must face not only the need for material re-appropriation of urban spaces, but it must also address the demand for political recognition by "those who have no part": workers, unemployed, poor, women, immigrants. Considering the case of migrants, we note that the space of European cities is crossed every day by those who have the right to freedom of movement and those who are instead excluded in the regulatory framework based on the Schengen agreements. The claim for the right to citizenship is based on an idea of equality that is never given or presupposed but always actively produced as an imagination, transgressing the limits imposed by nature and traditional forms of life. It is, therefore, a matter of eradicating the issue of the right to the city and citizenship from principles linked to nationality, especially when this is understood as a mechanism for excluding foreigners.

According to Balibar (2004), *Le droit de cité* emerges to the fore through the struggle of immigrants *sans papiers*, without papers, who demonstrate to reject the notion of clandestinity that has been forcibly attributed to them by political power and pose the question of the right of entry and residence for foreigners.[16] The action of the *sans papiers* is an example of a right to the city "constructed from below" (Balibar, 2004, p. 48); their demonstration is first and foremost about gaining visibility, taking the floor, and demanding the right to argue their case, also making visible the mechanisms of discrimination

[15] Sennett develops the distinction already elaborated by Martin Heidegger between building and dwelling. In this regard, see Heidegger (1971).

[16] In 1996, a group of "undocumented" foreigners occupied the church of Saint-Bernard in Paris in order to claim their legalisation. In March 1997, Balibar read a text at a meeting organised in favour of the "Sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard." See Balibar (2004).

linked to immigration policies. The problem is therefore that of overcoming the model of citizenship considered as a status in order to re-think citizenship as a social relation capable of "democratizing borders" and establishing a model of right to the city in which the dimension of reciprocity prevails over territorial belonging.

The struggles of migrants redefine city boundaries again and again through a dialectic of conflict and solidarity, reactivating the original meaning of the noun "citizen," which in Latin and ancient Rome pointed out the dimension of relationship and reciprocity that defined Roman citizenship.

Emile Benveniste (1974, pp. 272–280) has in fact shown that, from a philological point of view, the Latin binomial *civis-civitas* indicates the priority of the relational element over territorial belonging, which emerges instead in the Greek binomial *polis-polites*. Benveniste points out the error usually made when translating *civis* with "citizen" since it would mean considering the term "citizen" derived from that of the city, *civitas*; such a translation operation, however, turns out to be a *hysteron proteron*. The word *civis*, in common linguistic usage in ancient Rome, was always accompanied by expressions such as *civis meus civis nostri*. The word thus acquired meaning only as a "reciprocal value" (Benveniste, 1974, p. 274) and not as an objective designation. One was only *civis* for another *civis,* so Benveniste proposes to translate *civis* as concitoyen, "co-citizen" or "fellow citizen".

The city, *civitas*, as a derivative of *civis*, then indicates the "having-place" of relations between the *"ensemble* of cives" (Benveniste, 1974, p. 276). The parts, the *cives*, will always be more than the whole, the *civitas*, a surplus to the constituted space of the political community.

On the contrary, in the Greek context, the relationship of territorial belonging prevails over that of reciprocity. In this case, the noun *polites*, citizen, is derived from the fundamental term, *polis*, the city. The primary datum is the territorial space of the city, in which a specific *genos* has its roots. The polis constitutes that organic "whole" on which the parts depend and to which certain roles and functions are assigned. The Roman *civitas,* on the contrary, is a pure "having-place" of relations; it is an insubstantial reality, open to multiple ways of being together that take shape and unity through laws, beyond any ethnic-religious determinacy, as was the case instead of the Greek polis.

This linguistic difference signals an original tension in the idea of the city. The *civitas* is not the origin but the result of a process in which the relation has priority and precedence over the constituted term, the city. From here, the idea that the city is not a fixed entity but a dynamic one, marked by uninterrupted encroachments and global dissemination. Mobility is linked to the idea of *civitas augescens*, a city that grows

continuously, that constantly develops thanks to its capacity to accept *"peregrinos, hostes et victos"* (Cacciari, 2009). The *polis* is the seat of the rooting of the *genos* within certain boundaries; the peculiar characteristic of the *civitas*, on the other hand, is that of being *"augescens,"* of growing, developing, expanding, and going beyond its limits.

This ability to overflow the borders, embedded in the genetic code of the *civitas*, tells us something important about the transition from the Fordist city to the contemporary metropolis. The metropolis represents a moment of rupture from the idea of the city precisely because the metropolis, like the Roman *civitas*, continually exceeds its boundaries; its "*augescens*" and space can no longer be planned.

This process depends first of all on the transformation of labour, after the increasing integration of linguistic, cognitive, affective, and relational elements in the production of wealth (Marazzi, 2008; Virno, 2004). The city studied by Lefebvre was conceived and organised on the factory model marked by the Taylorist labour organisation. Lefebvre criticised the functionalist architecture of Le Corbusier, a pupil of Haussmann, who applied Taylorist principles in the planning of the city: Le Corbusier attempted to tame urban space by conceiving it as a "concrete abstraction" (Stanek, 2008). In the same way as abstract labour, urban space is considered abstract insofar as it is quantifiable, homogenous, and standardised, and it is concrete because it conditions and alters social relations; it functions as a technology of power pursuing certain political aims, as we have already noted in analysing Haussmann's renovation of Paris.

To comprehend the city's transformation into a metropolis, it is therefore decisive to focus on the changes that have occurred in the production of wealth. Production in the metropolis is no longer concentrated in specific spaces, such as the factory in the Fordist city. Rather, it is everywhere, disseminated: it incorporates the metropolis itself (Negri, 2018). It is interesting to ask how common goods are produced, organised, and appropriated on a metropolitan scale; economists call "externalities" factors that are external to the work process taking place within the companies and are capable of producing effects on the work process itself. Externalities are, for example, the high level of education of a population that can produce positive externalities for companies; negative externalities are, on the other hand, pollution, traffic congestion, and crime levels, which may influence the value of a property. In this respect, says Harvey:

> In urban systems it seems reasonable to suppose that the larger and more complex they are the greater is the significance of externality effects. In what follows I shall tend to the view that much of what goes on in a city (particularly in the political

> arena) can be interpreted as an attempt to organize the distribution of externality effects to gain income advantages. (Harvey, 2009, p. 58)

In a broader sense, externalities are also the affective, linguistic, and cognitive networks established in the interaction between the individuals who inhabit the metropolis. Since the *ensemble* of social relations has become an indispensable element from which capital extracts profits, it becomes difficult to plan the logic behind the unpredictable and aleatory interactions between individuals.

In the metropolis, it is impossible to fix boundaries *a priori* because the boundaries are posed by the communicative interactions between the different singularities. At the same time, urban planning can no longer claim to assign specific functions to urban elements according to the model of the organic totality, of which the Greek polis represents the conceptual genetic root and the Fordist city the modern realisation.

Rem Koolhaas (1995), in his writings, shows the disenchanted portrait of this space that can no longer be planned—unplannable because it is delirious, dislocated, deterritorialised, and accumulative. Koolhaas calls "Bigness" the metropolitan excess that can no longer be controlled by a single architectural gesture, or even by any combination of architectural gestures. "Bigness" depends on regimes of freedom; it is the assembly of maximum difference (Koolhaas, 1995). It becomes an instrument of other forces, which depend on the encounters and exchanges between metropolitan singularities, and these forces overcome the dichotomies of city/periphery, inside/outside, *ville/banlieue.* There is no such thing as an "outside," but only folds, overlapping and proliferating planes. For example, the banlieues are not an exterior of the metropolis but rather a folding of it, lines of flights (Revel, 2012). Koolhaas then declares the end of the desire for balance and planning expressed by Le Corbusier's architectural ideas.

The metropolis is excess, disproportion. It is "Bigness," says Koolhaas (1995). The boundary of the metropolis can only be established by communicative networks, but it is clearly a boundary that is in permanent crisis, existing only to be surpassed. The metropolis unleashes an energy that is de-territorialising anti-spatial; the spatial dimension is absorbed by the temporal one.

The rhythm of the metropolis demands speed, bustle, and mobilisation. This produces an exaltation of the virtual, understood as pure *dynamis*, intellectual energy, and immaterial communication at the detriment of the spatial dimension (Cacciari, 2009, p. 38). Yet, this time/space compression can only be achieved through a continuous production, reproduction, reconfiguration of space. In this regard, space is an opportunity for capital, but it is also a "limit"—its fixity is a problem for the capital's need for

movement and flexibility. Focusing on the multiple meanings of the English verb "to fix" ("to pin down, "secure something in space," "to solve a problem"), David Harvey argues:

> While these disparate meanings of "to fix" appear contradictory, they are all internally related by the idea that something (a thing, a problem, a craving) can be pinned down and secured. In my own use of the term, the contradictory meanings can be played out to reveal something important about the geographical dynamics of capitalism and the crisis tendencies that attach thereto. In particular, I use it to focus on the particular problem of "fixity" (in the first sense of being secured in place) versus motion and mobility of capital. I note, for example, that capitalism has to fix space (in immoveable structures of transport and communication nets, as well as in built environments of factories, roads, houses, water supplies, and other physical infrastructures) in order to overcome space (achieve a liberty of movement through low transport and communication costs). This leads to one of the central contradictions of capital: that it has to build a fixed space (or "landscape") necessary for its own functioning at a certain point in its history only to have to destroy that space (and devalue much of the capital invested therein) at a later point in order to make way for a new "spatial fix" (openings for fresh accumulation in new spaces and territories) at a later point in its history. (2001, p. 25)

Our body also occupies a place; it has a certain spatial form. Even more importantly, the living body is the substratum of labour-power (the *ensemble* of linguistic, cognitive, and affective faculties of the human mind); it becomes an object to be governed precisely because it is the material support of labour-power, which is the very crucial element for the reproduction of capital (Virno, 2004, p. 83).

On the basis of an inclusive/disjunctive dynamic, labour-power is incorporated by capital, including the entire population in the metropolis as a productive space (inclusive dynamic); continuous movements and radical nomadism force the labour-power into precariousness, and it often has to face exclusionary barriers and borders when it is forced to migrate (disjunctive dynamic).

However, the metropolis is also a possibility for encountering and constructing struggles from the exploitation of the urban proletariat, capable of transforming exploitation and suffering into emancipatory power. The excess of potential and forces that innervate the metropolis, "Bigness," as Koolhaas says, is included in the process of capital valorisation but can also trigger a transformative process. The urban proletariat acts in a situation of ambivalence, in the *decalage* that constitutes both block and poten-

cy of the productive forces (Negri, 2018).

The politics of the metropolis is then the organisation of encounters capable of transforming "Bigness" into emancipatory power. The metropolitan labour force thus represents not only an obstacle but also a factor of resistance to the processes of "creative destruction" of space by capital, constituting that "metropolitan body" which is an alternative to the attempts for the resurgence of territorial communities and to the yearning for a return to the ancient spaces of the Greek *polis*.

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