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The Urbanization
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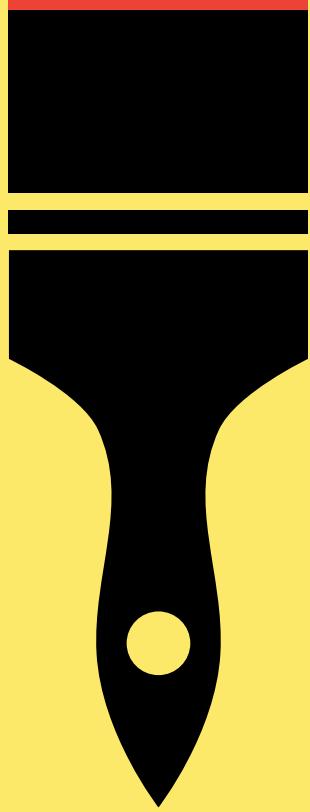
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In cities dominated by socialist elements, they make the effort to create means of social education, such as youth clubs, scientific conferences, and so forth.

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—Socialists of Bobigny, 1910



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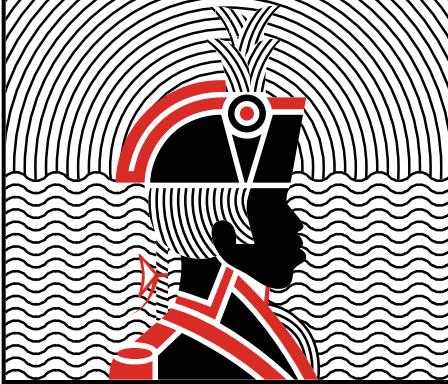
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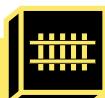
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The People's Playground

If you're a hip urban dweller, liberal pundits figure you're ready to hit the swingset now that it's fall. "Wait Your Turn for the Swings at Boston's Adult Playground," admonishes a recent headline in the *Atlantic's* CityLab, an outlet both symptomatic of and beholden to the neoliberalization of the city. The site in question is not an outdoor burlesque, but an actual playground with lighted swings for techie entrepreneurs in South Boston's new "Innovation District."

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the city was home to socialist ambitions, the site of mass politics that aimed to change the world. But these days, it's more likely to be championed by technocrats like Michael Bloomberg and Edward Glaeser or blogged about at outlets like CityLab, whose vision of urban life is more concerned with disruptive "solutions" than class struggle.

Radical critics were once at the forefront of urban thought and practice: in the 1950s and 60s, groups like the Situationists sought to counter the convention and alienation of life under capitalism by imbuing the city with the sense that everyday life held possibility, that it could be inventive and extraordinary. But without strong left movements working to transform the realm of possibility at a structural



level, playfulness and spontaneity have proved easily coopted and commodified. In the “creative city,” it’s capitalists who break down barriers between work and leisure, encouraging us to value experience, reject routine, and treat urban space as a giant playground to be explored.

Meanwhile, Jane Jacobs-style urbanism has become all too adaptable to liberal appropriation. Her celebration of mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods has been used in the service of gentrifying, high-income developments. Jacobs’s praise of the human connection in small-scale communities has likewise been assimilated into theories of the city as creative, productive, and prosperous — prime territory for the growth of capital.

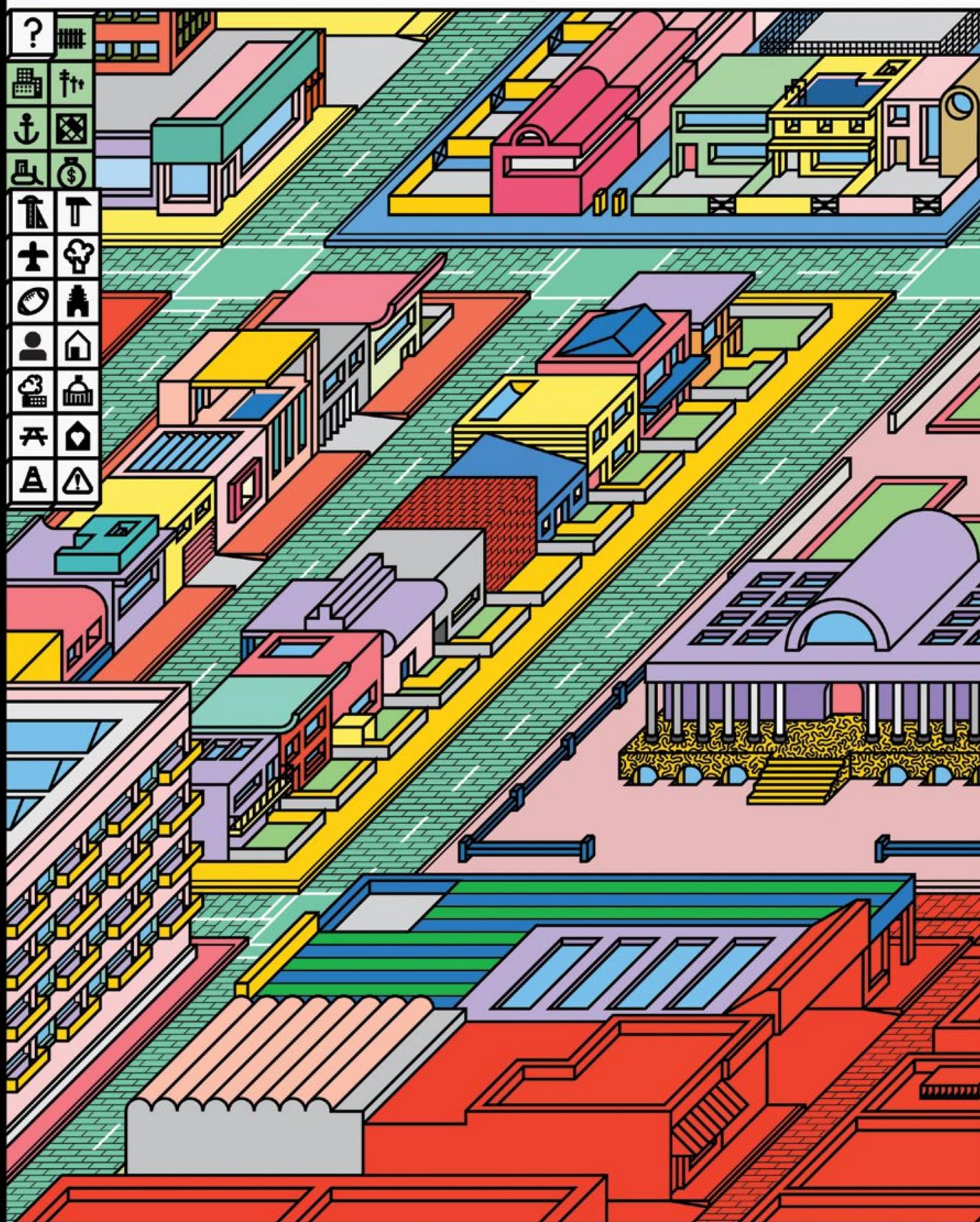
But of course, for many people, life in today’s privatized cities is anything but emancipatory. The rhetoric of the modern city belies the same old dirty politics hidden within gleaming algorithms, techno-efficient policies, and sharing economies.

In this issue, we explore how neoliberalism creeps into the city in the form of fun and games, from SimCity to the Olympics; how private property gains ground as public housing is destroyed and new life forms are created; and how developers and investors suck up profits through wonky zoning laws and financing schemes. Beneath progressive technocracy lurks the mechanics of class society.

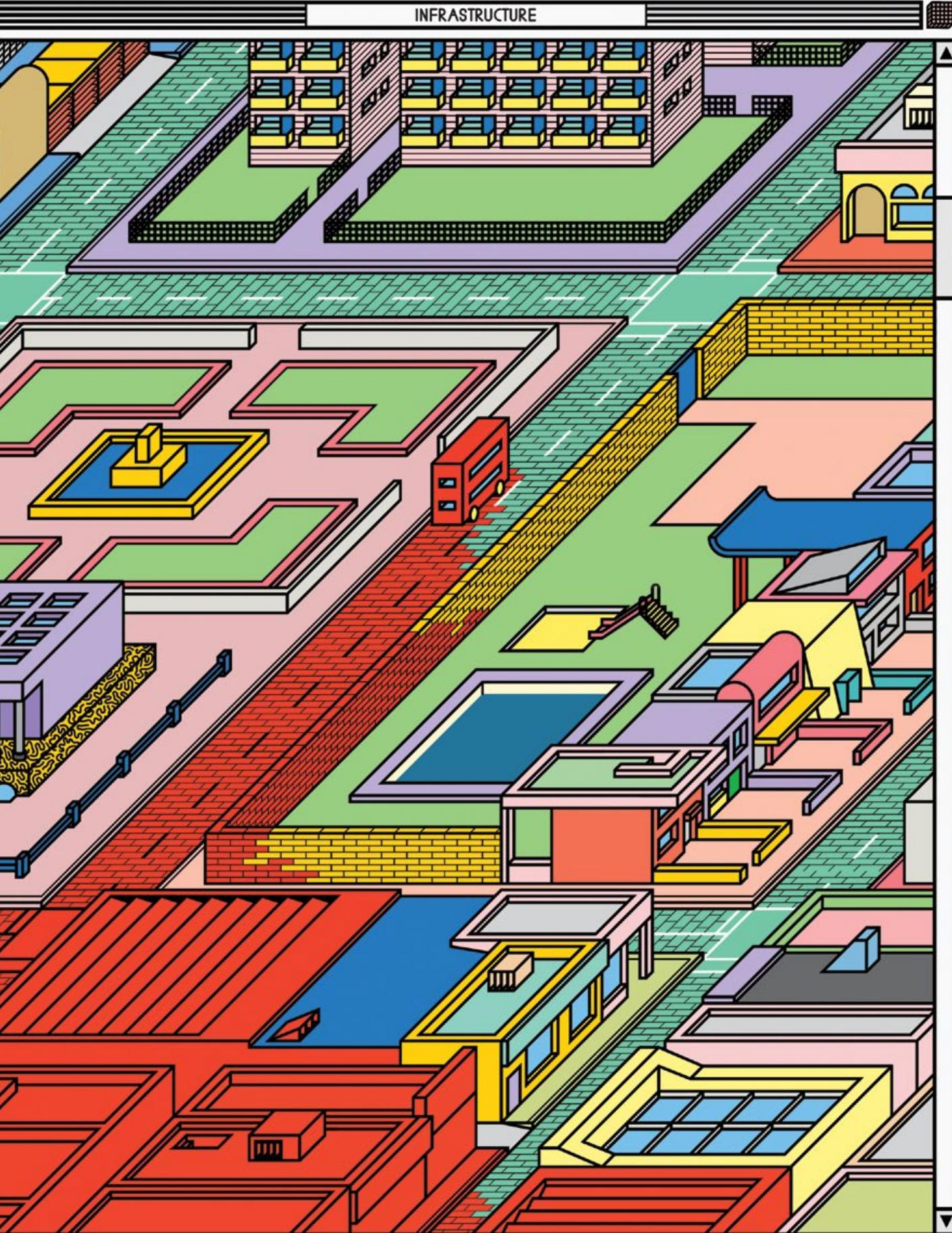
We look to the socialist cities of the past and those to come. We aim to reclaim the city as a space for struggle and solidarity in pursuit of needs and wants: public housing, parks, decent work, and plentiful leisure — with the possibility of an occasional escape. To realize the city’s emancipatory promise will require mass movements led by workers, challenges to property rights in its many forms, and collective feminist reimaginings of urban space and work.

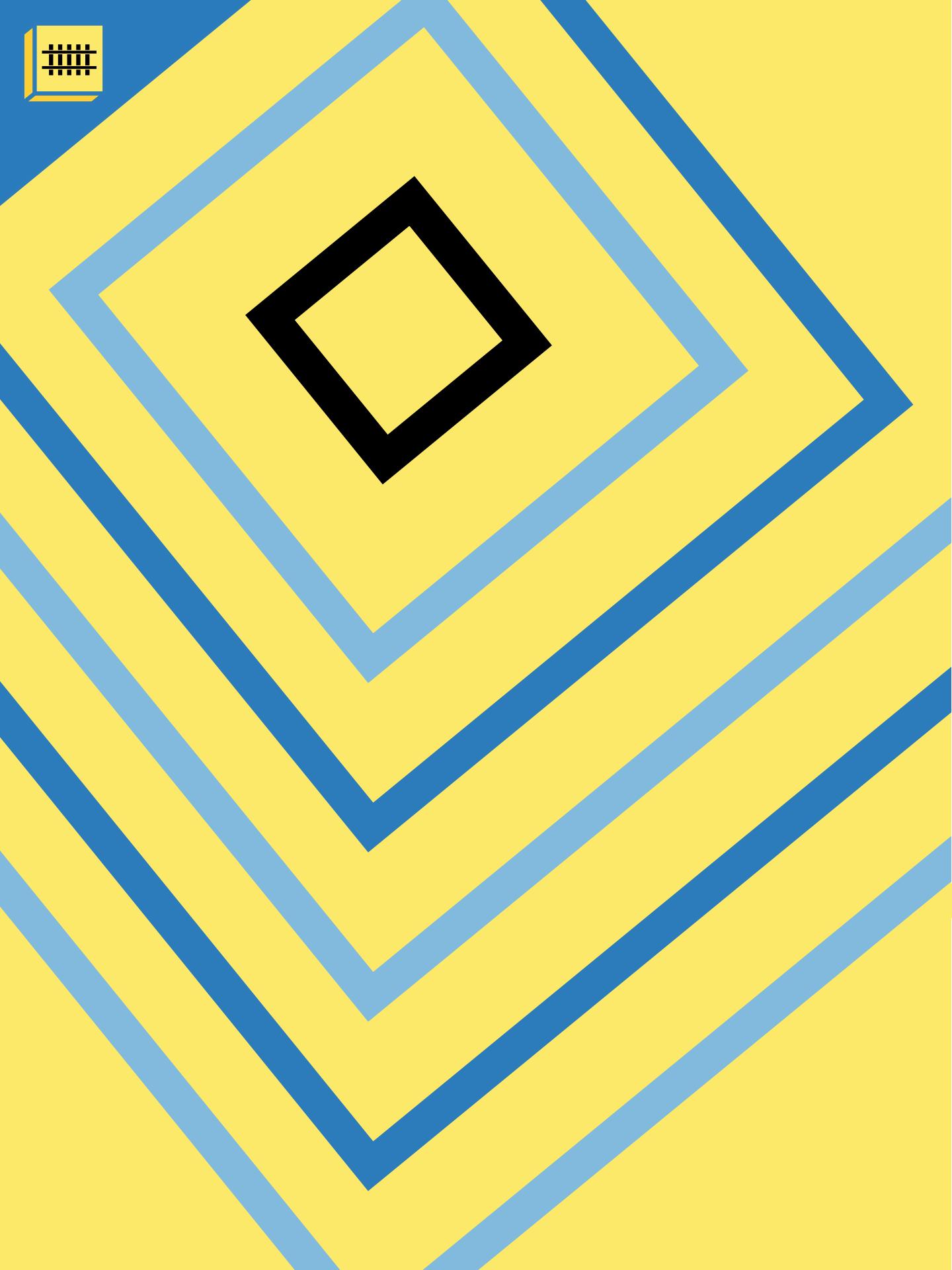
This task of our generation of socialists is to make this alternative a reality — moving beyond the creative-class politics of Richard Florida into the renewed working-class politics of the future. ■

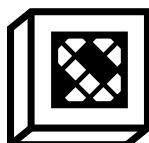
FILE SPEED OPTIONS DISASTERS PRIORITY ISSUE



INFRASTRUCTURE







De Blasio's Doomed Housing Plan

By embracing inclusionary zoning, Mayor de Blasio gets to put forth a big, bold plan for reducing inequalities without fundamentally challenging capitalists.

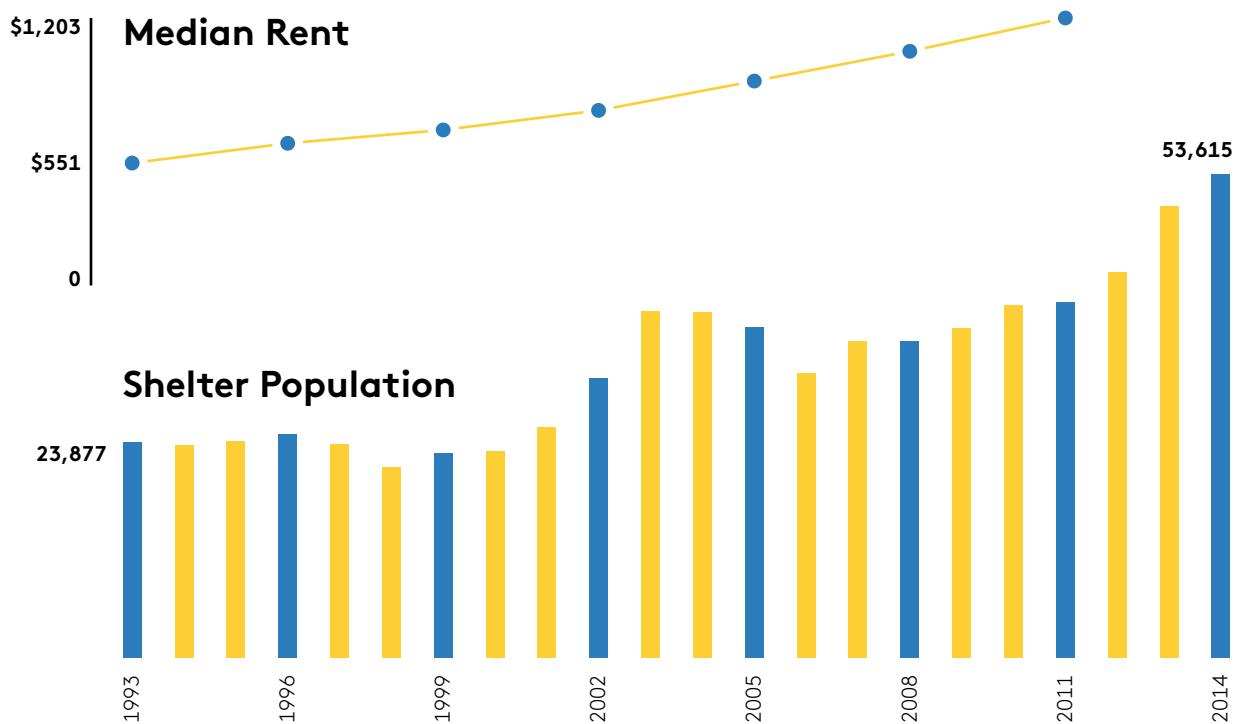
Samuel Stein



He called it the “most ambitious affordable housing program” ever initiated by an American city. It would “change the face of this city forever” as “the largest, fastest affordable housing plan ever attempted at a local level.”



NYC's Housing Crisis



On 5 May 2014, at the site of a construction project in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, New York City's progressive new mayor Bill de Blasio sketched the outlines for his housing plan: 80,000 new low-cost homes, 120,000 more homes preserved. It would put Robert Moses and Michael Bloomberg to shame, dispatching construction cranes to the city's every nook and cranny in the pursuit of affordable housing. "This plan," de Blasio proclaimed, "will create opportunity for so many people who are currently being priced out of our city. It will create affordability in the midst of what has been the greatest affordability crisis this city has ever experienced."

There is no doubt that New York needs a radical expansion of its affordable housing stock. In a city

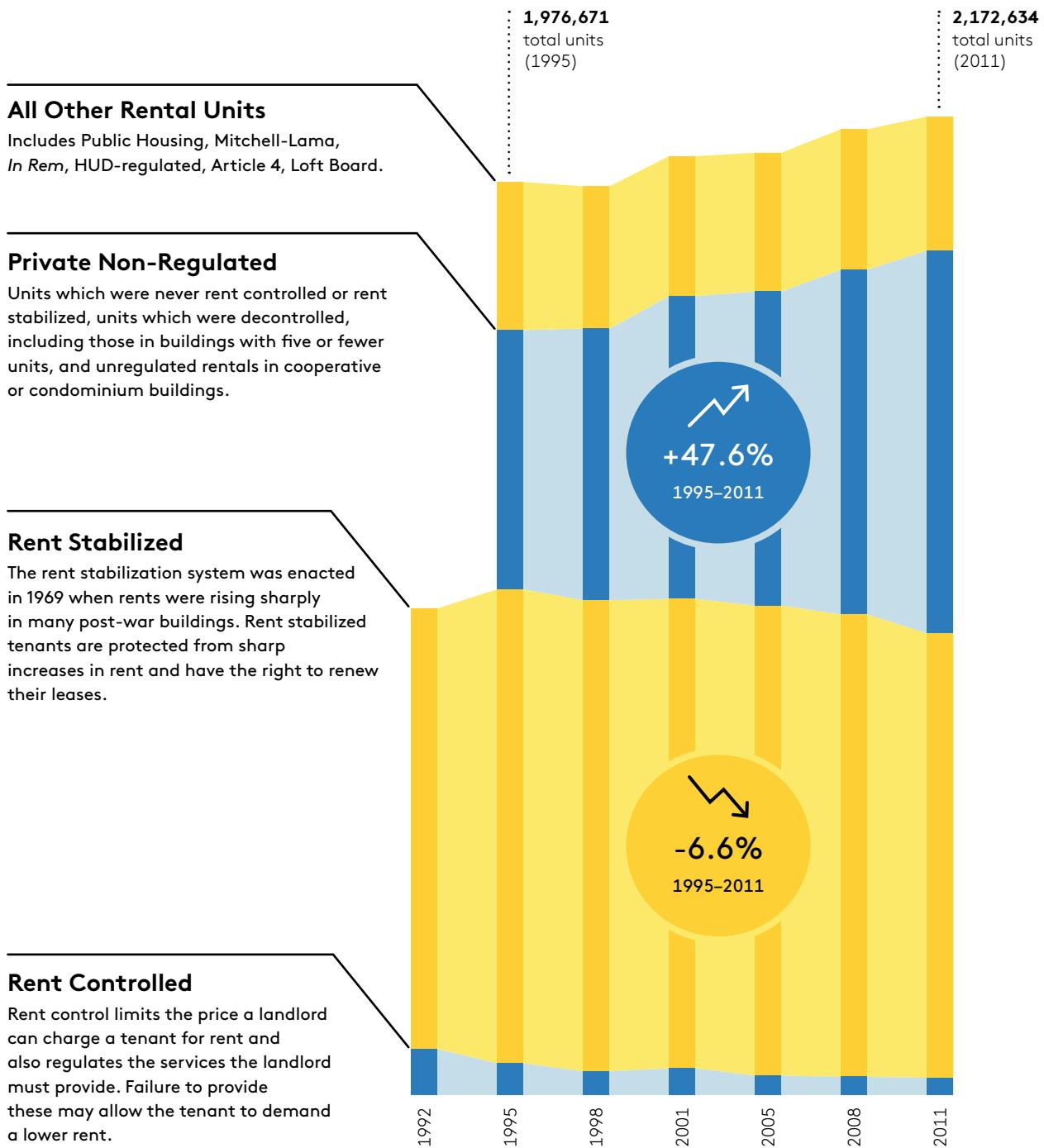
where almost 70 percent of residents are renters, one third of tenants pay more than half their income in rent. Between 2000 and 2012, rents rose much faster than wages — 75 percent rent increases compared to 31 percent raises. A minimum-wage earner would have to work 139 hours per week to be able to afford the average apartment. More than 60,000 people, including 22,000 children, are homeless. For a city of extraordinary wealth, New York is terrible at housing its vast low-wage workforce.

The Consensus Housing Policy

De Blasio's solution relies mostly on one tool: inclusionary zoning. It's an extremely popular program among housing experts and advocates, and is becoming

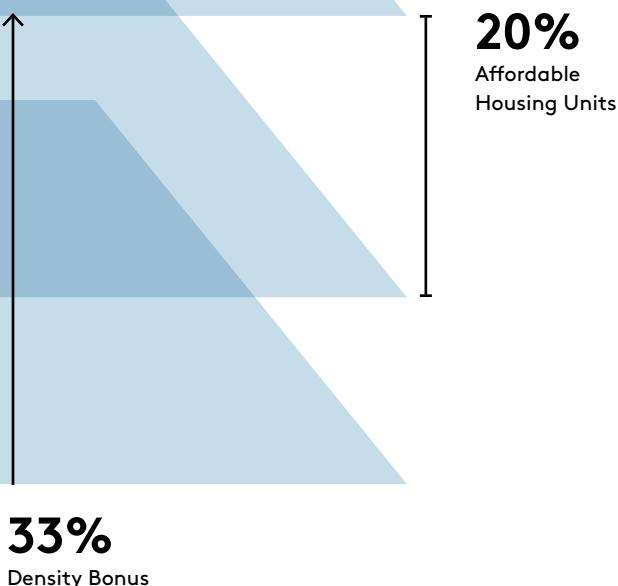


The Demise of Housing Regulation





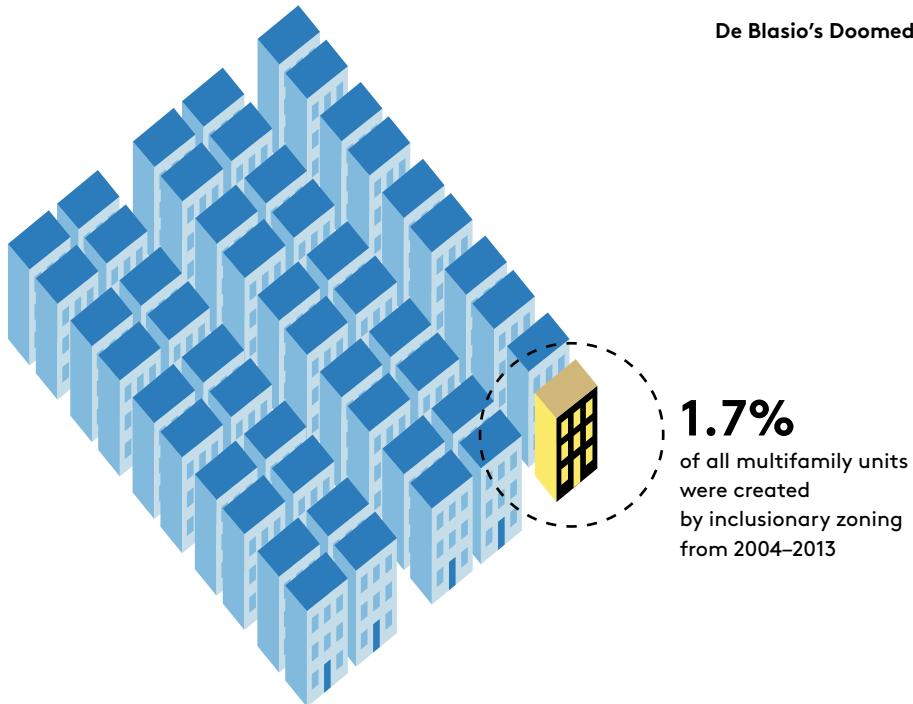
Too Little, Too Late



something like the country's consensus housing policy. Hundreds of US municipalities have adopted this approach, including Boston, Washington, DC, Denver, San Diego, and San Francisco.

The details vary from case to case, but the idea is for private developers to incorporate some percentage of below-market-rate units into their new developments. These units can be rented or sold, as long as they are targeted towards households within specific income brackets. The affordable apartments are often subsidized by government programs, usually in the form of tax credits. Inclusionary mandates are frequently coupled with increased zoning capacity, such as the ability to build more on given parcels of land than the law currently allows. In doing this, the state creates value out of thin air, but it recaptures a percentage of the profits through affordability mandates.

New York started experimenting with inclusionary zoning 27 years ago, but the program really took off during the Bloomberg administration, when more than a third of city was rezoned in 122 targeted neighborhood actions. Many of these rezonings were resisted by local residents, who saw them as a Trojan horse for gentrification. To counter this narrative,



the Department of City Planning often used inclusionary zoning as a way to sweeten the deal and show that the city's actions would provide new homes for the working class. The standard Bloomberg model allowed developers to build 20 percent bigger if they set aside 20 percent of the new apartments at below-market rates.

There are two common and accepted criticisms of this framework. First, it hasn't actually produced much low-cost housing. The affordable units created by Bloomberg's inclusionary zoning account for just 1.7 percent of housing growth between 2005 and 2013. They failed to even match population growth, let alone deal with rising inequality.

The other critique is that the "affordable housing" that is available is not actually affordable to most New Yorkers. As with a lot of other programs, the inclusionary rents are based on Area Median Income (AMI) — the federal government's calculation based on incomes, rents, and construction costs in the city and its wealthier suburbs. In 2013, AMI for an average household in the New York metro area was \$77,310; in the city alone, however, the average family made \$50,711. Under Bloomberg, most of the inclusionary housing was targeted to households

making 80 percent of AMI, or roughly \$61,920; that was more than the city's average income, let alone a given neighborhood's standard. Some new apartments were built for "middle-income" households making 175 percent of AMI, or \$135,293, with rents around \$3,380 a month.

If the critique of inclusionary zoning is that it produced too few apartments at too high rents, then the solution seems obvious: the city should force more developers to build inclusionary housing, and to do so with better income targets.

That's basically what Mayor de Blasio is recommending. De Blasio proposes that the city build 80,000 new affordable apartments over the next ten years, mostly through inclusionary zoning. Much has been made of the "mandatory" nature of this program (as opposed to Bloomberg's voluntary "bonus" system), but it will not be universal. Only neighborhoods that are upzoned for bigger buildings and higher densities will see inclusionary development.

We don't yet know how much low-cost housing will be included in each building, but de Blasio has signaled support for a 20 percent low-income, 30 percent middle-income, and 50 percent market-rate split. By wholeheartedly embracing



inclusionary zoning, the new mayor gets to put forth a big, bold plan for reducing inequalities without fundamentally challenging the dynamics between developers and communities, landlords and tenants, or housing and the market.

The de Blasio plan for affordable housing doubles down on the Bloomberg model, rather than rethinking its approach.

A Boon for Developers

Inclusionary zoning is a fatally flawed program. It's not just that it doesn't produce enough units, or that the apartments it creates aren't affordable, though both observations are undeniably true. The real problem with inclusionary zoning is that it marshals a multitude of rich people into places that are already experiencing gentrification. The result is a few new cheap apartments in neighborhoods that are suddenly and completely transformed.

De Blasio wants to use inclusionary zoning to create 16,000 apartments for families making \$42,000. That's just 3 percent of the need for such apartments in the city today, according to the plan's own figures. At the same time, the mayor's policies would build 100,000 more market-rate apartments in the same neighborhoods. What will happen when these rich people arrive? Rents in the surrounding area will rise; neighborhood stores will close; more working-class people will be displaced by gentrification than will be housed in the new inclusionary complexes.

Tom Angotti, the director of the Hunter College Center for Community Planning and Development, argues that inclusionary zoning's proponents "deal with housing as if it existed in a free market — as if it were just a matter of individual apartments combined. But it exists in a land market, where values are determined largely by location and zoning capacity. In areas with high land values, the new inclusionary development will just feed the fire of gentrification."

Worst of all, inclusionary zoning could actually incentivize the destruction of existing affordable housing. Many New York City neighborhoods are filled with rent-regulated apartments, often at lower densities than the new inclusionary zoning rules would allow. The average income for rent-stabilized

tenants is \$37,000; for rent controlled tenants it's \$29,000. Both are significantly lower than the income targets for many inclusionary apartments.

When neighborhoods are upzoned to allow bigger buildings, rent-stabilized landlords will have every reason to sell their properties to speculative developers. The new buyers could then evict all the tenants, knock down the existing properties, and build something bigger and more expensive. A percentage of the new building would be affordable, but the outcome would likely be a net loss in low-cost apartments and a major hit to the rent-regulated housing stock. So far, most inclusionary developments have been built on empty lots and converted commercial sites. But if the program is dramatically expanded, inclusionary zoning could actually hasten the loss of affordable housing in New York.

Even if all this happens, the plan will likely be touted as a success. The new affordable apartments will be easy to spot, but those lost will not. Inclusionary zoning might displace more poor people than it houses, but when the system's casualties aren't counted, they aren't seen.

While some free-marketers at the Manhattan Institute, the Congress for the New Urbanism, and the *New York Post* are pushing back against the plan, Big Real Estate is lining up in support. They want to stay on the mayor's good side, of course, but they also know a deal when they see one. The City Hall press release announcing the proposal came with a ringing endorsement from Steven Spinola, the president of the Real Estate Board of New York and one of the most powerful lobbyists in the state. It also included praise from Bill Rudin, whose company is responsible for the plan to convert St. Vincent's Hospital into a luxury condo complex; opposing that development was a centerpiece of the de Blasio campaign.

Developers know inclusionary zoning will ultimately bring them greater profits. It is a sort of neoliberal win-win-win: the real estate industry gets to keep on building and making lots of money; cities get an influx of upper-income taxpayers, while offering some support to the working class; and nonprofit developers get new contracts for housing construction and management. Rather than curbing speculation or aggressively taxing landlords,



inclusionary zoning keeps the urban growth machine primed and ready to build. It allows cities to address their housing crises without challenging the norms of neoliberal urbanism or slowing governments' retreat from public housing and welfare commitments. What this and other public-private partnerships will not do is fix the city's perpetual housing crisis.

There are ways to make inclusionary zoning work better than it has so far. It could be used only on vacant lots, or in neighborhoods that currently have no affordable housing whatsoever. Alternatively, it could be applied as a blanket over the entire city, so that the rules cover all new construction, whether or not it results in increased density. However, this is the way inclusionary zoning functions in San Francisco, and clearly it has not transformed that city into a beacon of affordability.

There is an Alternative

The truth is, cities know how to create affordable housing. The simplest, most direct, and cheapest way to do it is to build or acquire public housing, and actually maintain it well. Public housing not only provides affordable homes, but takes land off the speculative market, acting as a bulwark against gentrification.

We also know that rent controls are the most effective strategy for keeping private housing prices down. The strength of rent regulation is its universality: rather than applying to a small percentage of otherwise exorbitant housing, it can keep all rents in check. New York's rent laws are filled with loopholes, but those loopholes can be closed as easily as they were created, and tenants around the state are mobilizing for such reforms. The regulatory framework could even be expanded to cover commercial and community spaces, which would go a long way toward broader neighborhood stabilization.

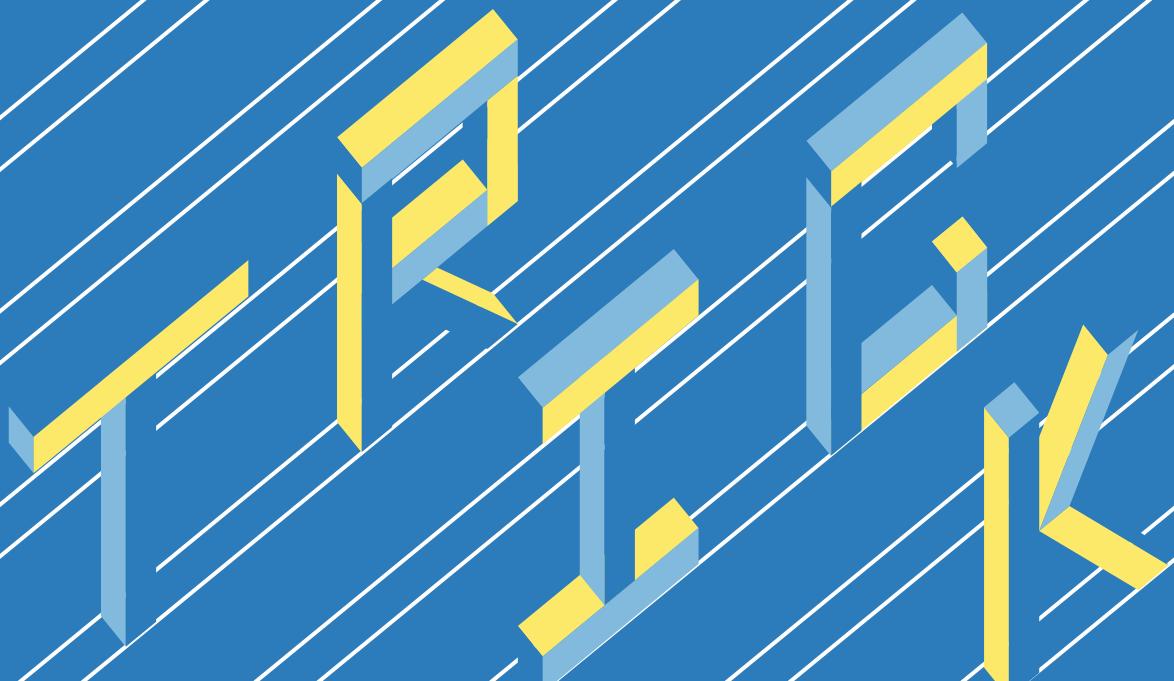
Democratically controlled community land trusts remain the best way forward in today's context, when government is reluctant to either finance public housing or dramatically expand rent regulations. The model has many variations, but in most cases it pairs a piece of land owned by a non-profit with a building owned by a mutual housing association, which sells or rents the apartments at

low costs and with limited outside management. If people can use these tools to take land off the market and develop permanently affordable alternatives, they can effectively decommodefy their housing and reclaim community control.

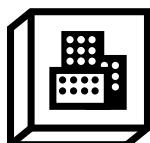
The solutions are out there, but the political will is not. Inclusionary zoning — a housing policy built on displacement — seems to be the most government is willing to do. And many leaders in the housing movement continue to support it, despite its failures. They argue that some new affordable housing is better than none, and that the program can be tweaked to produce better results. One group, however, has refused to endorse this policy. Picture the Homeless, an organization of homeless New Yorkers, has consistently challenged policy orthodoxies and pushed the boundaries of debate around housing, property, and land. Their position is that inclusionary zoning will do nothing for those in the shelters and the streets, and cannot possibly solve the city's housing crises.

Scott Andrew Hutchins, an active member of Picture the Homeless, told me he thought the inclusionary plan was "a very sick joke." That day, he had gone to apply for a job in the Bronx that paid about \$20,800 a year. While he was there, he saw a sign for a new inclusionary development. Its smallest apartments were for people making \$28,355. He knows the system is not for him. "Basically all these people are doing is creating more housing for people who don't live here to move here, and pushing out the people who do live here. It's creating too much housing we can't afford."

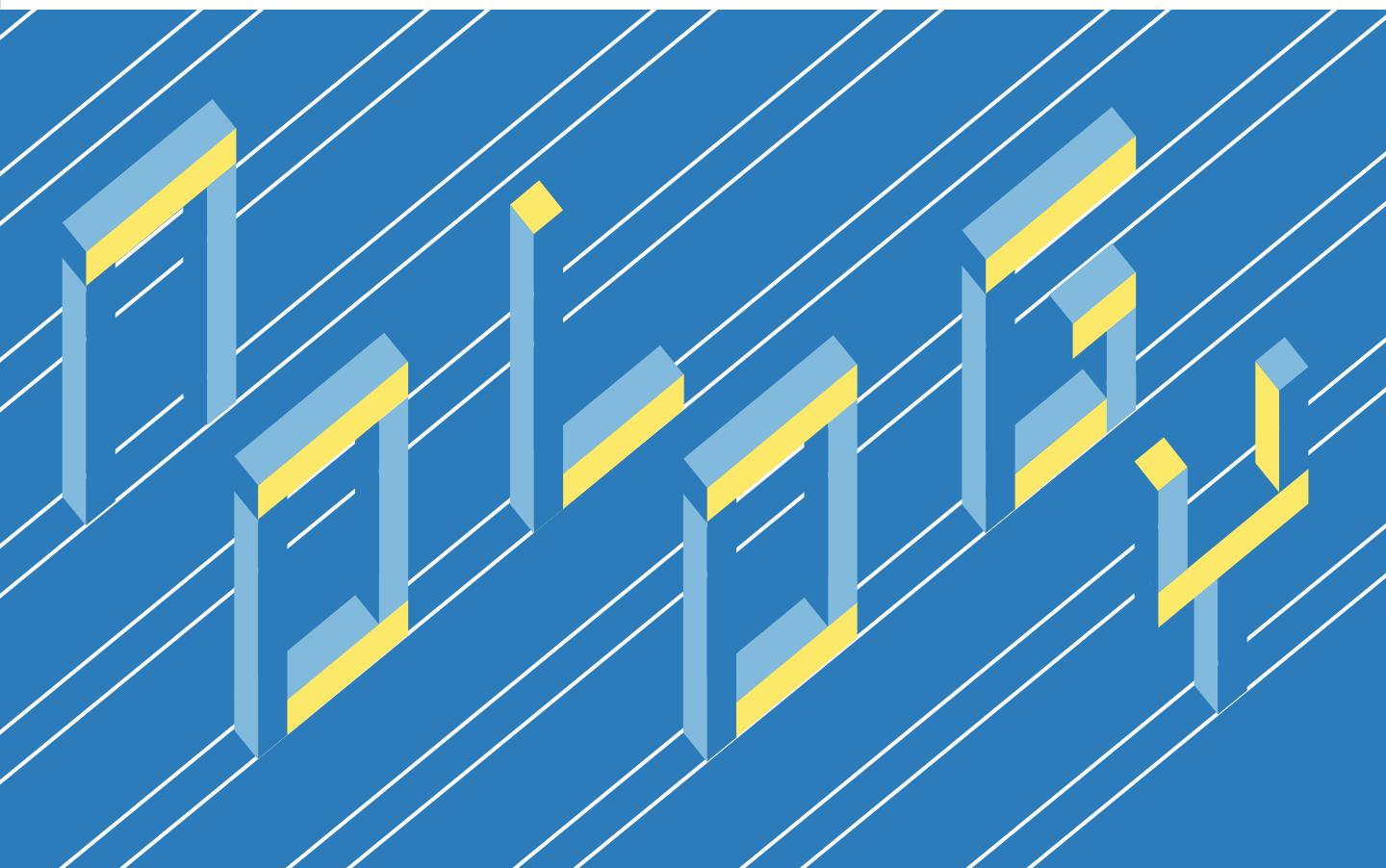
Politicians and policymakers treat housing like a puzzle to be solved with the right balance of subsidies and profits. But affordable housing isn't a mystery, it's a contradiction: it can't be done in a way that benefits both capital and workers in equal measure. There are ways to do it well, but they are not profitable. There are ways to do it poorly but profitably, and that's exactly what inclusionary zoning does. We need housing policies that confront capitalism while providing a genuine social good; inclusionary zoning does neither. As long as it remains the consensus position for politicians, nonprofits, and developers alike, we will see no end to the housing crisis. ■



The destruction of public housing
in Atlanta and Chicago
exposes capitalism's violent logic.



Tricknology 101



Maya
Dukmasova

T

hey had a lot of tricknology, AHA did. One minute it was one thing, next minute it was another," Shirley Hightower said. The Atlanta Housing Authority had bulldozed her home several years earlier. Sitting in her daughter's living room on the westernmost edge of Atlanta, she recalled these events with a mix of resentment and nostalgia.



Between 2007 and 2009, Hightower crusaded against the AHA in an attempt to save Bowen Homes, the public housing project where she had raised her children and lived for many years. She had hoped that the authority would redevelop the city's projects without displacing the community. Instead, many of Hightower's neighbors moved out into homelessness, unpredictability, and isolation. Nothing ever got built on the site of Bowen Homes. "It's just pretty green grass."

Tricknology is the word she used to describe how the AHA got its way. Hightower and her neighbors wanted to see an end to the stigma associated with living in public housing. They wanted the projects to become as they once were: stable family neighborhoods where "you didn't know you were poor." But the AHA had other plans. It had chosen to view public housing as unfixable.

In a 2009 essay called "How Neoliberalism Makes its World," political scientist Timothy Mitchell posited that neoliberalism should be understood as a process. Through his examination of the history of a land titling program in Peru, Mitchell argued that neoliberal programs are implemented to create test-case conditions for neoliberal policies. These "natural experiments" are designed to demonstrate the validity of the political agenda already in motion. As she told her story, Hightower was describing how neoliberalism has made its city. What happened in Atlanta entailed the same self-serving production and interpretation of certain facts about the poor that Mitchell observed in Peru. This cycle, beginning with the idea that public housing is doomed to fail and ending with its demolition, has been key to the "revitalization" of urban space over the past twenty-five years.

Throughout the eighties and nineties, images of decrepit and dangerous projects in Chicago made the case for eradicating public housing altogether. But the shift to the model of semi-private subsidized housing that is replacing the projects is deeply rooted in Atlanta. That city has become a paradigm for mixed-income redevelopment and a mass transition to vouchers. Meanwhile, in New York, the fate of public housing has entailed neither the demolition of thousands of homes for low-income families and seniors nor the profiteering of private developers.

The story of public housing in these three cities reveals much about the ongoing neoliberalization of urban space. It doesn't just demonstrate the obvious trend in the privatization of public resources; it exposes the logic at the heart of neoliberalism.

Atlanta's Techwood Homes

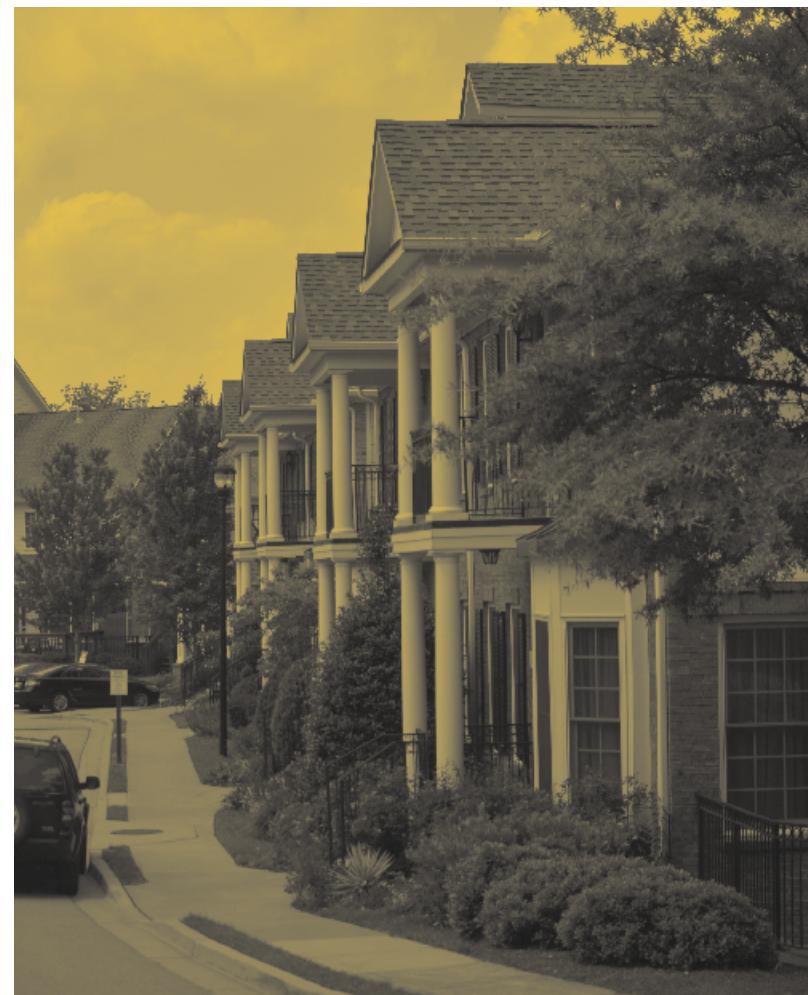
In the mid 1990s, Chicago public housing projects comprised eleven of the nation's fifteen poorest census tracts. After years of being a bureaucratic backwater, the Chicago Housing Authority had become corrupt and incompetent. Its executives embezzled money from the agency. Meanwhile, conditions in high-rise projects like the Henry Horner Homes and Cabrini-Green had deteriorated to such an extent that residents left en masse. Crime spiraled out of control as the city abandoned policing. Mail wasn't delivered, garbage wasn't picked up, and street lights weren't fixed.

The disorder within the housing authority and escalating gang violence in the projects led the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, which funds public housing nationwide) to take over the CHA in 1995. At the same time, big changes were brewing in Atlanta. In 1990, that city had won its bid to host the 1996 Centennial Olympics; the predictable rush to "clean up" downtown ensued. The planned site of the games bordered the Techwood-Clark Howell projects, an epicenter of poverty and crime that stood in the way of the city's Olympic dreams. Just as the CHA's reputation was hitting rock bottom, Atlanta emerged as a shining beacon for the future of public housing.

When Techwood Homes, the first public housing project in the US, was completed in 1935, it transformed the racially mixed area of Techwood Flats (called a "human garbage dump" by a local real estate magnate) into a "model community." In his recent book *Purging the Poorest*, Lawrence Vale points out that the families displaced from Techwood Flats were, ironically, not the ones who moved into the new public housing. The justification for public investment in slum clearance and public housing construction was that it would uplift those who lived in the debased physical and social environments of the slums. Yet the new homes were reserved for the



Cupola Building, the only Techwood building still standing. It's in the National Register of Historic Places, so the developer couldn't tear it down. Having no use for it they've let it sit vacant for well over a decade now.

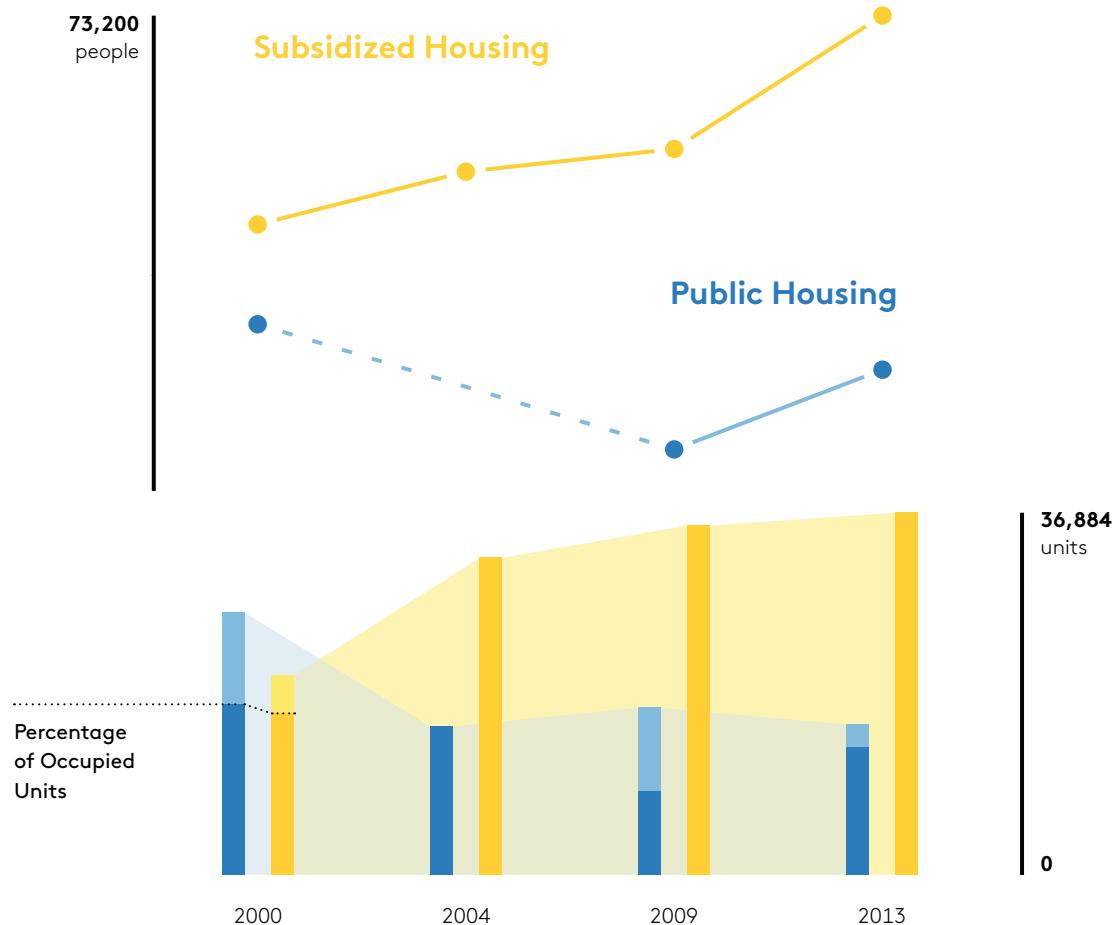


Centennial Park North calls itself a "spectacular gated town home community." It was built on part of the Techwood land and composed of 45 fee-simple homes, mostly sold at market rates.



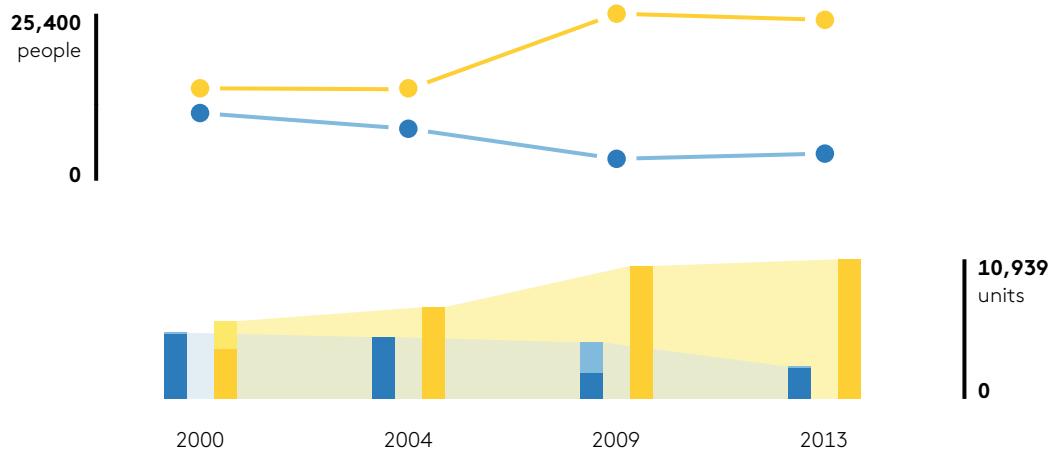
How Vouchers Replaced Public Housing

Chicago





Atlanta



“deserving” poor. This pattern was repeated across the country.

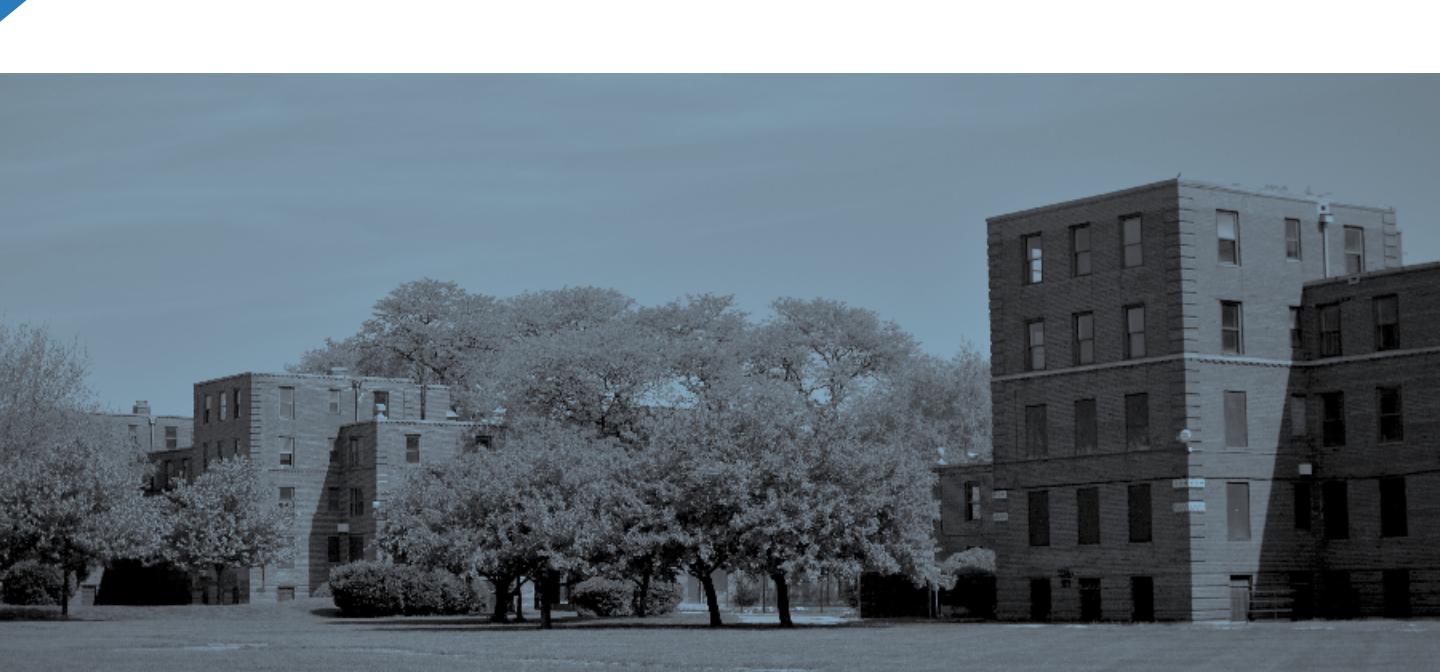
Early public housing projects like Techwood combined social engineering through tenant selection with site planning that facilitated the growth of an educated and organized population. Community spaces, libraries, schools, and recreational facilities were included in many projects. The success of this early public housing has been attributed by some scholars to the exclusion of “undesirable” families, including single mothers, the unemployed, and welfare recipients.

Techwood and its sister project Clark Howell Homes kept up these exclusionary practices until the 1960s, when the Kennedy administration mandated integration of public housing. Increased affordable homeownership opportunities for whites in the suburbs also pushed the AHA to accept a more diverse group of tenants. The Nixon administration deeply cut funding for public housing and imposed a moratorium on new construction, even though many of

these new residents required greater rent subsidies. By the 1980s, Techwood was a dystopia. The recession had left many unemployed, and the community, very poor and African-American, was further destabilized as a result of predatory gang activity and the crack epidemic.

When Atlanta won the 1996 Olympic bid, the city’s elites saw a delightful opportunity to get rid of Techwood. Conveniently, the federal government had also launched a new program called HOPE VI to fund mixed-income redevelopment initiatives. These were marketed as beneficial to both public housing tenants and to cities. HOPE VI grants financed demolition of traditional public housing and provided start-up funds to leverage outside investments for new communities, in which public housing residents would be the minority.

Though Atlanta wasn’t the first to try this approach — Boston and Chicago piloted early attempts at transforming projects into mixed-income housing — its efforts were certainly the most



A shuttered section of the Lathrop Homes in Chicago, built around the same time as Techwood. Beautifully planned, the development was supposed to be rehabbed as part of the Plan for Transformation. But the CHA stopped leasing out units to new families in 2000 and has been moving people out steadily, promising eventual renovation and return, since 2004. Lathrop is slated to be redeveloped as a mixed income community despite opposition from the remaining residents.

visible. In preparation for the Olympics, Atlanta's business leaders and the politicians they financed championed the notion that public housing needed to be torn down. In their place, private developers would build new homes. The units in these new complexes were partially reserved for market-rate renters and buyers. In keeping with the national political ethos of the eighties and nineties, private ownership and management were sold as the panacea for failed government housing programs. Advocates of redevelopment also argued that "concentrated poverty," not decades of government mismanagement and disinvestment, was to blame

for lamentable conditions in places like Techwood. If only the poor could be housed next to more stable, better off individuals, their lives would be improved.

Deconcentrating Poverty

Since the late 1980s, observers have blamed the conditions of American ghettos on concentrated poverty. Policymakers have disagreed on solutions. Revitalize and de-ghettoize existing communities or depopulate the ghetto and disperse the poor to new living environments? Copious research on the subject has been produced since William Julius Wilson first introduced the concept of concentrated poverty in his 1987 book *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

The notion that poor black neighborhoods are inherently bad for the people living in them has played into the hands of those who wish to seize the land on which these neighborhoods stand. Apparently independent and apolitical research findings by organizations like the Urban Institute point to persistent, intergenerational social and psychological problems in such neighborhoods. These findings in turn support the claims that eliminating enclaves of housing for the very poor would benefit the residents of those enclaves, regardless of



The still-inhabited section of Lathrop.

all projects were in dire straits. But the idea of pervasive and irrevocable dysfunction in the system was the first necessary component of an agenda to eradicate public housing. The case of public housing in New York is the glaring contradiction that makes this agenda abundantly clear.

The Case of NYCHA

New York City has always had the most public housing high-rises in the United States. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) houses over 400,000 residents. That amounts to 10 percent of all public housing residents in the country living in 2,600 well-managed buildings, some higher than 25 floors. Despite the fact that this makes well-functioning high-rise projects the rule rather than the exception in America, New York has been routinely dismissed by both public housing critics and sympathizers as too “different” to emulate.

Even under conservative mayoral administrations, NYCHA’s remedy for problems in its projects has been to change management practices, not to demolish homes. As in other cities, public housing in New York began as a program targeting the “deserving poor.” It started to serve an increasing number of welfare recipients only in the 1960s. Gang activity, drug use, and vandalism increased in the decades that followed. The housing stock aged. But in New York, this was accompanied by a scaled increase in maintenance and the intensification of security measures, including tenant patrols. NYCHA projects never became Chicago-style vertical ghettos because the Authority remained invested in them.

Since the 1990s, NYCHA has been faced with relentless funding cuts. The savings achieved by the government have been passed on as costs to residents. A recent report by the Community Service Society shows that the agency has lost over \$2 billion in federal operating and capital funds over the last decade alone. At the same time, the city and state have completely cut their operating contributions.

where they end up. As for the land, whatever isn’t immediately useful to private interests ends up being cleared. Better some pretty green grass than a ghetto. Nowhere has this pattern been more clearly observable than in public housing neighborhoods.

Neoliberalism is not simply a prescriptive pro-market, anti-state orientation. It is a manufactured reality within which such an orientation becomes inevitable. To manufacture the neoliberal reality, it is necessary to establish a baseline of truths, such as “public housing is doomed to fail.” Sometimes history and reality speak to the contrary. The neoliberal gambit is to make sure this contradiction is irrelevant.

High-rise projects are virtually non-existent outside of a dozen or so large East Coast and Midwest cities. This hasn’t stopped critics from generalizing arguments against high-rises to all public housing, regardless of size. Sometimes criticism of architecture and design fail. Techwood, for example, was masterfully planned and built to last, unlike the cheap construction of later projects. In such cases, concentrated-poverty arguments are always on deck. By the 1990s, the dismal reputation of public housing high-rises had grown to such monstrous proportions that it overshadowed the reality on the ground: not



NYCHA is currently experiencing a severe maintenance backlog and much of its housing stock is in need of capital repairs. The agency's coping strategies have themselves been limited by neoliberalization on the local, state, and federal levels. Defunding presented NYCHA with two options: continue to house mostly welfare recipients, whose rent revenues are insufficient to subsidize the cost of operations, or privilege higher-income households that generate more revenue.

Given these strictures, NYCHA decided to orient itself toward higher-income tenants, as it had in its infancy. The effects of this choice can be seen in a recent *New York Times* series about a homeless family living in appalling conditions in a shelter in Brooklyn's Fort Greene. Across the street at the Walt Whitman Houses, average monthly rent hovers around \$450. For the shelter residents, the projects represent a higher-class poverty.

Despite this policy of exclusion, it is worth noting that NYCHA has survived because of its commitment to maintaining public housing, even when that housing was home to the poorest New Yorkers. As Nicholas Bloom chronicles in his 2009 book *Public Housing that Worked*, an enormous amount of labor and money was expended over the years for maintenance and community services. Only a competent and politically independent housing authority could adequately and consistently provide this support to its residents. NYCHA achieved this while directly managing almost all of its housing stock — a practice long abandoned in favor of private management everywhere else. It employs over 13,500 well paid and unionized staff, almost a third of whom live in the projects.

And yet, NYCHA is hardly studied. There is no talk of the "New York model" in policy circles or among politicians. And why would there be? New York's narrative is blatantly contradictory to the story of public housing that failed. That failure is a foundation myth for the neoliberalizing American metropolis.

Liquidating the Projects

As Vale recounts in *Purging the Poorest*, the redevelopment of Atlanta's Techwood Homes began with a

Public Housing's Final Redoubt



Alfred E. Smith Houses
in Manhattan,
by Brooklyn Bridge.

395,709
people

New York City

Public Housing

179,714
units

0

0

2000

2004

2009

2013



multi-year planning process. It was characterized by the manipulation and co-option of resident leadership. For years, no information was provided on how many demolished apartments would be replaced or where residents would end up. Nevertheless, every household was led to believe that it individually stood to gain from the transformation.

The redevelopment of the country's first public housing project into a New Urbanist mixed-income community called Centennial Place was completed in 1996. Fewer than 7 percent of its original inhabitants made it back to the new apartments. The transformation generated an estimated \$1 billion in investments in the surrounding area. The new neighborhood is composed mostly of young, unmarried whites, and some public-housing families with children who made it through the developer's screening gauntlet. One Techwood building was preserved for its historical significance, but to this day it remains shuttered. The developer has had no use for it.

Under the leadership of Renee Glover, a former corporate finance attorney, the Atlanta Housing Authority scrupulously managed its image and reputation, outsourcing its public relations work to a pricey private communications firm. The firm buffered the authority from criticism and oversaw its dizzying ascent into national consciousness as an agency that was doing things right. But the AHA did not stop at aggressive PR. The transformation of Techwood also had to be assessed as a scientific "experiment," the results of which would be conducive to its expansion.

To carry out this assessment, the AHA hired Georgia Tech economist Thomas D. Boston, a man with no previous experience studying public housing communities. Boston was generously compensated and extolled the housing authority's programs in his review. His report elicited intense scrutiny from other scholars and from HUD. But it was sufficiently convincing for those already interested in reproducing the Atlanta model.

The second wave of Atlanta's public-housing demolitions began in 2007, and the AHA continued to thwart resident resistance and misinform the public. Vocal tenant leaders were evicted on technicalities or were among the first to be moved out. The AHA also used surveys to manipulate the

desired picture of residents' opinions. They distributed questionnaires that read: *As a resident in an Atlanta Housing Authority community, I wish to share my opinion regarding AHA's plans to demolish our community.* There were three yes-or-no questions to answer: *I want to move; I want a Housing Choice Voucher; I support AHA's Quality of Life Initiative.* The authority reported that 96 percent of residents saw the demolition of their homes as an opportunity.

By 2011, Atlanta — more than 10 percent of whose population once lived in public housing — had become the first city in America to liquidate all of its projects.

The Great Transformation

Atlanta's strategy of eliminating public housing and dispersing large groups of low-income African-Americans became known as the Atlanta model. News of its success resonated strongly in Chicago. In 2000, the city embarked on its own grandiose makeover of public housing called the Plan for Transformation. Slated for completion in 2010, the Plan called for the elimination of the city's high-rise projects in favor of mixed-income developments. The viable low-rise projects were supposed to be rehabbed. In total, the \$1.6 billion program promised to deliver 25,000 new or rehabbed units, though it has actually entailed the net loss of over 18,000 units. Fourteen years after it began, the Plan is still incomplete.

Unlike the Atlanta Housing Authority, the CHA did not spend exorbitant sums on managing its image, nor did it benefit from steady leadership. For years, it faced virulent criticism from the press, tenant organizations, and advocacy groups, as well as numerous lawsuits over its handling of the transformation. Chicago's public policy mandarins and liberal technocrats also grew impatient with the authority. They saw the CHA's inconsistency as a threat to the elimination of public housing. Civil rights attorney Alexander Polikoff, who had successfully sued the CHA over its racial segregation practices in the late sixties, called for a heartier embrace of the Atlanta model.

In a 2009 report on the Plan for Transformation released by Business and Professional People for the



Public Interest, Polikoff argued that the CHA needed to learn from Renee Glover. He gushed over her eloquent arguments against rehabilitating public housing and glossed over the massive community disruptions resulting from HOPE VI redevelopments. Polikoff added in a footnote:

The critics have their facts right, but do not paint the full picture, which would include depicting the intergenerational poverty of which Glover speaks so tellingly, and asking whether mixed-income communities would last if all original residents returned. The issue is not what percentage of original residents return to replacement mixed-income communities, but whether life prospects for original residents — and those of their children and grandchildren — are improved as a consequence of their enforced relocation.

In other words, for Polikoff and his colleagues, any scenario in which the projects were demolished was a win. The AHA's program to liquidate public housing is seen as an experiment, a bold new idea. Its results are inevitably interpreted as the validation of a redevelopment hypothesis. No other hypotheses were tested, and no actual experiment took place, because retaining public housing was never an option. Those observers who start with the belief that nothing could be worse than public housing call its destruction "improved life prospects." We come full circle. The model can be replicated elsewhere because it is deemed a success. With the launch of several new privatization initiatives by HUD in the last two years, the future of public housing nationwide is bound to the Atlanta course.

False Choices

Outside of New York City, our country has largely abandoned public housing. What was once a public asset has been drained of its value, disassembled, and redistributed into private hands. For this to happen, a wide consensus had to emerge that public housing couldn't be fixed. We had to believe that problems in public housing were inevitable because there is something naturally wrong with poor people living together. We had to believe Renee Glover.

Residents' resistance has been eroded by time, precarious personal circumstances, and the consistent message that the projects would be leveled eventually, no matter what. Their solidarity splintered when plans that would ultimately disenfranchise and disband their communities were sold as individual benefits and choices. The real transition for most former public housing residents has been from permanent housing in convenient neighborhoods to Section 8 vouchers on the fringes of the city. They have gone from vertical ghettos to horizontal ones.

These "Housing Choice Vouchers" are not a long-term affordable housing strategy for any US city. There are never enough to go around, and families frequently lose them due to minor infractions. They do not guarantee safe, decent, affordable housing for generations to come. I once heard someone say "You could take them to Hawai'i!" But even though vouchers are appealing for their theoretical flexibility, they usually entail an endless lateral movement. "Everybody I know who's on Section 8, they continuously move," a former Chicago public housing resident recently told me. If public housing promised solid units where poor families could find their footing, vouchers propose nothing more than a ludicrous magic carpet ride.

Eliminating public housing in our cities has required everyone's tacit agreement to a set of baseline truths about people of little means. "Concentrated poverty" and its associated ills have proven to be useful constructs for those in power. Since the eighties, an agenda that suited the needs of capital has been marketed as good for the poor. It helped that they had already suffered through years of disenfranchisement and abhorrent living conditions in the projects. While their housing options have actually dwindled, they have been offered endless "choices." Strangely, in Atlanta, Chicago, and elsewhere, public housing residents have "chosen" their way out of their homes, neighborhoods, and social networks, away from transportation, jobs, doctors, grocery stores, schools, and relatives. They have "chosen" their way into low-income neighborhoods on the margins of these cities, into exhausting commutes and feuding gang territories. How did it all happen? Tricknology. ■





Friendly FIRE

Social impact bonds offer private interests yet another opportunity to enrich themselves at public expense.

Chris
Maisano



oldman Sachs wants you to know that it's not just about plundering the globe for profit — it wants to do a little good along the way. That's why the vampire squid has started founding seemingly innocuous philanthropic outfits like the Urban Investment Group (UIG).

Established in 2001, the UIG is the perfect embodiment of what labor journalist Bob Fitch used to call “friendly FIRE,” per the old shorthand for the finance, insurance, and real estate industries. Always attuned to the public-relations value of its activities, UIG promotes itself with a gauzy language of community uplift centered on the buzzword “double bottom line”: the simultaneous pursuit of social change and return on investment. In a gesture of exquisite irony, its first investment was in the Dorothy Day Apartments, an affordable housing development in Harlem named after the founder of the anticapitalist Catholic Worker movement. Since then, it has invested billions of dollars in projects such as community health centers, charter schools, early childhood education, low- and moderate-income housing units, small business loans, and community development grants. As Alicia Glen, the former UIG chief currently serving as deputy mayor for housing and economic development under Mayor Bill de Blasio, put it: “We’re not all evil squids. We’re nice little calamari.”

Glen’s highest profile deal as head of UIG was a \$42 million investment in Citi Bike, the privately funded bike-sharing program whose signature blue bicycles have become ubiquitous throughout Lower Manhattan and the gentrified zones of north-central Brooklyn. But bikes may not be the most important legacy of her tenure at Goldman. The bank, together with some of the biggest names in social policy,

philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector, has led the way in establishing the burgeoning field of social impact bonds (SIBs).

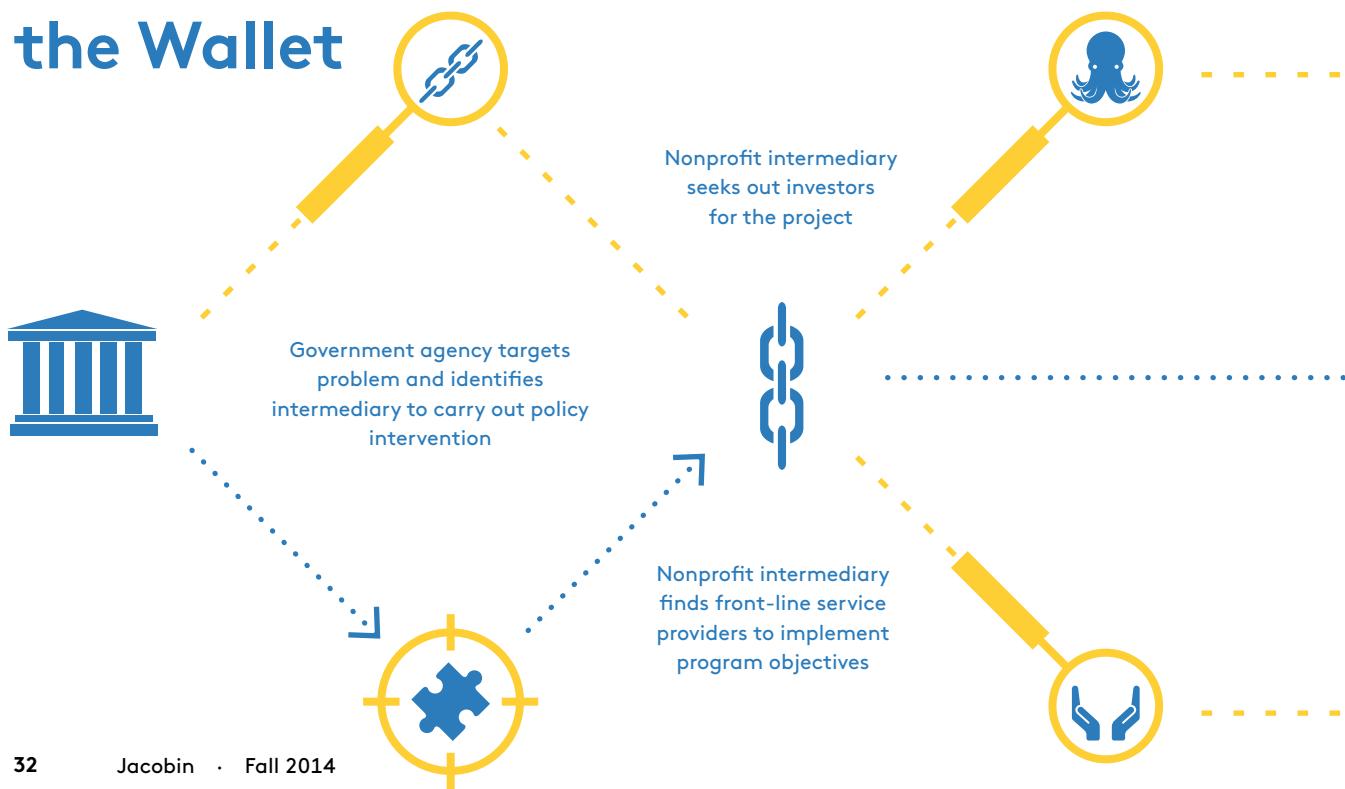
Why SIBs?

The typical SIB entails a complex set of transactions involving government, a nonprofit intermediary organization, private investors, and front-line service providers. It begins with some unit of government defining a preventive policy “intervention” with a measurable outcome, a timeline for its achievement, and a level of payment to private investors if the objectives are met. It subsequently seeks out and contracts with a nonprofit intermediary organization charged with two tasks: finding private investors to fund the project, and finding front-line service providers to work with target populations and implement program objectives.

The investors provide the upfront working capital to finance the service providers while the intermediary manages their activities. If the targets are met at the end of the project, the government entity pays the investors at the agreed-upon level of return; if not, the investors (at least in theory) do not receive payment. All the while, a neutral third-party evaluator is retained to monitor the project and certify the validity and integrity of its results.

The complexity of SIB financing and implementation raises an obvious question: why adopt this model when governments could simply use tax revenues to fund and deliver social services directly? SIB boosters offer a number of justifications for their project, but three are particularly relevant. First, because payments to investors are performance-based, SIBs can save taxpayer money and shift risk from the public to the private sector. Tellingly, SIB advocates often seize on the persistence of austerity at all levels of government as reinforcement for this argument. Second, unlike traditional government social programs, SIBs support innovation and risk-taking. Politicians and bureaucrats, so the

Good for the Soul, Better for the Wallet



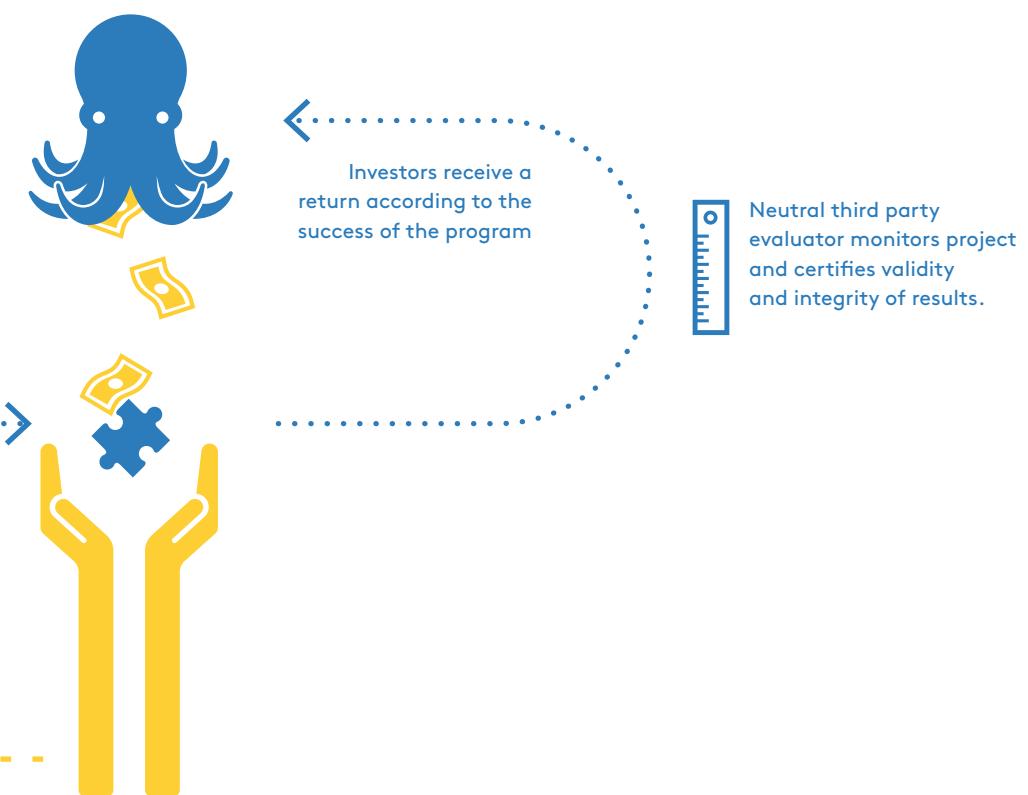


argument goes, have no incentive to experiment in the face of electorates, opposition parties, and media establishments on the lookout for high-profile policy failures. Private-sector money is therefore needed to break through public-sector inertia and fund needed social policy initiatives. Finally, because they are data-driven and reliant on rigorous empirical analysis, SIBs increase the rationality and effectiveness of policy-making. Instead of throwing taxpayer money at programs that have political constituencies but little demonstrable impact, policymakers should direct scarce public dollars toward “what works.”

In many ways, SIBs are the latest phase in the so-called “special relationship” between the US and Britain — an expression not only of mingled economic interests but of ideas and people with a common grounding in behavioral economics and psychology. As the leading behavioral economist Richard Thaler put it, “It makes sense for social scientists to become more involved in policy, because many of society’s most challenging problems are, in essence, behavioral.” In this view, social problems do not arise primarily from structural relationships of

power and interest but rather from a congeries of bad individual choices or habits. Much of this discourse revolves around the concept of the research-based intervention and its ability to alter the choices that ostensibly lead to expensive social problems like criminal recidivism or ill health. SIB projects tend to involve interventions like cognitive behavioral therapy and other programs intended to modify individual patterns of behavior.

Both the Obama administration in the US and the Cameron government in the UK have displayed a marked enthusiasm for policy approaches that adopt the methods and concerns of these fields. One of the most prominent SIB boosters in the US is the Center for American Progress, a liberal research organization that has served as a talent pool and policy shop for the Obama administration. In Britain, the Conservative government has established a department called the Behavioral Insights Team to pursue projects relating to everything from job training and tax collection to organ donation. Popularly known as the “Nudge Unit,” it takes its nickname from an influential work on behavioral



economics co-authored by Richard Thaler and the American legal scholar Cass Sunstein, who served in the Obama administration as the former head of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Last summer, The Nudge Unit, in turn, inspired the creation of the Social and Behavioral Science Team within the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. The proposed \$300 million Treasury Department SIB fund is directly modeled on the British government's Social Outcomes Fund, and nonprofit organizations like Social Finance are actively involved in SIB projects on both sides of the Atlantic.

Originally conceived and implemented in the UK, SIBs have quickly become one of the hottest trends in the world of nonprofit philanthropy, a sector notoriously susceptible to faddish enthusiasms and progressive-sounding rhetoric. They've generated a lot of buzz for a reason: they offer policymakers a way of funding social programs that accepts the apparent permanence of austerity while offering profitable investment opportunities for financial institutions and wealthy individuals. SIB advocates — many of whom are Democrats and liberals, including the Obama administration — are quick to argue that their application should be limited to relatively narrow policy areas and not large-scale collective goods. One may recall, however, that similar arguments were once applied to charter schools, which were not intended to compete with and displace public schools. Such projects have a funny way of going big.

A Booming Market

The SIB market is still rather small in terms of dollars, but its promoters are intent on achieving rapid growth. The current total value of SIB transactions in the US is estimated at approximately \$100 million; sixteen states and Washington, DC either have an active SIB underway or are considering implementing one. The Obama administration, through its Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, has played a leading role in promoting the expansion of the SIB market. In 2013, it proposed a total investment of \$500 million in "social innovation" programs, including the establishment

of a \$300 million Incentive Fund at the Treasury Department to provide state and local governments with federal matching funds for SIBs and similar initiatives. These expenditures would complement the \$24 million the federal Department of Labor has already spent on state-level workforce development projects to increase employment prospects for formerly incarcerated individuals.

As mentioned, the SIB model is imported from the UK, where David Cameron's Conservative government has promoted them with an evangelical fervor. In 2010, the UK Ministry of Justice (MoJ) signed the world's first SIB contract: a four-year deal with a private Sodexo-operated prison in Peterborough to reduce recidivism rates among 3,000 males serving jail sentences of less than 12 months. The intermediary Social Finance UK (an early SIB booster with financial support from big philanthropies like the Rockefeller Foundation and the Omidyar Network) raised £5 million from a range of private investors and hired two nonprofits to provide services to the prisoners. If recidivism rates among the experimental group fall by at least 7.5 percent relative to the rest of the prison's population, the MoJ and a charitable arm of the British lottery will pay investors a return of up to 13 percent.

In 2012, New York City became the first US jurisdiction to launch a SIB when it signed a four-year, \$9.6 million deal with Goldman Sachs, Bloomberg Philanthropies, and the nonprofit MDRC to fund a cognitive behavioral therapy program to reduce youth recidivism at Rikers Island. The deal is backstopped by a \$7.2 million grant from Michael Bloomberg's personal foundation, ensuring that Goldman can only lose \$2.4 million if program targets are not met. If the program reduces recidivism by 10 percent, Goldman will recoup the full \$9.6 million; the bank stands to reap \$2.1 million in profit if the target is exceeded. The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, a nonprofit entity that exists solely to fund public-private partnerships, will pay for third-party evaluation to certify the results and authorize payment.

Additional SIB projects are underway in New York State, Utah, and Massachusetts. In late 2013, New York governor Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, announced a five-and-a-half-year SIB contract with



\$13.5 million in private funding from financial institutions like Bank of America Merrill Lynch and wealthy, politically connected individuals like former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers. Like the Rikers Island SIB, it is backstopped with a \$1.3 million grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and \$300,000 from the Robin Hood Foundation, a feel-good front group for bankers and hedge funders. The philanthropist J. B. Pritzker is partnering with Goldman Sachs to fund an early childhood education SIB in Salt Lake City.

Meanwhile, another Goldman tentacle reaches into Massachusetts to fund yet another youth recidivism program. Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick, also a Democrat, has been an enthusiastic supporter of SIB. In 2012, his state became the first in the nation to establish a competitive bidding process for pay-for-success initiatives. It is currently in the process of negotiating a second SIB for a project addressing chronic homelessness managed by the same nonprofit that oversees the recidivism program.

Transpartisan and Transatlantic

At the Congressional level, SIBs appear to be one of the few domestic policy options that unites Democrats and Republicans, even in the romper-room atmosphere that currently prevails in the House of Representatives. In June, a group of House members from both parties introduced the Social Impact Bonds Act, which would implement the \$300 million Treasury Department fund the Obama administration has sought to establish in recent budget cycles. According to the bill, state and local governments would be required to submit a feasibility study to the Treasury, which would work with a newly created Federal Interagency Council on Social Impact Bonds as well as potentially affected federal agencies, to determine whether to allot funding to specific projects. It would also provide a substantial boon to the financial industry by allowing banks to use their investments in SIB projects to help meet their requirements under the Community Reinvestment Act.

The bipartisan appeal of SIBs is not difficult to understand. Democrats and liberals have latched

on to them as a way of attracting support for discretionary social spending in an austere budget climate. Republicans and conservatives are lured by the possibility of cutting spending in the long term while offering financial interests the opportunity to generate profits and PR. The emerging SIB industry reveals a complex of political and financial interests that straddles both sides of the Atlantic, unites parties and political figures of the center-right and center-left, and highlights the growing role of an increasingly financialized philanthropic sector.

Like reality television and the war in Iraq, SIBs and their milieu possess a distinctly Anglo-American flavor. Michael Bloomberg plays a central role in this transatlantic nexus. As mayor of New York City, he implemented the country's first SIB and backstopped it with money from his personal foundation. His company is currently building a massive European headquarters in the heart of London, whose Tory mayor Boris Johnson counts Bloomberg as a close personal friend. The same goes for Prime Minister David Cameron himself, who has invited Bloomberg to address Conservative Party conferences on more than one occasion and shares his penchant for libertarian paternalism and technocratic governance.

SIBs accord perfectly with Cameron's promotion of "Big Society" as an alternative to the bogey of big government, as well as American notions of communitarianism that have given Democrats cover to abandon residual commitments to a redistributive welfare state. Popular among advocates of Third Way politics like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, these projects stress the superiority of "civil society" over government in the delivery of public goods and the creation of social solidarity. While the phrase may conjure benevolent visions of democratic community-controlled institutions, in practice it tends to be synonymous with well-heeled and unaccountable philanthropic and nonprofit networks.

Private Interest, Public Harm

The explosion of top incomes documented by Thomas Piketty and others has driven the growth of those networks and their growing influence over politics and public policy. There are vast oceans of

USD \$1 Million

Wealthy philanthropists and foundations invest to find housing for 800 of London's homeless. St. Mungo's, a local charity, will carry out the program.



Social Finance, a UK-based "ethical" investment bank, funds rehabilitation work for 3,000 Peterborough Prison inmates.



Social Finance partners with the Action for Children charity to oversee 380 "troubled" adolescents, for which investors can expect an annual return of 8 to 12 percent.



Goldman Sachs finances a United Way of Salt Lake preschool program, focused on increasing "academic performance" among at-risk Utah three and four-year-olds.



Goldman Sachs invests in a program with 3,400 young black and Latino Rikers Island prisoners. They could make \$2.1 million if recidivism rates drop more than 10 percent.



The nation's first state-led SIB is announced by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in late 2013. Private sector investors and foundations invests raise funds to train and employ former inmates.



Money in the Bank

money washing around at the top of the income distribution, and the titans of high finance and technology can't spend it all on *pieds à terre* or superyachts. Unfortunately for the rest of us, a large portion of it goes toward funding social policy experiments that often do more harm than good. Because the foundations of the super rich are not subject to any meaningful form of democratic accountability, their money and connections exercise outsized influence over policy formation and discourse.

In her essential work on the forces behind the school privatization movement, Joanne Barkan identified the mantras of big philanthropy: "strategic giving, return on investment, grantee accountability, numerical data to verify results, social entrepreneurship, and public-private partnership." In the case of public education, wealthy investors have acted on these mantras by funding pet projects and hiring researchers and organizations that will ratify and promote their policy views. By any measure, the results have been disastrous, for students as well as the public. When experiments in school privatization fail, their backers are never held to account for the damage left in their wake. The obsession with data, measurement, and testing has created perverse incentives for teachers and school administrators, resulting in an unprecedented epidemic of cheating on standardized tests. The same pressures will apply to the measurement and evaluation of SIB programs, not least because there's money on the line.

Like school privatization, SIBs also pose a potential threat to unionized public-sector employment. New York State's SIB deal seeks to reduce recidivism by providing 2,000 formerly incarcerated individuals with transitional jobs in New York City and Rochester through a nonprofit called the Center for Employment Opportunity. Under the terms of the deal, these jobs will include maintenance, janitorial, and



groundskeeping work for public institutions such as parks and universities. In a state like New York, these sorts of jobs are typically unionized and pay higher wages and benefits than the transitional job-holders are likely to receive. Similar employment arrangements can be found in other types of public-private partnerships like Business Improvement Districts, where street-level sanitation and security jobs that should be done by public employees are given instead to vulnerable low-wage workers, many of them in transitional job programs.

Public-sector unions are increasingly aware of the threat SIBs pose and have begun to rally against state-level legislation that would expand their use. AFSCME Council 94 in Rhode Island has been outspoken in its opposition to a bill that would allow the state to implement a \$25 million SIB program. In his testimony against the bill, the union's legislative coordinator argued that "this could be a back-door way to privatize the delivery of social service programs... and to most likely reward wealthy investors while you're at it." Still, unions have not yet succeeded in blocking SIB-friendly legislation or organizing many of the workers in transitional job programs.

Early Reviews

With the Peterborough prison SIB scheduled to expire by the end of this year, we will soon be able to definitively assess whether these projects can live up to the claims of their boosters. The early reviews, however, are not good.

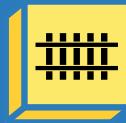
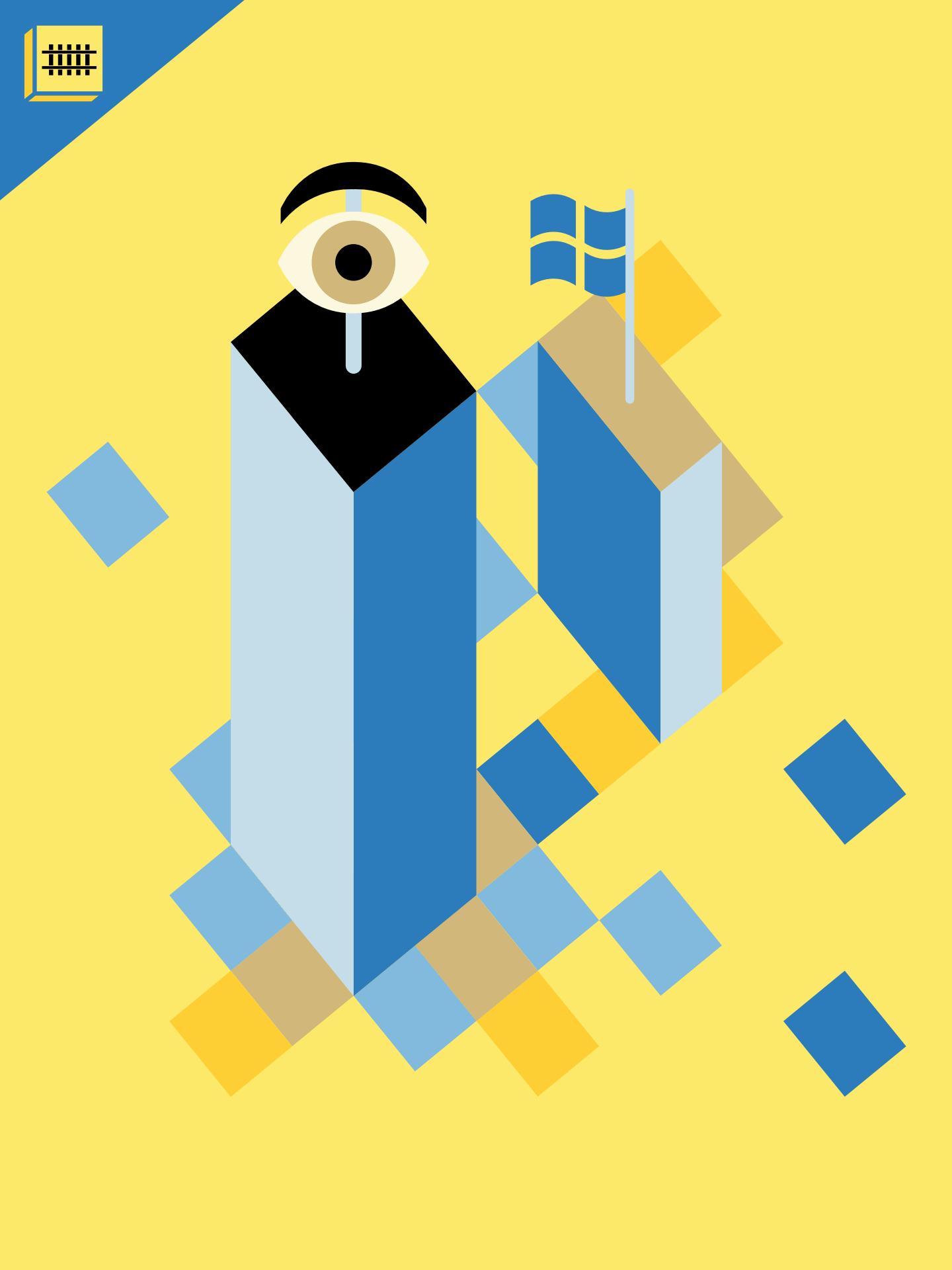
In recent testimony before a hearing of the Senate Budget Committee, budget analyst Kyle McKay identified a number of severe flaws in the model. Despite claims to the contrary, SIBs are more likely to increase costs for governments than reduce them. As McKay notes in his testimony, in Massachusetts the state is liable for up to \$27 million in SIB payments while investors are only providing \$12 million in funding. In an analysis of the proposed New Jersey Social Innovation Act, the state legislature's budget office concedes that "it is possible that the departments may not accurately quantify the value of avoided future costs or attribute savings to these interventions when other

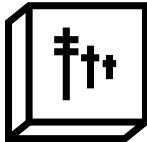
factors may be responsible for the savings, resulting in actual increased costs rather than savings." A RAND Europe study of the Peterborough SIB and McKay's own research on prisoner reentry programs found that even under the most optimistic set of assumptions, the potential savings generated would be very small. Investors receive payment when success is achieved, and even, depending on the circumstances, when it is not. The complexity of the model requires a small army of administrators, evaluators, consultants, and lawyers to run it — and they all want to be paid.

Similarly, claims that SIBs shift risk from the public to the private sector are not supported by the evidence on hand. The New Jersey Social Innovation Act, for example, contains loan guarantees for private investors even if anticipated savings are not achieved. Also, the complexity of SIB contracts can make it difficult to determine exactly which party will be on the hook if the desired outcomes are not achieved. As McKay observes, "Attempting to manage social services through contract attorneys, consultants, financial intermediaries, and an all-or-nothing payment model based on an evaluation will inevitably produce a contract that is complex and subject to unforeseen contingencies and weaknesses." Armed with the capacity to absorb billable hours and superior knowledge about the projects they've created, private interests have a way of sticking the public with the bill when deals go bad.

Finally, it is far from clear that SIBs will encourage innovation or creativity in the design and implementation of social policy. As McKay notes, investors have a strong incentive to choose interventions that already have a track record, skim service providers, and select target populations with a greater ability to meet program goals.

Our ill-fated experiments with charter schools and education reform should serve as cautionary lessons for those willing to experiment with SIBs. Like charters, they cannot possibly live up to the overblown claims of their supporters. They do, however, reinforce the logic of austerity and tax avoidance, strengthen the influence of the rich and the capital markets over policy-making, and offer private interests yet another opportunity to enrich themselves at public expense. There's always a market for that. ■





Les Simerables

SimCity isn't a sandbox. Its rules reflect the neoliberal common sense of today's urban planning.

Ava
Kofman



nce upon a time, a brilliant engineer by the name of Trurl built a miniature kingdom for the deposed dictator of another planet to govern as he pleased for the rest of his days. At such a small scale, the bored despot could harmlessly indulge his “autocratic aspirations” without risk to the “democratic aspirations of his former subjects.”

This fable, by Polish sci-fi writer Stanisław Lem, appeared in 1981 in *The Mind's Eye*, an anthology of reflections on artificial cognition, where it was read by Will Wright, creator of *SimCity* and founder of the Sim empire. In the many interviews he's given, Wright cites his encounter with the story as an inspiration for *SimCity*.

Released in 1989 by then-indie game developer Maxis, *SimCity* was a gamble. Nobody thought anyone would bother to tinker with an urban development simulator — let alone one without a clear objective. The game is not a story but a managerial system. You can't definitively win or lose.

The plot, if there is one, is generated by the player's ability to model the city in her own head. With an hour and basic literacy skills, anyone can establish a city: the tools are intuitive, the graphics friendly. In the latest version of the game, starting is as easy as drawing roads, demarcating the city's industrial, residential, and commercial zones, and plopping down buildings.

To play the game well, however, you must understand *SimCity* as it understands itself. In Mario, you jump. In *SimCity*, you anticipate. You try to predict a series of complex, emergent social phenomena. You optimize, maximize, and extrapolate from afar — no hand-eye coordination necessary. You embody, in essence, the spirit of urban industry.

In the *New Yorker* profile of Wright, the cofounder of Maxis, Jeff Braun, remembers the first time he heard the idea behind the game. The two had just met at a pizza party in Alameda, California where, as Braun explains, “Will showed me the game and he said, ‘No one likes it, because you can't win.’ But I thought it was great. I foresaw an audience of megalomaniacs who want to control the world.”

As it turned out, Braun was right: the game was a smash success. It inaugurated a new golden era for computer gaming and was, until



recently, the bestselling computer franchise of all time. It remains the most influential. By pioneering the simulation genre for computer gaming and introducing its diversions to new types of players, the game inspired a new generation of urban planners, architects, and social theorists.

From these simulations, the logic of the game goes, you can abstract urban design principles. Where our cities appear unpredictably chaotic and impossibly complex, *SimCity* harmoniously tames this uncertainty into a manageable landscape. It offers a micropolis (as it was originally titled) to serve as a model for our own. It represents our cities not as they are but as they could be: calculated, optimized, controlled.

That vision is rapidly becoming our reality. The game's simulational thinking has restructured how we relate to our politics and ourselves, to our work and our play — in short, to our social space. So-called "smart" cities have already started to deploy its techniques as Silicon Valley — home to Wright as well as Cisco and Microsoft — moves into the business of constructing cities.

SimCity is at once an archive of these future cities and an engine of their algorithmic logic. So what can this game — a hallucination of urban consciousness experienced by millions — tell us about the gamified, scalable, smoothly rendered cities to come?

The Limits of Possibility

Wright has stated that his goal in designing the game was to create a space of possibility open-ended enough for the player to experiment in, "a problem landscape" large enough to generate infinite solutions. According to Wright, the game encourages utopian thinking: "So when you start SimCity, one of the most interesting things that happens is you have to decide, 'What do I want to make? Do I want to make the biggest possible city, or the city with the happiest residents, or most parks, or the lowest crime?' Every time you have to idealize it in your head, 'What does the ideal city mean to me?'"

Possibility is a word he returns to often: "I think what we're trying to do is build the maximum possibility space in your imagination when you're playing the game." In contrast to Wright's open-ended

vision, the promotional text on the back of *SimCity 2000*'s box playfully warns, "If this game was any more realistic, it'd be illegal to turn it off!"

SimCity draws on the contemporary city not only for its graphics, but also for its rules. Its situations are at once descriptive and normative — displaying what a modern city is while at the same time dictating conditions for how and what a city should be.

The manual for *SimCity 4*, released in 2013, takes on a friendly advisory tone:

Industry is what really drives your city and creates the most profit of the three zones. By providing jobs, industries provide money for your residents ... Money keeps Sims happy and allows them to shop, which in turn makes the Commercial zones prosper. Industrial zones also produce the most amount of pollution of the three zones. Because of this, it's a good idea to build your city's industry away from the residential parts of town.

But these "good ideas" are coercive, not suggestive. To succeed even within the game's fairly broad definition of success (building a habitable city), you must enact certain government policies. An increase in the number of police stations, for instance, always correlates to a decrease in criminal activity; the game's code directly relates crime to land value, population density, and police stations. Adding police stations isn't optional, it's the law. Or take the game's position on taxes: "Keep taxes too high for too long, and the residents may leave your town in droves. Additionally, high-wealth Sims are more averse to high taxes than low- and medium-wealth Sims."

The player's exploration of utopian possibility is limited by these parameters. The imagination extolled by Wright is only called on to rearrange familiar elements: massive buildings, suburban quietude, killer traffic. You start each city with a blank slate of fresh green land, yet you must industrialize. The landscape is only good for extracting resources, or for being packaged into a park to plop down so as to increase the value of the surrounding real estate. Certain questions are raised (How much can I tax wealthy residents without them moving out?) while others (Could I expropriate their wealth entirely?) are left unexamined.



These possibilities, or lack thereof, have led to criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. Some see the game as replicating statist socialism in its centralized development and ownership of all utilities and major infrastructure; others, pointing to its regressive tax policies and rational-choice modeling, understand the simulator as a mouthpiece for neoliberal common sense. Neither is entirely wrong.

Players have attempted to build cities without capitalist elements, cities sequestered from government aid, realist cities that caricature Pyongyang, and cities that attempt to mirror decaying industrial centers like Detroit. Some of these efforts have succeeded; others, running up against the limits of possibility, have failed.

In 2011, Vincent Ocasla, a young architecture student in the Philippines, posted a video on YouTube announcing that he had “beaten” *SimCity*. His city, Magnasanti, was the product of three and a half years of planning and construction on the *SimCity 2000* platform. News of his triumph quickly spread across the Internet. But many wondered: what did it mean to say that someone had “beaten” *SimCity*?

By analyzing the game’s algorithm for modular growth, Ocasla’s plan optimized the distances between resources, transportation infrastructure, and the energy grid to build the most densely populated city in *SimCity* history. Achieved at the cost of social repression and totalitarian control, Ocasla’s victory was a numerical one. His goal was not the quality of his Sims’ lives, but the quantification of technocratic efficiency; his intention, to critique the lethality of the game’s managerial assumptions. Ironically, because of its precise techno-scientism, Magnasanti’s viewers speculated about its applicability to real-world urban projects. Many of the Reddit posts were optimistic: “Wow a city planning department needs to hire this person.” But their directive to study the logic of *SimCity* goes without saying: we’ve already been doing it.

Shiny Happy People

Even those who have never played *SimCity*, or have somehow avoided even hearing it mentioned in passing, are not immune from the game; it has infiltrated

our ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Its engineering of perspective is itself a political technology. The game employs a combination of 3-D modeling and isometric perspective so that the eye of the spectator is free to be everywhere and nowhere at once. It duplicates a gaze of mastery with roots in military and industrial management: the observant eye of the factory manager scrutinizing the speed of movements on the factory floor below; Napoleon surveying his battlefield from a mountain peak; the gaze from the police helicopter circling Washington, DC.

Just as divisions of vertical space are used in the military occupation of cities, where aerial space is splintered into terrains of policing and struggle, *SimCity* organizes the city’s data maps into 3-D layers for players to flip through with keyboard shortcuts. These systems of management are disciplinary, allowing for increasingly subtle forms of control.

A case can be made that the buildings themselves are the characters of *SimCity*: they become objects programmed with human relations, enacting the blurring of boundaries Marx termed commodity fetishism, absorbing into their digital bricks and mortar the social relations that created them in the first place.

SimCity 4 added people to the game for the first time. It visualizes them as contract wage laborers: laboring bodies perpetually tied to the rhythms of exploitation. Every morning, the Sim “agents,” as they are called, wake up, arrive at whatever workplace needs laborers (within their programmed class bracket), and toil in this industrial zone until dinner. Every evening, they go to sleep at whatever random house slots them a space. Life as a Sim is lived in this constant present tense, shuttling through traffic to take whatever work or shelter they can get.

“Sims are selfless little troopers, working at any place they are required,” explains the designer of their algorithm on the *SimCity* website. “Even if their home was destroyed, they will take up occupancy in a new home all in the name of keeping the city running as effectively as possible.” While this designer probably intended for these Sims to add texture to the game’s design, what he programmed is eerie: an endless loop of faceless, nameless



labor. What's terrifying about these "selfless little troopers" is not their strangeness but their familiarity. This nightmarish vision of a world where we're all temps, deskilled and interchangeable, called up daily by different bosses, is already a reality for many.

Consider the success of TaskRabbit, a company founded in 2008 under the auspices of the "collaborative consumption" movement. TaskRabbit prides itself on turning the precarity of the temporary contract into a game. Tasks are posted on an app; taskers, as they're called, wait by their phones for the beep of a job, race to click first, then dissolve into blue GPS dots zipping through the streets, algorithmically sent to their next job site to build IKEA furniture, wait in line for new iPhones, read *The Stranger* out loud to spoiled children, or do any other type of short-term work someone might pay for.

These precarious workers can play the game of employment over and over again, sometimes up to five times a day. There is no compensation for the time spent "playing"—that is, searching, refreshing, applying. As long as the work is temporary, the game never ends. Likewise for *SimCity*'s populace: they simulate this labor for us so that we can play.

But even the free time we spend playing the game looks something like work. Prosumerism, the slippery ramp between production and consumption, participation and exploitation, is a hallmark of the flexible production schedule of today's creative industries—the gaming industry included.

Devoted players are often tacitly recruited into being unpaid testers for the industry's beta releases and contributors to its mod (modification) scene. Consider the disastrous release of the undercooked *SimCity 4*: there were many bugs—by some accounts, all of its advertised processing capabilities were a sham—and many angry prosumers. Electronic Arts outsourced the labor of spotting the game's bugs to its hive-mind of dedicated players

who, after buying the game, discovered all the sore spots in need of patches. They got to play at doing the labor that Electronic Arts had failed to invest in the product it took to market.

By the end of Lem's fable, the formerly box-sized micropolis has colonized the face of the entire planet in its own image. Even the tyrant himself has disappeared, "as though the earth had swallowed him up." The triumph of Trurl's engineered simulation is total. Is Wright's?

City OS

In a lecture last year on "Gamifying the World: From SimCity to the Future," Wright discussed how companies used to ask him how to make their products more gamelike. They would ask him to attach his "simulation engine" to other experiences, as though it were some sort of mechanism external to the game's immersive experience. The world today, he stated, doesn't need immersive gaming to escape from everyday life; today, life itself is gamified. What we are witnessing, Wright explains, is the emergence of a "blended reality" full of deeply personal, data-saturated games.

What he neglects to mention is that speculating on the city of the future has become another game—at least, for the investors who can afford to play it. The market and technology of the exportable, downloadable smart city are still up for grabs—as Wright might say, a maximum "possibility space." As with the strategy of *SimCity*, where the best governance is that which promotes the best growth, governments are learning to become flexible and to mix and match enterprises in response. With the erasure of local history comes the influx of global investors. Honduras, for example, has been developing a charter city, clearing away existing laws and infrastructure to rapidly implement new infrastructural technology; even the constitution was amended to this end.



In South Korea, the government is placing its bets on an incarnate data cloud, otherwise known as the city of Songdo. The city, outfitted with ubiquitous computing infrastructure, sensitive synapse-like sensors, and high bandwidth, is built on the assumption that the collection of its residents' data is a useful and immensely profitable enterprise. The promotional materials (which use an aerial perspective reminiscent of *SimCity*) understand these data fields as digital resources that can be mined for wealth, so as to "smartly" decrease consumption of natural ones. As of 2012, Songdo was the largest private real estate project on earth.

But Songdo is as much a protocol as it is a city: other territories can "download" its plans. Its technology was bought by other cities before it had even been built in Songdo itself. Its master plan is being exported to Ecuador; meanwhile, China has purchased kits from similar companies to make its cities more closely resemble Singapore. Nations dissolve into transnational, portable, cities in a box. With simulation emerging as the dominant paradigm, material and lived histories are rendered obsolete.

SimCity's faith in algorithmic development has proved prescient. The value of the city now lies in part in the immense repository of data it is outfitted to collect through cell towers and embedded sensors. Speculating on the future value of this data is what generates its present value. In other words, what's smart about the smart city is the belief that all data, however meaningless, will someday become financially meaningful.

Yet as long as companies are competing to collect different data sets, their collections will have a limited range of smart integrated applications. That's why former Sony chairman Nobuyuki Idei has called for a universal city software, a "city os." This solution to urbanism according to Silicon Valley sounds a lot like an updated version of Wright's immersive simulation. A universal "city os" would serve as the underlying platform for the entire Internet of

Things — the network of "smart" devices and objects connected to the internet. It would be a complete system.

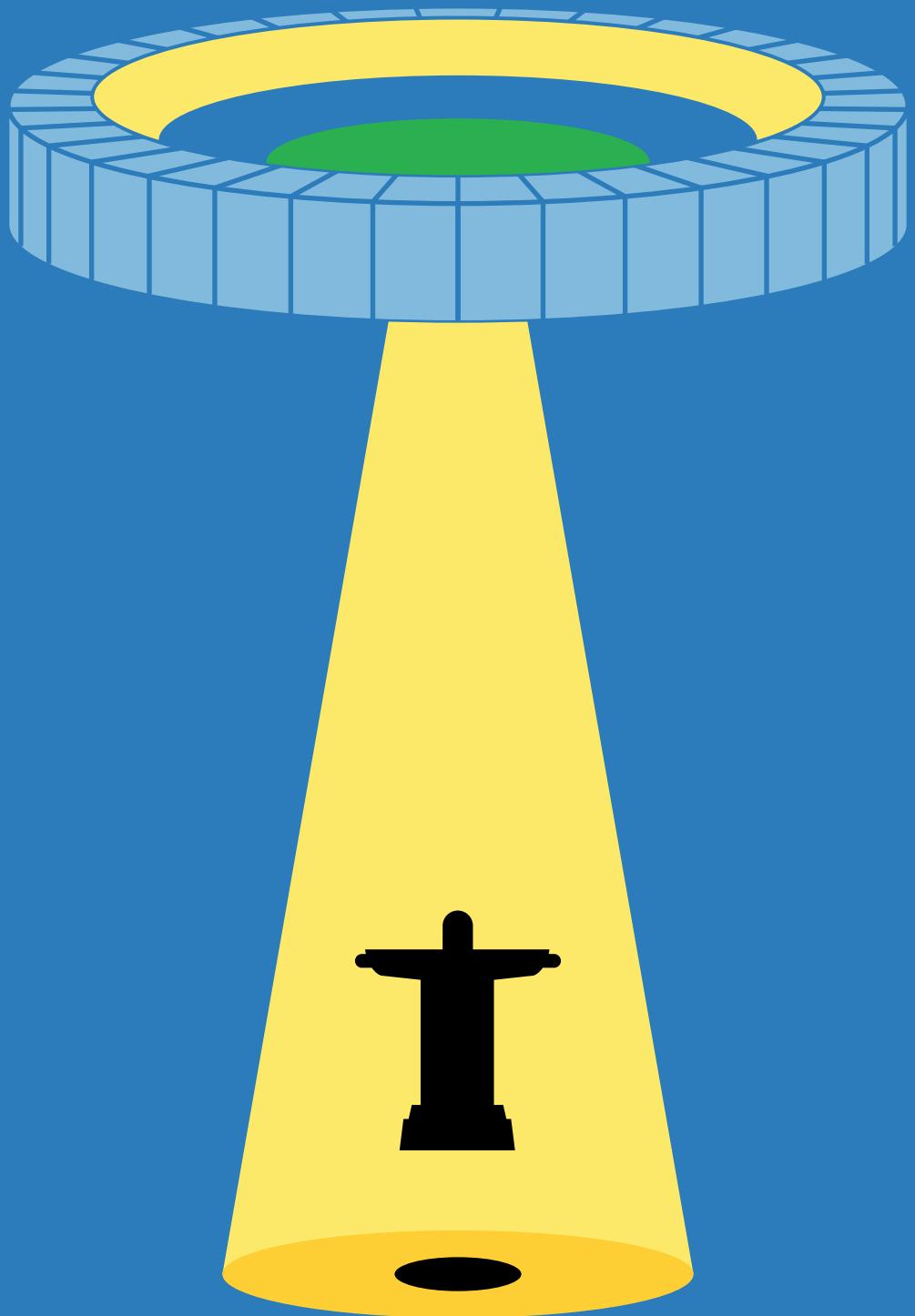
LivingPlanIT, a start-up founded by a former Microsoft executive, has been developing what it hopes will be *the Urban Operating System (UOS)*. Apps, buildings, people, traffic — all will be connected through its cloud. LivingPlanIT's business model is to monetize and license its UOS for users — big players like governments and investors — to download. Their first prototype is a green smart city in the hills of Portugal.

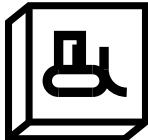
SimCity and these "city os" spin-offs promise that we can know the city in its entirety: scaled down to the size of a microchip, dematerialized into data clouds, predictable and iterative. Still, these seemingly invisible digital architectures are no more free of politics or history than their analog counterparts. How can we look back toward the messy, complex city without looking backwards?

As top-down city design becomes a market commodity, we will soon be forced to choose between the urban operating systems we want to inhabit. The choice might even be made for us through competition and mergers. In Songdo, Cisco is installing its TelePresence technology in every apartment, under the assumption that if you integrate it everywhere, people will inevitably live with it.

In these future cities, those who own the operating system will be those who own the property, the money, and the means of production. By owning your Sim data, they will own you. It is towards these relations of power and data — the power to engineer life itself — that we should turn our attention.

We should ask not what our ideal city on *SimCity*, LivingPlanIT, or some other Urban OS would look like, but what our ideal urban simulator would be. Given this or that operating system, who does the city work for and who works for the city? No longer is the goal to design an urban imaginary: you must now code the game. ■





The Jock Doctrine

Rio has used mega-events like the World Cup and the Olympics as a “state of exception” to push through private development projects and neoliberal reforms.

Carolyn
Prouse

As I walked through the streets of Rio de Janeiro on the opening day of the World Cup, I was surprised by the number of different protest slogans ringing out: *Não vai ter Copa* (There will be no Cup)! *Contra estado autoritário e policial* (Against an authoritarian and police state)! *Eu só quero ser feliz na favela onde eu nasci* (I only want to be happy in the favela where I was born)! The masses of bodies were in the streets that day largely for common cause: accusing the Brazilian government of overspending and corruption, and standing against FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Cariocas are known for their love of soccer. But the massive burden of mega-event development has not escaped the attention of Rio’s citizens. The city held eight World Cup games this summer and is the sole host of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. For the Olympics alone, the city has twenty-one Strategic Development Projects in the works, from new bus lines to housing projects, the total cost of which is USD \$10 billion. Many of these expenditures are only loosely connected to the mega-events themselves.

It’s common among dissidents to blame the burden of mega-events on international sport-governing bodies like FIFA and the IOC. What’s not to hate about capitalist regimes that masquerade as non-profit organizations and take countries for rides of billions of dollars?

FIFA and the IOC do have a strong hand in how mega-events take shape in host nations. After a country or a city wins the bid to host an event, they must use what is called a Host City Agreement (with FIFA) or a Matrix of Responsibilities (with the IOC), which include lax visa requirements for FIFA or IOC employees and affiliates, tax



exemptions, a mandate to beautify areas around sporting facilities, and exclusive rights for official partners and sponsors to sell their products in stadiums and fan spaces.

But it would be a mistake to solely blame FIFA and the IOC for the misuse of the public dime. FIFA only requires a country to have eight stadiums in which to host a World Cup, yet the previous Brazilian government, led by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, chose to build twelve. Meanwhile, Rio has focused much of its Olympic preparation efforts on gentrifying the Porto Maravilha region, which wasn't central to its winning bid.

So why are Rio de Janeiro and Brazil implementing projects beyond the requirements of FIFA and the IOC? Because mega-events have come to represent an opportunity, a chance for cities to promote themselves globally and to compete against one another for financial investments.

Cities are being transformed through neoliberal globalization: they are privatizing their assets and making public policy decisions based on the logic of a global market. New public-private partnerships (PPPs) are being created as municipalities are forced into competition on a national and international stage. Cities like Rio are behaving like entrepreneurs, seeking foreign investors through “placemaking” that targets the tourism and commerce industries in particular. Political-economic power is being rescaled as international organizations and corporations gain influence and make profit while municipal governments assume the risks of unbridled development. Technocratic experts now ply their trade across the globe, offering their services to municipalities to help them compete. Where social services do exist, they tend to be focused on policing the disenfranchised, who have been losers within the neoliberal game. And hosting mega-events has become a key part of playing this game.

This hasn't always been the case. It wasn't until the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles that mega-events were seen as a way to profit through corporate sponsorships and the marketing of television broadcast rights. The Barcelona Games in 1992 carried the for-profit potential a step further, as Barcelona incorporated Olympic redevelopments

into its municipal strategic plans, largely to attract foreign investors.

Rio de Janeiro followed that example. With the help of Catalan consultants Jordi Borja and Manoel de Forn, Rio became the first South American city to create a Strategic Plan centered on marketing the city as a tourist destination and vaulting it into the mega-event circuit.

But Rio has taken these processes to such an extreme that critics from Brazil to Barcelona are crying foul: too much privatization, too many displacements, and too much money invested in an Olympic legacy.

Developmentalism Meets Neoliberalism

Brazilian cities have gone through remarkable changes in the last half-century. Under the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, municipal growth occurred within a centralist planning model, whereby the national government oversaw most economic and urban development. The development agenda, such as it was, put national ambitions ahead of municipal ones.

With the transition to democracy and pressure from urban land reform movements, the new government included a chapter on urban policy in the constitution of 1988. Municipalities gained even greater independence in 2001 through the introduction of Brazil's City Statute, in which cities became responsible for developing “master plans” through popular participation and community engagement.

According to Raquel Rolnik, a Brazilian urbanist and current United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, these new rules fit neatly into an emerging global neoliberal agenda. In what she calls a “perverse convergence” between urban rights and neoliberal privatization, the City Statute has devolved significant power to municipalities as they become entrepreneurial entities competing for federal and international funding. The emphasis on popular participation and consultation has enabled private companies to gain increasing influence in policy circles and affect the flow of government funds.



And state funds are flowing. While the Brazilian government has privatized many of its assets and transferred huge sources of wealth to the private sector, it has remained a developmentalist state in some key regards: the federal government is focused on economic growth and the creation of jobs through investments in infrastructure. This focus was only strengthened following the 2008 global financial crisis. While many other countries imposed austerity measures to reduce state spending, the Workers' Party (PT) introduced large infrastructure projects as stimulus packages.

But the ways that funds get distributed and spent also matters. Municipalities, like corporations, are either forced to compete against one another for this funding or are given a direct transfer of funds as a product of close political relationships. Sometimes both happen at once: those who "win" are those who have an inside track. It's not a coincidence, for instance, that Odebrecht S.A. — the largest civil construction firm in Brazil and a major financial contributor to the PT — continues to win a massive share of the country's development projects since the company's rise during the military dictatorship. Here, developmentalism meets neoliberalism, as state infrastructure investment in redevelopment projects results in a transfer of funds from the public purse into private hands.

Rio de Janeiro is pursuing these redevelopment projects with vigor. The 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games have given the city the opportunity to revamp its strategic and master plans to become a *cidade corporativa*, or corporate city, in the words of Brazilian urbanist Ermínia Maricato. Rio's transformation into this corporate city can be better understood by focusing on three of the city's mega-event projects: Maracanã privatization, Porto Maravilha gentrification, and favela pacification.

Maracanã 2.0

People who know *futebol* know Maracanã. This stadium is perhaps the most famous in the entire world, familiar for its standing-room-only section that could double in size for large Brazilian matches. It's the stadium that some of the best players in the history of the game, like Pelé and Garrincha, have

called home. It's where the infamous "Maracanazo" episode occurred during the 1950 World Cup final, in which Uruguay beat Brazil to accomplish one of the largest upsets in soccer history. Indeed, despite years of military dictatorship and widespread poverty, it's that loss that many Brazilians still refer to as the lowest point in the country's history. Maracanã, in other words, has been much more than a building to soccer fans in Brazil.

But this has dramatically changed with the World Cup and Olympic Games. The stadium has been refurbished to the extent that it is now almost unrecognizable. Or, rather, it looks like any other sanitized stadium space built for international competition. This building, in which corporate boxes have replaced standing crowds, is exactly the sort of sterile environment that municipalities are constructing to climb the hierarchy of world cities that can attract more events, more tourists, and more capital.

A great deal of public money has been invested in refurbishing the stadium to meet the demands of FIFA. Federal, state, and municipal governments have spent approximately USD \$598 million on stadium upgrading in Rio, more than double the cost originally projected.

As geographer Chris Gaffney writes, the problem with this spending isn't simply the amount being invested. The stadium could become a white elephant, useful only for the mega-events. Even more concerning, however, is that this once-public facility has been transformed into private space, with all activities now oriented toward making profit for the public-private partnership that currently manages the stadium.

Maracanã is also a prime example of the new legal spaces that characterize neoliberal globalization. The stadium and its surrounding neighborhood have become "zones of exclusivity," marketplaces for FIFA and its corporate sponsors. Budweiser, Coca Cola, and McDonald's can sell their products, but you will have a difficult time finding Brazilian staples *churrasco*, *guaraná*, or *açaí* — or the vendors who have made their living selling such products for years.

Many commentators in Brazil have described this as a state of exception: democratic rules are



The Summer Games Cost Too Damn Much

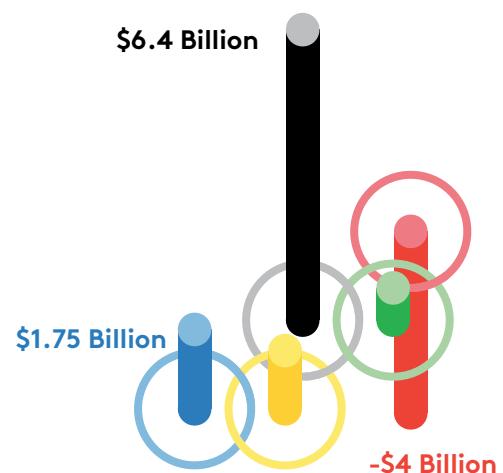
1976–2012

- Operating Budget
- Initial Budget
- Total Costs
- Taxpayer Contribution
- Profit/Loss

Montreal

1976

The exploitation of construction workers at the Olympic site and subsequent crackdown on unions sparked widespread work stoppages (total of 155 working days).



being suspended for authoritarian and non-transparent forms of governance in the shape of unelected non-governmental organizations like FIFA, the IOC, and Rio's newly created Public Olympic Authority. Importantly, the Brazilian state doesn't simply disappear in this arrangement: the government is necessary to pass legislation creating zones of exclusivity and new authorities.

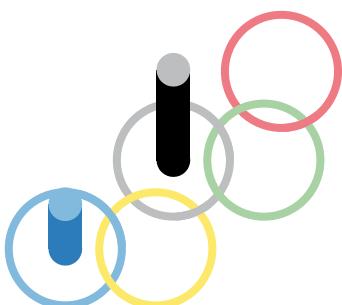
This state of exception also applies to the people who live in the areas surrounding this stadium. Their livelihoods, housing, and bodies are being made



Moscow

1980

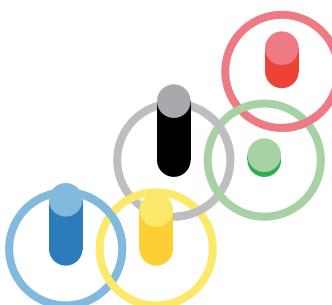
Homeless and urban poor were displaced more than 100 km from Moscow. Tens of thousands of police reportedly swept the city in search of undesirables.



Los Angeles

1984

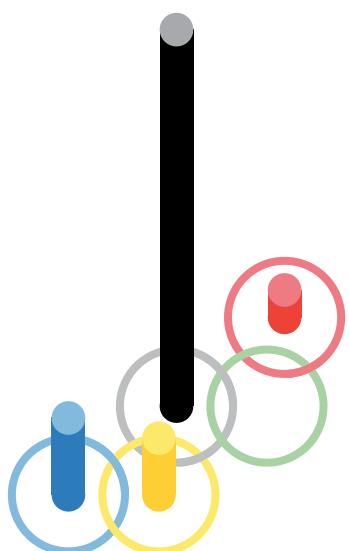
Non-union labor employed in preparation for the games. LAPD arrested thousands of poor people of color in Olympic "gang sweeps." Reports of police brutality spiked starting in 1984.



Seoul

1988

Estimated 720,000 residents were forcibly displaced. Homeless were rounded up, housed in detention camp. Tenants and workers who resisted were beaten and imprisoned.



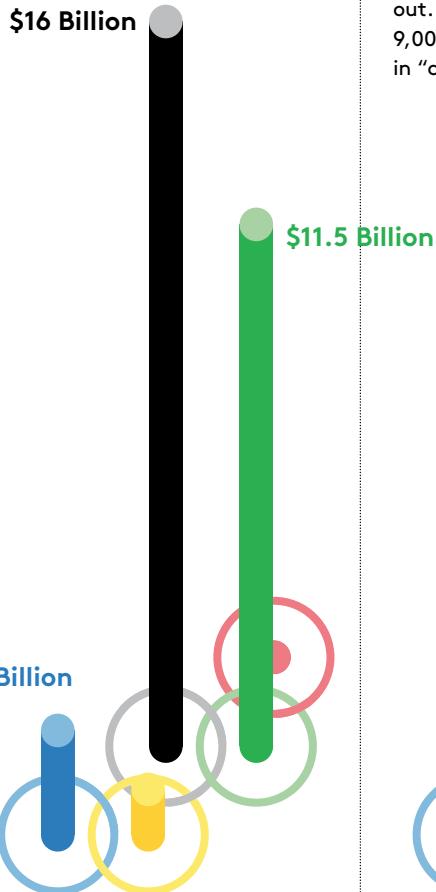
exceptional and expendable. In the neoliberal city, the poor are the first ones to be relocated for the sake of profit.

Porto Maravilha

But mega-event developments are not limited to stadiums. The Porto Maravilha (Marvelous Port) project is being hailed as the largest Olympic development project in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The total cost of this 5-square-kilometer redevelopment is a whopping USD \$4 billion. Yet the project was never a cornerstone of the Olympic bid and is set to host

only a few minor Olympic events. What it is doing is further consolidating the power of the largest public-private partnership the country has ever seen.

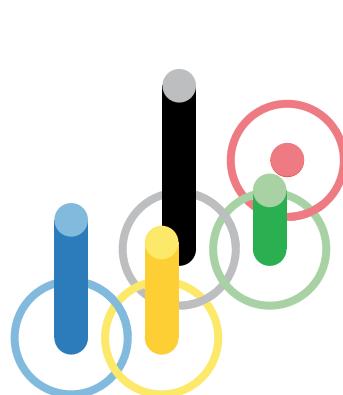
The port area of Rio de Janeiro has a rich history. It was the locus of the Atlantic slave trade and remains a center of Afro-Brazilian culture. It was the home of the Portuguese monarchy after they fled the Iberian Peninsula, and more recently was the seat of the federal government. But with the transfer of the nation's capital to Brasilia in the 1960s, deindustrialization in the 1970s, and flight of businesses to the western part of the city in the 1980s, the area fell into economic decline. Today, the port is home



Atlanta

1996

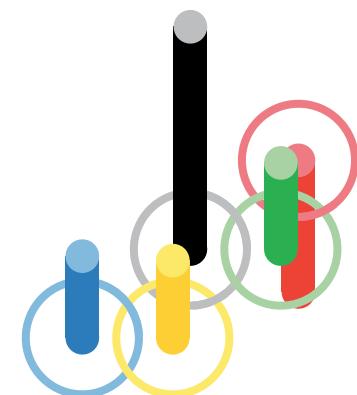
Approximately 2,000 public housing units demolished, 6,000 tenants dispersed, and up to 30,000 priced out. During run-up to the Games, 9,000 homeless people arrested in "clean up" operations.



Barcelona

1992

Some 2,500 people displaced from area of Olympic Village. In Barcelona, rents increased 145%, while public housing stock decreased 76% from 1986 to 1992.



Sydney

2000

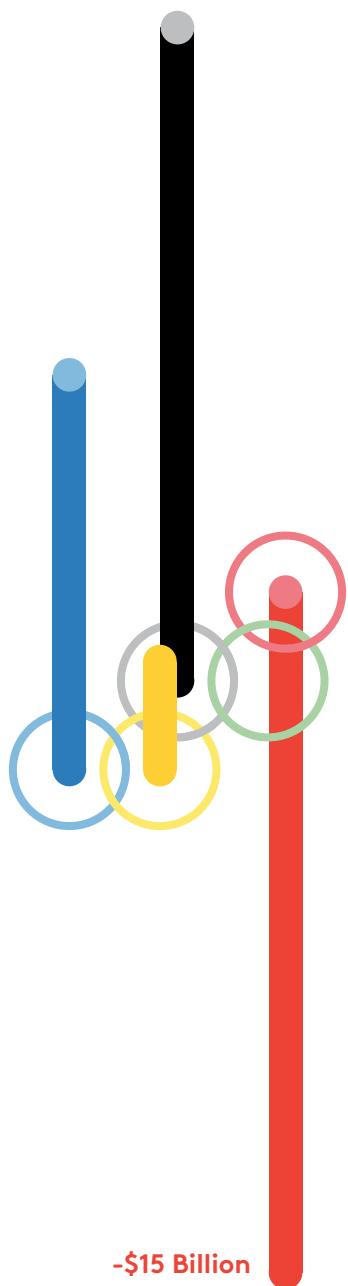
Government of New South Wales took over major costs of the games, then used its debts to force through massive budget cuts. Sydney's housing costs doubled from 1996–2003.



Athens

2004

Low-wage migrant workers employed in construction of Olympic sites. Fourteen workers killed in the process. Games preceded by mass roundups of homeless, refugees, and Roma people.



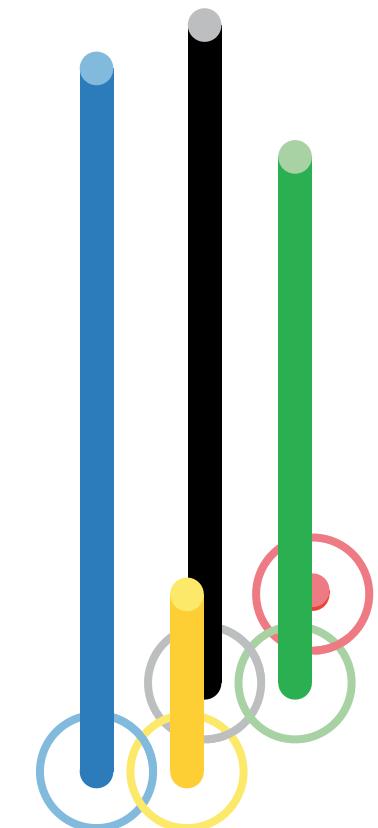
\$44 Billion

-\$15 Billion

Beijing

2008

As many as 1.25 million tenants were displaced by redevelopment. Migrant workers faced unpaid wages and unsafe conditions. At least six were killed at construction sites.



London

2012

Working-class tenants displaced by the London Development Agency. Union workers faced blacklisting for organizing against development.

to abandoned factory buildings and low-income communities.

Construction companies, engineering firms, and architectural conglomerates are all but drooling over the possibilities of port gentrification. Port redevelopment projects have figured prominently in the entrepreneurial city's strategy to attract foreign capital, business, and tourism. In cities around the world, port areas — Puerto Vell in Barcelona, Atlantic Gateway in Manchester, the Inner Harbor in Baltimore, and now Porto Maravilha in Rio — are marked as potential centers of tourism, culture, real estate, and business.

Like spectacles elsewhere, Rio's mega-events have fostered a veritable "state of emergency." As researchers Fernanda Sánchez and Anne-Marie Broudehoux have noted, zoning regulations have been changed, tax exemptions granted, and legal mechanisms reformed in order to create the largest consortium of private companies ever responsible for a project in Brazil. This consortium, called Porto Novo, is comprised of three companies — Odebrecht, Carioca, and OAS — that have their hands in many of Rio's redevelopment projects.

High rollers in Brazil have been pursuing this port redevelopment strategy for a long time, and it wasn't a coincidence that these companies were awarded the project. In fact, they had been eyeing the port for years. According to Gusmão de Oliveira, the new municipal decree granting them development rights was effectively copied from a private-sector proposal for port redevelopment in 2009 written by these very same companies. The sense of urgency around the Olympics provided the opportunity to rush into this PPP without adequate public oversight.

But who profits through these mechanisms isn't all that matters. Who gets pushed out, and how, is also fundamental. Neighborhoods can only be revalorized through gentrification after they have been devalued. And it is poor, darker-skinned people who are considered to devalue land in this area. People who have been oppressed and neglected for generations will now be pushed out.

This is accomplished in part through the language and framing of redevelopments. Meu Porto Maravilha, an interactive exhibit set up to showcase

the area's redevelopment plans to the public, describes the port area as "empty" and "derelict." But a quick look around the port reveals vibrant housing communities, people working on the streets, and local businesses catering to lunch crowds.

Descriptions of "dereliction" and "emptiness" effectively erase the thousands of people without homes, squatter communities, and favela residents who currently live in this area. Rhetorically erased in an attempt to legitimize the project, Rio's impoverished populations will be physically removed as land values increase and speculation runs amok.

Quiet the Favelas

Nowhere are race, class, and the rhetoric of dereliction more keenly felt than in the pacification of Rio's *favelas*. These communities of low-income people have grown rapidly in the last forty years as a result of massive urbanization, developing on hilltops and other environmentally vulnerable spaces that were the only places available to people migrating for work from other areas of the country. The historic neglect and marginalization of favelas by state and municipal governments means that residents have had inconsistent access to the city's legal infrastructure and services.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, after waves of deindustrialization swept across the country, hitting Rio de Janeiro particularly hard, the drug trade gained a stronghold in the city's favelas. This was particularly concerning for Rio's governors and media, because the favelas are located in some of the richer neighborhoods of Zona Sul. This apparent hazard to the wealthy led the municipal and state government to develop a mandate to quash the violence. Mega-events have provided an opportunity to further this agenda.

Military police occupation is central to Rio's mega-event strategy. The first large-scale military intervention in Rio's favelas of this era occurred just prior to the Pan American Games in 2007. Hundreds of military police invaded Complexo do Alemão, in Rio's impoverished Zona Norte, under the guise of "taking back" the community from drug traffickers. Nineteen people, mostly young black boys, were killed during the operation.



In 2008, shortly after Brazil won the rights to host the 2014 World Cup, and as Rio was bidding for the Olympic Games, the state government of Rio de Janeiro introduced the Police Pacification Unit (UPP) program. Supposedly designed to control drug-trafficking territory, the program established a permanent military police presence in numerous favelas. Complexo do Alemão and other low-income communities have now been invaded by the UPP units. The media has framed the presence as a way to both save “innocent” favela residents and protect tourists and international visitors to Rio.

Pacification is a program designed partly to securitize the mega-events and “protect” favela populations, despite the continued deaths of residents at the hands of the military police. But it also fits into Rio’s broader neoliberalization strategy. It’s often said among the city’s low-income residents that the first group entering the favelas after the military police was Light, the private (formerly state-owned) electricity company. Cable enterprises, bank branches, and garbage collectors soon followed.

The UPP program has been part of a strategy to integrate the favelas into the urban fabric and provide government support where there once was none. But they have also allowed the state to achieve more permanent surveillance within these areas and open them up to state-sanctioned economic development.

The rhetoric of pacification has celebrated the small entrepreneur and tried to attract business interests into these previously “dangerous” and “untapped” communities. Now events are staged to exploit the business opportunities that favelas offer. An event called “Bairro Chic” (Chic Neighborhood) held this past May in a grandiose theater in Rio brought stakeholders from the private sector together to discuss the potential for profit in pacified favelas. Such events, attempting to make favelas trendy, are becoming commonplace in Rio.

As pacified favelas are marketed for commercial development, the value of land is increasing. Particularly in Rio de Janeiro’s Zona Sul, where the areas offer magnificent views of the ocean, land speculation and gentrification have increased dramatically since pacification — so much so that

Vidigal, a favela on the West side of Zona Sul, will soon be the next home of soccer superstar David Beckham.

Back to the Streets

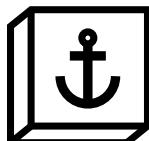
On that opening day of the World Cup, I stood with the protesters. There were blocks of favela residents chanting against the police violence of pacification. There were activists holding signs denouncing gentrification of the downtown port area. And there were vendors selling food to protesters, having been banned from the grounds around Maracanã. On that day, the connections were being made viscerally as demonstrators stood shoulder-to-shoulder on the pavement: Maracanã renovation, Porto Maravilha revitalization, and favela pacification. All privatizing public resources, all dispossessing low-income people. And all part of the veritable legacy of Rio’s mega-events.

It’s true that some Brazilians will make money from hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Indeed, what is particularly insidious about the neoliberal city within a neo-developmental Brazil is that massive quantities of *public* money are being invested in infrastructure developments for the profit of the already rich, who tend to be national and international developers with close financial and political ties to the ruling parties.

But the people are angry. Citizens are demanding change in the streets of Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian cities. The rhetoric and media discussions of these protests, however, must extend beyond a critique of mega-events. Social movements and demonstrators who are unhappy with Rio’s redevelopment will have to continue taking to the streets and boardrooms to target the governance structures and ideologies that make urban competition and the profit motive the only obvious course for this city.

Of all the cities faced with privatization via mega-events, perhaps Rio de Janeiro can do it differently. Brazilian urban movements have shown in the past that they can effect significant change. It’s because of their efforts that urban rights are enshrined in the country’s constitution. Now, a new generation of activists is fighting to ensure that these rights have meaning in the new Rio. ■





The Book of Paul

**From British Hong Kong to Paul
Romer’s charter cities, neoliberals
have a solution for us all.**

Sam
Wetherell

P

aul Romer, the inventor of the charter city, is the closest this century has to a real-life character from a Joseph Conrad novel. Since quitting his job as a Stanford economist and tech CEO, Romer has dedicated himself to realizing a vision: the creation of vast neocolonial cities within the territory of developing countries, paid for, built, and governed by wealthy liberal democracies.

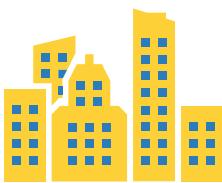
Romer, who describes his office as the local Peet’s café down the road, fills his calendar with meetings with corrupt local leaders and trips to survey remote coastal hinterlands where he fantasizes about the creation of cities of millions. You can imagine arriving at a tavern in some distant tropical port only to find him, wearing khakis and a Panama hat, with a cellphone, a map, and a giant red marker pen, talking about “win-win solutions” to global poverty.

Romer’s charter cities are pitched as a solution to the “bad governance” — often referring to pesky things like taxes — preventing countries like Uganda from becoming, say, Switzerland. These future metropolises will boast free movement of labor in and out of their borders. Trading their citizenship for jobs, residents would not be allowed to vote in any traditional sense other than with their feet.

Romer imagines a world in which the United States, tiring of its now-toxic ownership of Cuba’s Guantánamo Bay, cedes the territory to Canada. With Castro’s permission, the Canadians use private contractors to erect a vast, ten-million-strong city there. While the land would be in Canadian hands, residents of the city would still be Cubans. They would have almost no say in the administration of the city, which would be managed by technocrats and business leaders. According to Romer, such a city-state would have a profound effect on Cuba’s economy, enabling the transfer of ideas, jobs, capital, and people.



Enterprise Zones



Enterprise Zones are small, neighborhood-sized areas in which certain taxes and regulations are suspended, in the hope that capital would be attracted into the area. Originally, the brainchild of a handful of British radical planners in the 1960s, enterprise zones were first implemented in the country in 1981 to revitalize deindustrializing inner cities.

Special Economic Zone



Similar to enterprise zones but much larger, operating on a city-wide or even regional level. While enterprise zones are designed to attract capital for urban regeneration, SEZs usually exist to stimulate an entire national economy. This is a catch all term that includes things like Export Processing Zones and Free Ports. Early forms of SEZs can be traced back to Ireland in the 1950s but they were made famous as a macroeconomic strategy in the late 1970s in China as part of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms.

Forerunners to Roemer's Charter Cities



1979

Illinois Legislature approves the first enterprise zone in the US, but, amid objections from labor, environmental, and civil rights groups, Governor James R. Thompson vetoes the bill.



1981

Michigan Representative Jack Kemp co-sponsors the first enterprise zone bill with Bronx Democrat Robert Garcia. Kemp becomes heavily associated with the zones; President Ronald Reagan also puts them at the center of his urban agenda.

1947

The world's first special economic zone is established in Puerto Rico. However, it takes several decades for the model to spread to other developing countries — most notably, India and China.



1965

India sets up a special economic zone in Kandla, the continent's first.

Photograph by Mukund Pradhan
via Wikimedia Commons

While this sounds fantastical, Romer rightly notes that this is an idea with a historical precedent. In 1842, representatives of the ruling Qing dynasty were marched aboard a British gunboat anchored off the coast of China and forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking, the outcome of a messy imperial war from which Britain had just emerged as the victor. Among other things, the treaty ceded Hong Kong, a small but strategically located peninsula, to British control. Hong Kong stayed in British hands until 1997, becoming a dynamic port fueled by free trade, low taxation, and sweatshop industrial production.

When Deng Xiaoping began transforming the Chinese economy in the late 1970s, the special

economic zones created along China's Pacific Coast were apparently inspired by Hong Kong's example. Romer's imaginary city in Guantánamo would be to Cuba as Hong Kong was to China in the 1980s.

The sociologist Aihwa Ong has argued that in the late twentieth century citizenship is becoming increasingly decoupled from geographic space. Romer's cities are a perfect fit for this new state of affairs. Residents of charter cities will be consumers rather than stakeholders, able to come and go but unable to vote on how their city is run. Indeed, the idea that people have the knowledge, material resources, and inclination to uproot and leave their charter city as soon as things start going



Photograph by David Iliff via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC-BY-SA 3.0



1982

An enterprise zone is carved out in the London Docklands, once part of the Port of London. The area becomes a financial services hub — vindicating, in the eyes of supporters, the originator of the idea, Peter Hall.

1994

Several states establish enterprise zones in the 1980s, but the first federal legislation isn't signed until Bill Clinton's first term. The act dubs the deregulated areas "empowerment zones" and awards \$100 million to six cities.

1995

South Carolina passes enterprise zone legislation, a decade after early adopters. It ends up going further than nearly every other state, effectively making the entire state an enterprise zone.

1976

The Kingston Free Zone is formed in Jamaica, and twelve years later so is the Montego Bay Free Zone. The zones are part of the "industrialization by invitation" mode of development embraced by many Caribbean countries.

1981

Special economic zones figure prominently in China's post-Mao economic liberalization under Premier Deng Xiaoping. The original one is set up in Shenzhen; in the last thirty years the coastal city has grown exponentially.



Shenzhen Stock Exchange Center
via Wikimedia Commons

1995

Mielic is the first in a wave of Polish special economic zones set up in the 1990s. The areas have recently attracted a flurry of criticism for enabling the firing of striking workers and several erosions of labor conditions.

2003

In an attempt to develop the logistics, tourism, and financial services industries, South Korea designates a swath of land three times the size of Manhattan the Incheon Free Economic Zone

downhill — and that these decisions can be substituted for traditional forms of political action — is perhaps the most fantastical and terrifying part of Romer's vision.

His idea recalls Italo Calvino's fictional city of Eutropia, whose residents, tiring of their mundane existence, move en masse to a different city, which is waiting "empty and good as new," a city where they will receive new jobs, friends, and pastimes.

Romer first pitched his idea to the government of Madagascar in 2008. After repeated attempts to secure a meeting with then-president Marc Ravalomanana, Romer turned up uninvited in Antananarivo and staked out the presidential palace. When he was eventually granted an audience, Romer



2008

Using California as a case study, an exhaustive National Bureau of Economic Research working paper finds that state enterprise zones don't boost employment, and that the Golden State's program is "ineffective in achieving its primary goals."

2013

California repeals its enterprise zone program, replacing it with a more limited hiring credit that will cost the state significantly less in tax expenditures.

2005

The Kaesong Industrial Complex opens in North Korea, just across the demilitarized zone. A rare example of North-South rapprochement — the North supplies about 50,000 workers to produce for more than 120 South Korean businesses.



Model Industrial Complex in Kaesong
via Wikimedia Commons

convinced Ravalomanana to agree to the creation of two charter cities, each run by a different Western power. Ravalomanana, a wealthy self-made man, was himself an evangelist for neoliberal development and had spent the better part of the last decade privatizing much of his country's infrastructure.

Malagasy charter cities were shipwrecked, however, by events in 2009. When Ravalomanana's presidential guard opened fire on demonstrators protesting high food prices in Antananarivo, a chain of events was initiated that ended in Ravalomanana's deposition by military coup and the termination of his partnership with Romer.

Romer's next stop was Honduras. He hoped that a charter city there would reduce the influence of

the country's powerful criminal networks. However, while described as "unpopulated," the two zones selected for the cities were home to large numbers of the Garifuna community, who would be displaced were the plan to go forward. When an initial attempt to create a charter city was struck down by the Honduran Supreme Court in 2012, the government promptly fired the four judges who had voted against the plan and invited Romer to sit on a transparency committee advising the creation of two charter cities. But in the wake of news that those in charge of the cities had signed a memorandum of understanding with a mysterious business consortium called Grupo MGK that had alleged links to libertarian Whole Foods founder John Mackey, Romer resigned from the transparency committee, claiming he wasn't being included in major decisions regarding the project.

Events in Madagascar and Honduras saw a return of the realpolitik that Romer's breezy *Freakonomics*-style rhetoric tries so hard to repress. While his ideas seemed convincing in the air-conditioned hum of a TED Talks lecture theater, in practice the trading of democracy for untrammelled free-market capitalism turned out, to Romer's surprise, not to be conducive to human rights, political stability, and the flourishing of a million bright-eyed tech entrepreneurs.

Thatcher's Paris Commune

Although charter cities are presented by Romer as a technocratic conjuring trick, the geopolitical equivalent of a lifehack, similar ideas have been at the forefront of New Right thinking for more than a generation. The privatization and deregulation of small pieces of urban land to showcase the success of free-market capitalism in its purest form has been the strategy behind enterprise zones, special economic zones, and free ports. These policies have arguably been neoliberalism's most successful legislative pushes.

The story of these ideas begins with a group of maverick urban planners writing in Britain in the late 1960s. Led by the urban planning guru and later government advisor Peter Hall, the group set out their



vision in what became known as the “Non-Plan” manifesto. The non-planners called for large county-sized regions of the UK to be freed from all state planning restrictions. Critiquing what they saw as a frustrating and ossified government bureaucracy, the authors imagined that a new world of social and aesthetic freedom would emerge in these regions.

They envisioned thatched British villages connected by vast Los Angeles-style freeways and houseboats sailing to “row-in movie theaters,” and outlined a radical vision of democratic urban planning. “Why not let people shape their own environment?” the non-planners asked. At times playful, at times fiercely passionate, the Non-Plan did not quite amount to an ideology, but it was a sentiment, a primordial soup from which a new ideology would soon evolve.

Despite these libertarian fantasies, Peter Hall remained at first a reliable, though at times reluctant, member of Britain’s left-wing intelligentsia, advising a key Labour Party planning committee and participating enthusiastically in campus upheavals in Berkeley during a 1960s stint at the university. In 1973, Hall chaired the Fabian Society, Britain’s most influential left-wing think tank.

His allegiances were overturned, however, during the economic crises of the 1970s. During that decade, Hall made repeated visits to Hong Kong, where, like Romer, he fell in love with the British colony’s sweatshop dynamism and grew convinced that deregulation was the only solution to Britain’s growing urban crisis. In a high-profile speech in 1977, Hall first suggested the enterprise zone as a solution to Britain’s urban decay (though he didn’t use the term). The idea was seized on by Margaret Thatcher’s government-in-waiting.

Enterprise zones were to be small inner-city areas, exempt from certain elements of state regulation (and, crucially, from taxation). Gone were the anti-authoritarian impulses and aesthetic hedonism of the Non-Plan; the freedom that remained was to be the freedom of the market. The enterprise zones were designed to pave the way for top-down, financial-services-led gentrification. The original vision called for passport checks along the borders of the zones, which would be designated as “Crown Colonies,” (the formal name for many British colonial

territories, including Hong Kong). The zones would be totally exempt from all fire and building code regulations and laws forbidding workplace discrimination. While the final implementation of the zones was somewhat diluted, it was the enterprise zone, rather than the Non-Plan region, that became British policy in 1981.

Twenty years later, Hall would acknowledge the irony of this story, writing that the transition from Non-Plan area to enterprise zone marked a moment where “right and left met around the back of the stage.”

The idea took off. The same year that enterprise zone legislation was being drawn up by Thatcher’s new government, it crossed the Atlantic, supported and further honed by libertarian think tanks like the Cato Institute. Today, there are thousands of enterprise zones in the United States, 79 in the UK, 85 in France, and 22 in Italy. There are plans to set up zones in South Africa, Australia, and even Sweden.

The first eleven zones created in the United Kingdom by Margaret Thatcher were presented to local residents as means of bringing back jobs and prosperity. Secret government memos from the time, however, told a different story: Keith Joseph, a senior advisor to Thatcher, noted that the zones would be “demonstration areas ... where conditions more encouraging to enterprise might be established — to show what would then result.” Indeed, Paul Ferrara, the Cato Institute apparatchik who bought the policy to the US, wrote in 1982, “The creation of islands of economic freedom in America’s major central cities will hopefully serve as useful demonstrations of the success of free markets.”

Unlike Paul Romer, who has attempted to steam ideology out of his charter city idea, the early evangelists for enterprise zones were clear about the effects of their policy. It was designed to achieve ideological ends with administrative means. One newspaper even joked that the streets of East London’s enterprise zone would be renamed after right-wing economists — Friedrich Hayek Boulevard, Milton Friedman Avenue, maybe even Ludwig von Mises Lane.

Like Romer, Hall and Thatcher’s chancellor Geoffrey Howe repeatedly and favorably cited Hong Kong as a role model for their ideas. While



Britain developed a Keynesian welfare state in the postwar period, Hong Kong perfected its policy of “positive non-interventionism” and became a laissez-faire carnival of sweated migrant labor. Praised by Milton Friedman, Hong Kong became something of an urban fantasy for the British new right — the Thatcherite equivalent of the Paris Commune. During a state visit to the city in 1980, for example, Thatcher’s trade minister could not resist mentioning in his speech that the British right “shares your profound belief in free enterprise and we shall strive to come as close to your achievements as we can.”

The proliferation of extrajudicial deregulated zones crafted to the needs of capital has occurred at the national as well the local level. Introduced in 1980, Chinese Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are vast macroeconomic exceptions designed to link Chinese manufacturing to the developed world without fully jettisoning protectionist trade policy. There are now more than a dozen SEZs scattered along the length of the country’s Pacific coast, where exceptional laws have favored the production of export-oriented commodities with minimal regulation or redistributive measures. There are also more than thirty state-level economic development zones, more than fifty industrial development zones, and fifteen free-trade zones scattered throughout China.

To the extent that these zones proliferate and overlap, it is increasingly difficult to talk of a single Chinese political economy. The result is something like political economy à la carte, a system that allows neoliberalism to live alongside state-planned communes seemingly without contradiction.

The fragmentation of the global economy into competing exceptional zones continued into the late 1980s and 1990s, with new zones in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. A 2008 World Bank report noted that there were more than two thousand such zones scattered across the world, and that 62 percent were entirely developed and operated by the private sector. The Dominican Republic, for example, has created thirty-one privately-run special economic zones around Santo Domingo in which private contractors are responsible for the provision of almost all of the zone’s infrastructure. Romer’s plan for charter cities is little more than the

intensification of a process that has been underway for more than a generation.

One Big Zone

The enormous global transformations of the last few decades — away from both state socialism and Keynesianism — has been described as a coup by business elites, a structural shift in the economic base, or the outcome of an increasing loss of solidarity and social totality in the wake of globalization. Looking at these geographically based policies, however, we can see neoliberalism not as a discrete set of national policies or strategies of accumulation, but instead as a network of different zones crafted to the needs of capital — zones that are increasingly becoming the rule, rather than the exception.

In 1944, Karl Polanyi argued that a series of early nineteenth-century upheavals ushered in, for the first time, integrated national markets which stretched taut across states like fitted sheets. Non-Plan areas, enterprise zones, special economic zones and export processing zones have pierced holes in these national economic fabrics.

Historically, from worker-cooperative towns like Robert Owen’s New Lanark to the Occupy movement, the creation of utopian communities has been the preserve of the political left. The perfection of exemplary social relations within a tightly bounded geographic space has often been seen as the first step in making a new world free from the ravages of industrial capitalism. With enterprise zones and charter cities, neoliberals are discovering the powerful political possibilities of their own utopias.

A decade after the policy was proposed in Britain, Thatcher’s finance minister, Geoffrey Howe, returned to the first enterprise zone in London to give a speech among the forest of skyscrapers and shopping malls that had mushroomed within its borders. The need for the zones, he claimed, was now redundant, as his government had “turned Britain into one giant enterprise zone.”

As Paul Romer continues his mission, setting forth like Conrad’s Marlow to far-flung corners of the world with a map and an imperial spark, it might not be long before we are all living in charter cities, one way or another. ■



The Creativity Bubble



Richard Florida chats about Karl Kautsky, Karl Marx, and other urban creative types.

Erin Schell



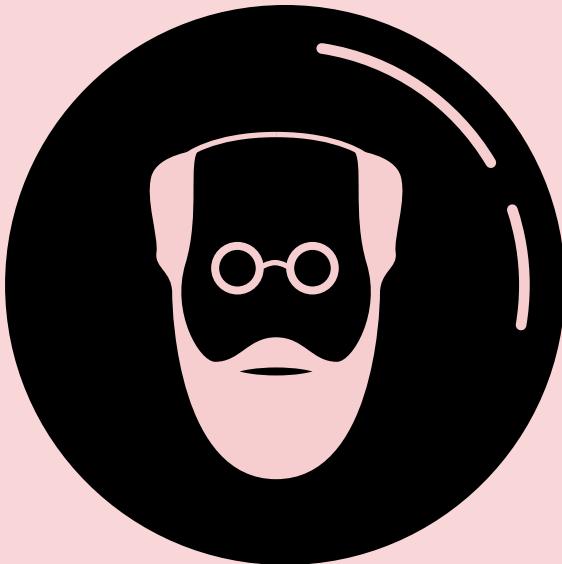
Richard Florida burst into the mainstream with 2002's *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Over the past decade, his ideas about what drives economic growth have spawned new policy prescriptions in American cities. Florida's most controversial claim is that the urban "creative class" — which he says comprises 35 percent of the US labor force — is at the root of new economic growth.

For Florida, the "economic revolution" of the new creative economy is occurring in tandem with an "urban revolution." Major metropolitan areas, he maintains, have become the de facto form of social organization in the post-industrial era; they are the place where the creative class lives, works, and most importantly, clusters together.

The essence of Florida's idea is simple: creative class prosperity, located within the economic and social structures unique to the urban environment, attracts new waves of creative class immigration, in turn expanding urban colonies of prosperity. Thus, cities provide the scaffolding not only for the day-to-day life and happiness of the creative class; they are the engines of prosperity itself.

One can see the appeal of such an idea to urban policy makers as well as to the fortunate members of the creative class: they are the designated knights of a promising future, and they bear the bittersweet responsibility to better the world for us all.

Florida's "Three T's" — technology, talent, and tolerance — serve as the analytical factors that determine his "creativity index" of economic development in cities. It follows that progressive policy decisions aimed at nurturing an open-minded urban ecology of arts and culture that appeal to the tastes of the creative class — charming Wi-Fi equipped cafés, vintage boutiques, cozy galleries, and music venues — are seen not only as an effect of economic prosperity, as a cause of it.



At least from the publication of *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2002 until the 2008 crisis, it seemed to follow that any downtrodden city possessed the potential to stem depopulation and instead attract the creative class with the right combination of infrastructure and cultural investments. The well-paying jobs would follow on the heels of their arrival.

Of course, the flipside to a successful city in the creative age is the displacement of the non-creative class and widening inequality in our cities, a problem that Florida freely admits. The popularity of his urban prescriptions have drawn ire from both the Left and Right, the former regarding him as a “neoliberal dressed in black”; the latter accusing him of neglecting family values through his trumpeting of hip gays and minorities as integral to urban economic growth.

No doubt Richard Florida is filled with good intentions. Yet the broadly progressive truism that he claims motivates his work — creativity, a universally innate human trait, deserves the chance to be realized — is challenged by his acceptance of neoliberal capitalism and market logic as the inevitable economic situation that the creative class is obliged to shape from within.

The shortcomings of such an understanding are glaring. We’re left to wonder how redistributive concessions could ever be won from above, without an account of non-creative class political agitation from below.

What follows is a condensed and edited transcript of my conversation with Florida, where he generously gave me the opportunity to ask him to elaborate on some of the political implications of his work.



ERIN SCHELL RICHARD FLORIDA

You have said previously that "we're living right now through the greatest economic transformation in human history." What changes in the state are accompanying this economic transformation?

I've been interested in the big structural shifts in capitalism since I was an undergraduate at Rutgers, and I came at that pretty much from a Marxist or neo-Marxian point of view.

I read all of Marx, I read all of Schumpeter, I took classes in Hegel and Marx, and the Frankfurt School, and what I came to understand is that the biggest problem we confront intellectually is how capitalism changes. And that happens in these big disruptive bursts. The classic ones would be the rise of modern industry in the nineteenth century, and then in US terms, the great crises of, say, the 1870s or the 1890s and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

I began to believe, and many people began to believe, with Keynesian demand management and smart economic policy, that this wouldn't happen again. Lo and behold, in 2008, we had a crash on the same order of magnitude of those ...

What I've been *really* interested in is understanding why capitalism does not collapse, and why capitalism is able to remake itself. Early on, then, I got very interested in Joseph Schumpeter and his theory of how capitalism revolutionizes itself, mainly through creative destruction, powered by these great entrepreneurs.

There's a great economist of innovation called Christopher Freeman. I met Chris Freeman as a young scholar, and what Freeman said to me, which was really interesting, I asked him, "How did you come to Joseph Schumpeter?" And he said, "Well I was basically a Marxist, but when I wrote stuff about Marx, nobody would publish my articles. When I substituted the name 'Schumpeter' for 'Marx,' my papers would get published everywhere."

What I thought Schumpeter did was very interestingly point to the fact that capitalism doesn't collapse necessarily in the way Marx predicted, but it's able to self-revolutionize because it can generate new technologies, new industries.

What I tried to do, successfully or unsuccessfully, is to marry this notion of what Marx and Schumpeter were talking about with modern urban studies. And what I think I came to figure out — whether you guys like it or not — is that the industrial corporation and the factory were the arena for Marxian innovation, the Schumpeter innovation, and Marxian class conflict in the older phase of capitalism.

In this new stage of capitalism — call it the knowledge economy, the postindustrial economy, whatever — place itself has become the key social and economic organizing unit: where the knowledge workers congregate, where the infrastructure of capitalism is built (like roads, density, communications, etc). And this packing in of people, à la Jane Jacobs and Robert Lucas, it is place itself that supplants, becomes the social and economic organizing unit of modern capitalism, analogous to the factory.



What I've tried to do is show how place plays that role in both the growth of capitalism, the dynamism of capitalism, and its instability. And there, I tried to marry the insights of Jane Jacobs and, a little bit, the insights of David Harvey. So I see this crisis not so much a crisis that's expressed in the economy, but a crisis that is expressed in this contestation over place.

When I wrote *The Rise of the Creative Class*, all I could focus on was the dynamics of place in leading this Schumpeterian reinvention of capitalism. I could not have predicted that this same reinvention of capitalism would lead to a similar, analogous kind of crisis that we saw in 2008. Right now, I think we're seeing an expression of that crisis, of capitalism trying to remake itself around dynamic cities and urban areas.

I was hoping you could discuss some of the political implications of your concept "quality of place," as a more specified measure of a city's economic potential than "quality of life." What I have in mind here is — we're speaking to you from New York City, where famously, Rudy Giuliani and Bill Bratton, our once-again police commissioner implemented "broken windows laws" that crackdown on petty crime like loitering and graffiti.

Giuliani essentially made homelessness illegal, and Michael Bloomberg just in 2009 was giving one-way tickets to homeless people to leave the city, which could be seen as a kind of spatial solution, I suppose. So I'm just wondering how you would respond —

Disgusting. I mean, one word: disgusting. I was a huge opponent of people like Rudy Giuliani. I have much more respect for Mike Bloomberg, and I actually quite like the current mayor, and am a big fan of the comptroller, Scott Stringer. If you saw, Scott and I just did an event on building a more inclusive and creative New York. So I am extremely aware of the issues of inclusivity, as well as diversity and quality of place, and I would say I've become one of the leading champions of this.

What I've decided to do, to be quite honest, is instead of raising many of these issues in an oppositional way, to try to phrase them within the logic of capitalist economic development. Some might call me a neoliberal. I don't like that label. But all I tried to do was phrase issues that would broaden the debate about urbanism in ways that mayors and economic developers could accept — rather than trying to combat them in a directly oppositional way, which I think, by the way, is useful.

I thought I could use my influence in a different way. There was a debate between Rosa Luxemburg, and Trotsky and Lenin, and Karl Kautsky. I saw myself following a more Kautskyite position — reform within the system.

When I talk about quality of place, I talk about quality of place for everyone. My critics can shape and twist this. But I'm talking about parks for everyone, green space for everyone, cities for everyone, cities that are diverse and open without regard to race and ethnicity, and how those things actually, ironically, propel development.

The open-minded, the tolerant, the diverse city, where people have access, becomes a better city that people feel more connected to, and are more productive. Because many of the innovations that drive capitalism don't come from — and this is what the whole idea of the creative class is about — classifying people by education level and college degrees, but by the kind of work they do.



This is directly derived from Marx: what are the kinds of occupations that define the classes? Much of creativity doesn't come from the high-minded software engineer, or biotechnician, but it comes from the street, and this is a defining characteristic of American urban areas.

I think I've been very unfairly criticized for not dealing with socioeconomic inequality. I think I've been one of the first urbanists, modern urbanists, empirical urbanists, to point to socioeconomic inequality. I said it was a direct outgrowth of the clustering of knowledge and creative workers, and their competition. In *Rise of the Creative Class*, I said that place would become the arena for class conflict in modern capitalism, and I think I didn't quite know how that would play out. I cautioned city leaders and the creative class to be well aware over that contestation over space.

You seem to designate the creative class as the universal class — by which I mean the primary agent of social transformation and social change — i.e. the revolutionary class. Yet at the same time there appears to be a rejection of class struggle in your analysis.

I've heard you say previously, and I'm paraphrasing, that it's not about division, it's about the working class, the service class, and the creative class all coming and working together as a team, in cities. Given the structural limitations capitalism puts upon the non-creative classes, how do you envision the service and working classes —

There's a difference between the one percent and the creative class. Going back to Marx, if you really want to think about how I formulated this, I went back to the *Grundrisse*. Already in the *Grundrisse* Marx is pointing to the rise of social and collective knowledge. Remember, he looked at the factory as a collectivity, as a place of intersubjective production.

What I began to believe was that as factory production declines to what we have now — 5 or 6 percent of Americans involved in direct factory production, getting to what agriculture was in the thirties or forties — that there was another kind of intersubjective production that binds people together, and it's human creativity.

I think, empirically, I had to make a call. And the empirical call was I had to document people who were paid in some way to use their creativity and dub them a socio-economic class, in contrast to the lower-income service class, who are not paid. They should be paid to use their creativity; we have to extend the boundaries of that class. I believe that every human being is creative.

I'd say the central contradiction of capitalism — I say this in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, completely overlooked — is the attempt to impose top-down order, corporate direction, corporate control over the full flourishing of human creativity — this conflict between organization and creativity.

If Marx saw the working class as the universal class, I think the creative class — the notion that every human being is creative — is an even broader class.



I think what you just spoke to, about this contradiction — the mistake of trying to institutionalize an ordering from above, rather than harnessing creativity from below — points back to my first question that I'm hoping to push you on regarding the political implications of your work.

I've heard you say previously that we should really have mayors leading the way in steering economic growth, with the help of the federal government subordinated to their leadership. But my fear is that instead of serving the function of redistribution, the role of the state then becomes one of surveillance and securitization; to serve and protect the boundaries of the creative class, legitimized through the rhetoric of universal creativity —

facturing, the industrial working class, but nearly half of us toil in these low-wage, contingent, minimum-wage, low-skilled, routine service jobs.

And I've written a lot about the need for global minimum wages that are tagged for the cost of living, and I've written a lot about the need for an effective strategy to upgrade those jobs. So yeah, I think that state policy now, you're right — and I think it's not just the security state, it's this modern, quote unquote ... "smart city of censors," and total 24 by 7 security. I mean, this is something that would make Orwell shutter. So yeah, we need to do something, but in the absence of some kind of unified, urban progressive —

It's interesting to me, I feel like I'm part of the leadership of that kind of movement, and in some ways I feel excluded from it. I feel like people are putting me with the conservatives. I call it the narcissism of small differences. We need to come together.

In my next book, it's something I'm looking at in a very clear-eyed, open-minded, and hopefully hard-nosed fashion.

Let me give you a simple answer, and then you can push me more. I've come to have a very different reaction to a lot of my friends about cities being able to do it all. I don't think cities and mayors can do it all. I think they have limited powers, and I think that we need a really progressive urban policy around this. The contours of that progressive urban policy are hard to specify, and in my next book I'm going to work on it more. Clearly it has been concerned with inequality, it has to be concerned with segregation. We have to be concerned with concentrated poverty, which increasingly looks to me like a problem that is even more devastating than gentrification.

This is where I say the urban optimists and the urban pessimists, we have to come together. We can't stay in this oppositional position. We have got to come together and figure out a new route for federal policy. Will it be perfectly progressive policy? No. But I think we have to come together on this, and I do think it means taking care of the people being left behind.

As you know, the biggest element of my work recently has been trying to look at what is happening with the group I call the service class that no one wants to focus on. People want to talk about knowledge workers, education, manu-



You were talking about your interest in the transformation of capitalism, and how capitalism keeps managing to transform itself. Would you dare to make the argument, then, that it's possible to transform beyond the cyclical crises of capitalism? I'd also like to raise here the Marxian concept of the "reserve army of labor" —

We have a large reserve army of labor in global capitalism, and a pattern of uneven development that Americans and American urbanists have to wake up to. I look at the greatest challenge, it's global urbanization, where we're going to put billions of people in cities, and many of them still live in global slums. The whole kind of automatic relationships between agglomeration and urbanism and development is not occurring. It's not fine to me. So no, I think capitalism is fundamentally destabilizing.

The Kautskyite in me — here's what worries me: I cannot imagine the hell that will occur if this system really breaks down. I think of my dad during the Depression, working in a factory, fighting in World War II, the hell that was his life. God I would hate to see that kind of system breakdown today, with nuclear arsenals. So I will do everything in my power to try to ensure that we avoid system breakdown.... But I really think it means building great cities. I think this is what progressives and conservatives don't get. If we don't build these great containers of place, that work and that have great infrastructure — social, knowledge, physical — that bind us together and create pathways to opportunity for all, this thing is really unstable.

But frankly, it's hard to see the alternative out there. I'm fifty seven. I would opt for a better, more egalitarian, more progressive form of capitalism than an unknown. You guys may not like me for that, but I would think — a unionized capitalism, with a stable working class, getting my dad the ability to own a home was better than the capitalism that came before it, and I think we can do a lot better today.

I think we're all in agreement on hoping for a more egalitarian future, but I think the thing that concerns me a little bit is, again, the lack of political struggle in your account, the lack of any opposition that's typically thought of when you think of politics —

Of course, because the creative class is an atomized class. And it's this possessive individualism that all of us suffer for. And all of us have to wake up. So I don't think it's the working class and the service class versus the creative class. It's every one of us outside the owners of the means of production. That's why I wanted to specify this group of knowledge workers that potentially is a revolutionary class.

I believe Marx would've seen these knowledge workers not as the petit bourgeois, but as a group of people whose objective conditions force them to understand the intersubjective nature of their labor, their dependence upon one another, those who can't afford it, and those service workers who support them and create the infrastructure — you know, home cleaning, healthcare, personal care, food preparation.



All of us are in this together, and if we draw lines — working class, creative class, service class — we're cuffed. But I do think the creative class owes it to society, because of its privileged position, because of its level of education, to see this.

We lack a progressive left. We have an animated, completely purposeful right that terrifies me. But we on the left shoot at one another. We need a progressive and purposeful left that can provide a vision of a better life for everyone.

Now what scares me, of course, is for every Bill de Blasio, we have a Rob Ford. And what really terrifies me, if you ask me what really shook me to my bones, was the rise of Rob Ford in Toronto. If you had asked me a decade ago if one of the most progressive cities in the world could elect a retrograde thug, I would have said you were insane. To see Rob Ford's rise in Toronto, to see the group of new immigrants, working-class people, new Canadians who supported him ... the "what's the matter with Toronto?" It terrifies me. So I think this galvanized me more.

Based on what you just said, it sort of sounds like you're framing class struggle, perhaps, around the Occupy credo of 99% versus 1%.

But is that sort of like —
It's the means of production, and it's not the creative class versus the working class, you know. It's those who own and control. That's

what Marx would've said: it's the ownership.

But isn't that an oversimplification?

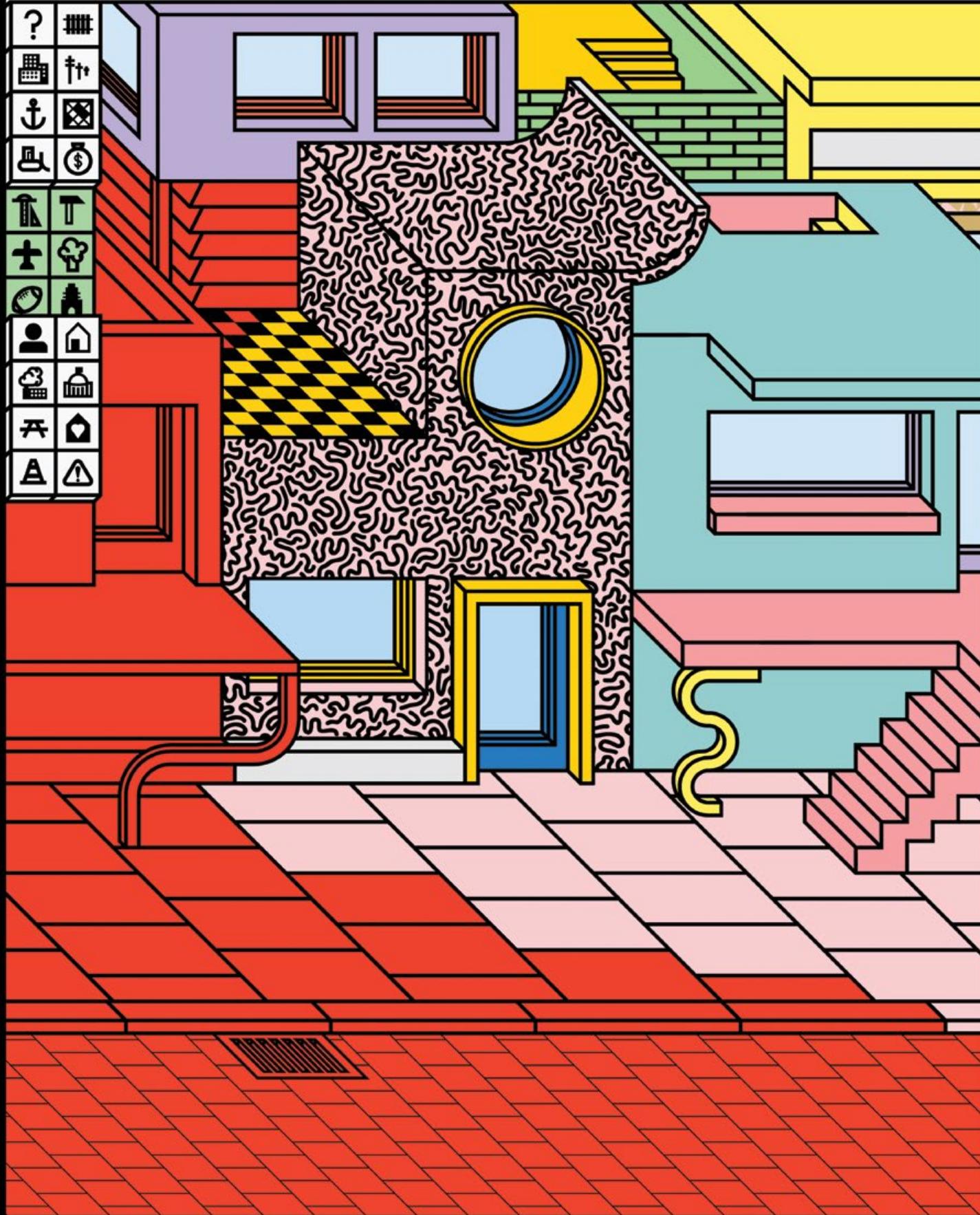
So, it sounds great, but if one of the central tenets of capitalism is competition —

Of course, the trade workers versus the mass industrial workers, pitting worker against worker, pitting people against people. It's a central tenet of capitalism. And that's what a progressive movement should help to overcome.

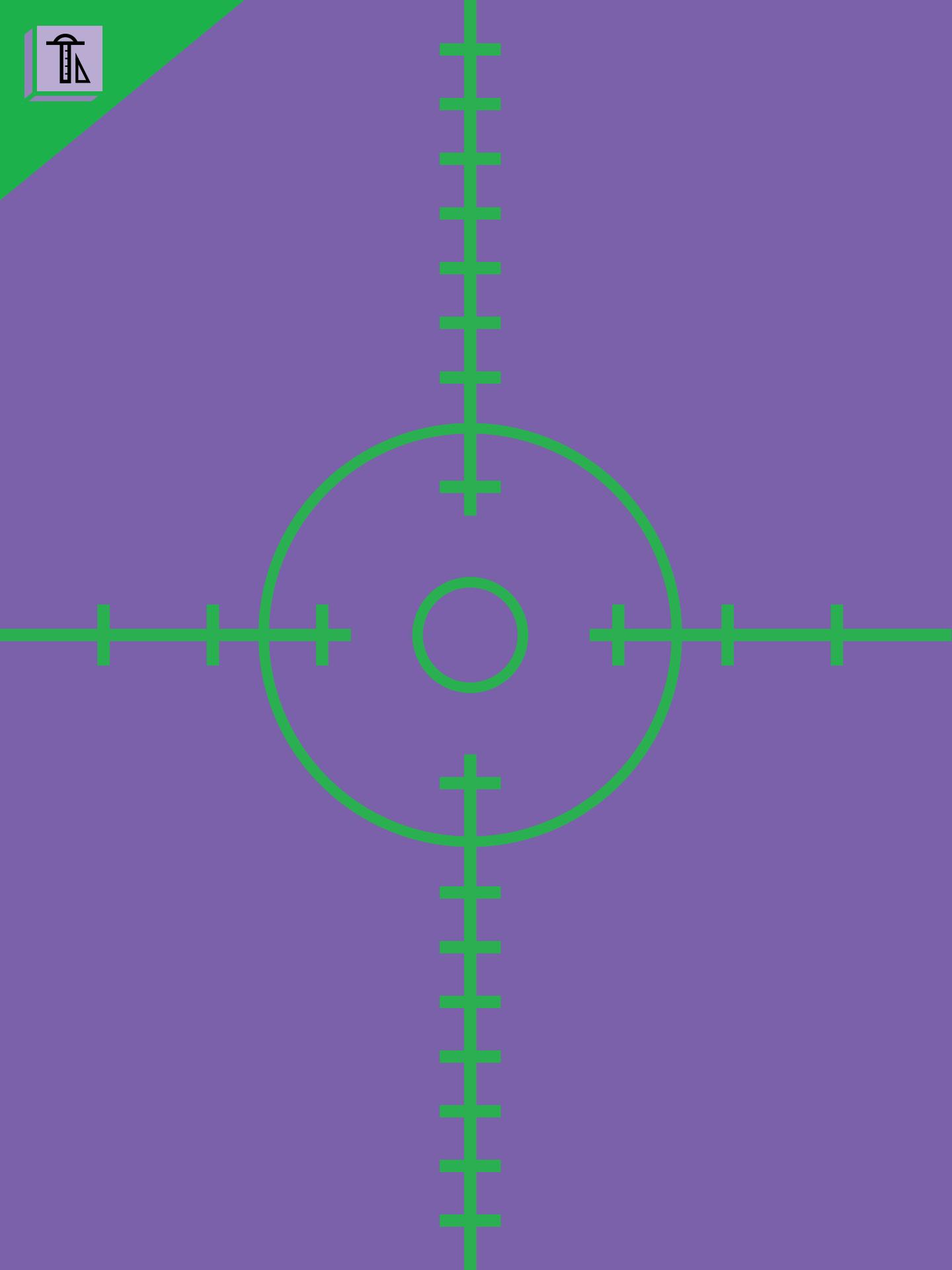
But I don't think we should say it's the creative class versus the working class. I think that's the wrong way to frame it. If we exclude the 35 percent of us who are knowledge workers, and the 50 percent of us in cities like San Francisco, and we make the big struggle a Google worker against a service worker — it's really who owns and controls the means of production.

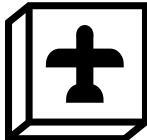
It's not individual capitalists; it's a structure. It's a structure of capitalism at the very top. Finance capital is really hamstringing us. ■

FILE SPEED OPTIONS DISASTERS PRIORITY WINDOWS ISSUE









B-52 Bomber Radicalism

A plan for rational improvements to the city of Los Angeles.

Mike Davis



In a not entirely facetious vein, I once taught a course at the Southern California Institute of Architecture where every student was made to imagine they had a B-52 and unlimited bomb tonnage. Their assignment was the optimal improvement of the built environment through the destruction of the ugliest and most antisocial large buildings.

It was hopeless to expect that architects would agree on what constitutes “good design,” but I was curious whether we could achieve any consensus about “bad architecture.” If so, perhaps we could leave some pertinent instructions for the next LA riot.

In the event, students loved playing Curtis LeMay and bombed the city with gusto, but with disappointingly little overlap among their targets. Perhaps “bad” design was as capriciously subjective as “good” design. But one student remembered a lecture I’d given about Churchill’s quasi-Marxist strategy for terror-bombing German cities during the Second World War. The RAF’s early priorities were the slum neighborhoods in Berlin and Hamburg-Altona that had the highest percentage of Communist voters in the 1933 elections, with the expectation that morale in these former red belts would shatter most easily. (It didn’t.)

By analogy, my student reasoned that we should ignore the ugly buildings and bomb their designers instead. To be as inclusive as possible, he had made an address list of the headquarters of the major corporate architects and commercial developers. These were pre-drone days, and some students balked at the idea of targeting people rather than their creations. But when someone else pointed out the incredible future that such carnage would create for young, promising architects, there were smiles all around.

We were having too much fun to reflect on the fact that the system would immediately reconstruct itself with SCI-Arc grads seduced into business suits, or that avant-garde experiments depend on powerful private patrons.

The discursive world of urban design and planning will always be dominated by masturbatory fantasy until its inhabitants acknowledge that the real target of change must be the commodity form of land itself. Greater equity in urban space, including the basic right to remain in the city of one's birth or choice, requires radical interference with rights of private property. Reforms — large-scale affordable housing, for example — that once seemed realistically achievable within electoral politics now demand an essentially revolutionary upheaval. Such has been the logic of Reaganite post-liberalism: to convert basic demands into what Trotsky called "transitional demands."

Certainly, it was inspiring to see Occupiers reading the like of Slavoj Žižek and David Harvey inside their tents in Zuccotti Park, but the cause might have been better served if *Progress and Poverty* (1879) had been on the reading list as well. In 1890, Henry George, not Karl Marx, was far and away the most popular radical thinker in the English-speaking countries. His concept of a confiscatory tax on unearned increments of income from land ownership was as enthusiastically embraced by urban workers (he almost won the mayoralty of New York in 1886) as by Highland crofters and Irish tenants. Although Engels and Daniel De Leon rightly scourged the "Single Tax" as a universal panacea, George was no crank, especially in the application of his ideas about land reform to urban areas.

The great accomplishment of the Occupy movement — forcing national attention on economic inequality — became its ideological cul-de-sac to the extent that the movement was silent about economic power and the ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. Anyone can enlist in the vague cause of reducing income inequality, but actually attacking (or even acknowledging) the pyramid of economic power required a clarity that Occupy groups largely failed to achieve.

And yet, the historical moment offered the opportunity. After 2008, the American financial and residential real-estate industries were wards of the state, entirely dependent on public investment and government action. It was a prime moment for progressives to demand their conversion into de jure public utilities — nationalized and democratically managed.

An emphasis on public ownership would also have illuminated solutions immediately at hand, such as using the huge housing stock that defaulted to federal ownership to address the lack of shelter and affordable rents. Instead, the Obama administration followed the same path as Bush senior in the savings and loan crisis a generation ago: organizing a fire sale of homes and apartments to speculators.

Let's be blunt: unregulated real-estate speculation and land inflation and deflation undermine any hope of a democratic urbanism. Land-use reforms in themselves are powerless to stop gentrification without more municipal ownership or at least "demarketization" of urban land.

The public city is engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the private city, and it's time to identify large-scale private property as the disease. Bombs away. ■

WOMEN AND CLASS Towards a Socialist Feminism



Essays by Hal Draper

This book recounts the origins of the modern feminist movement in the revolutionary movements of the 19th century. Beginning with an account of the first organized women's movement, La Société des Citoyennes Républicaines et Révolutionnaires, on the left of the French Revolutionary movement, this book tells the story of women's movements in England, France and Germany. It is a story that has rarely been told in English.

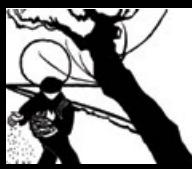
THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT



Hal Draper & Stephen F. Diamond

In the early 1970s in California, at the height of the movement to pass an ERA, a split developed within the feminist movement. One of the consequences of the proposed legislation would be to eliminate existing legal protections for women workers. One solution was to extend protective laws to men. A solution that was rejected by most feminists. Draper and his co-author, Stephen F. Diamond, discovered that this split went all the way back to the 1920s.

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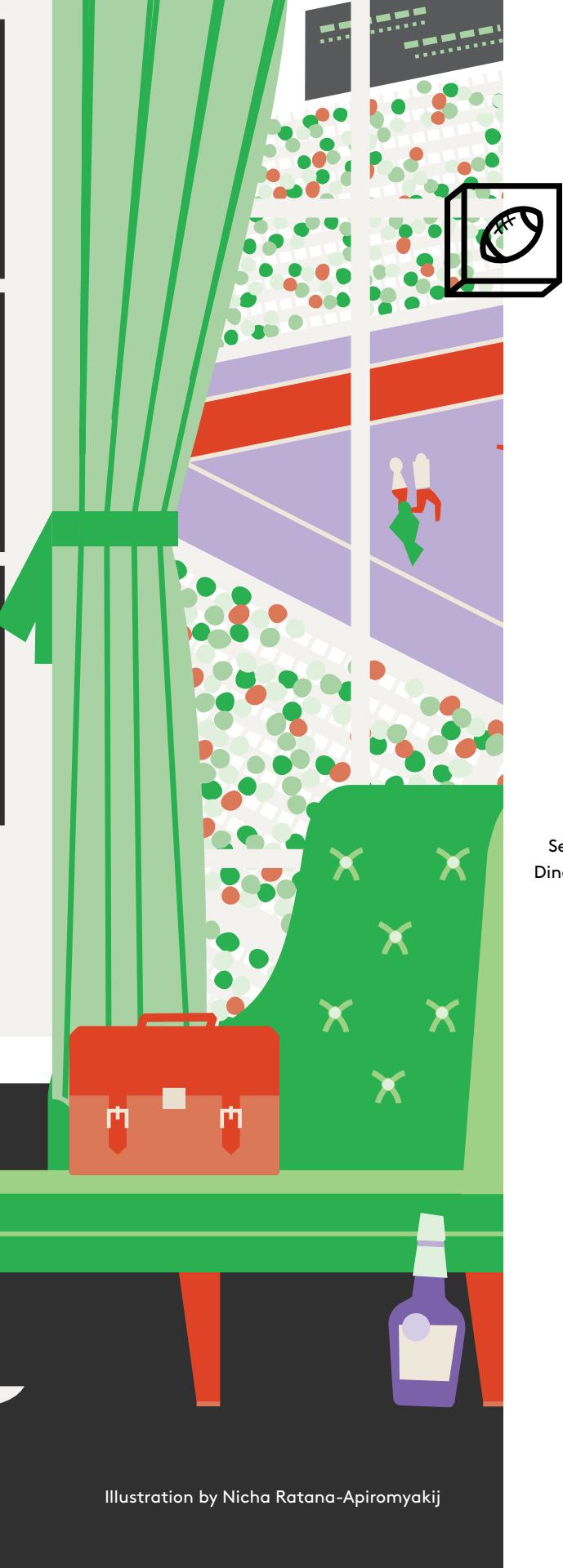
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Fanfare without the Fans

The luxury suites in modern stadiums are reminders that capitalist society values elite consumption over public enjoyment.

Sean
Dinces

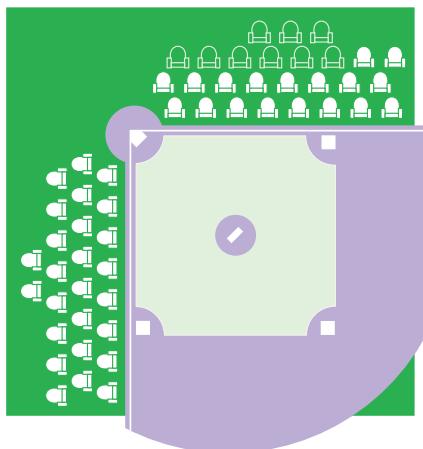
You don't even have to like football to have a fine time at Metlife Stadium. A regular ticket gets you access to more than twenty different types of concession stands, including one operated by cable television's Food Network, which serves up buffalo mac and cheese alongside signature sloppy joes. After taming your appetite, hop on over to the Flagship Store Powered by Reebok. Just in case anything exciting happens on the field while one of the store's more than fifty associates is ringing you up, the \$1.6 billion facility features cameras that beam replays directly to your smartphone.

For those who find these amenities too spartan — and indeed, there are some who do — Metlife Stadium also offers an array of premium seating options. Holders of season tickets for any of the venue's 9,500 club seats (all of which are cordoned off on their own tier) receive "roomier, cushioned seats," as well as access to the "two luxurious 50,000-square-foot, climate-controlled Chase/Lexus Clubs." These clubs offer more

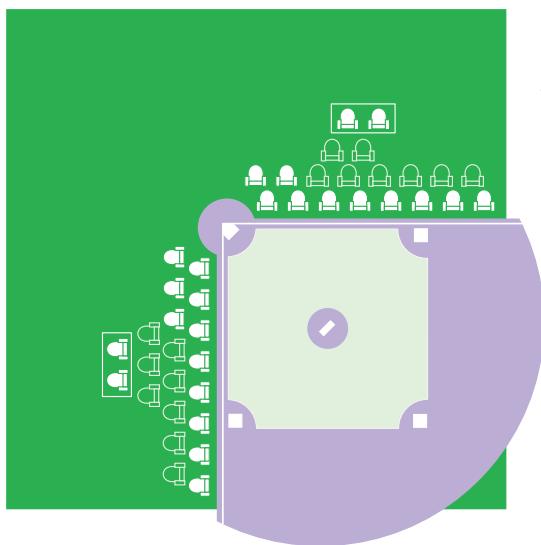
GROSS	SQUARE	FEET
COUNTY	8	0,0 0,0
MILLER	1,2	0,0 0,0
COUNTY	SEATING	MILLER
44,000	NON-PREMIUM	21,000
9,000	SEASONAL	16,000
0	PREMIUM	4,600

Standing Room Only

Despite its greater square footage, the Milwaukee Brewers' new stadium, Miller Park, contains 15,900 fewer non-premium seats than County Stadium, the franchise's former home.



County Stadium
1953



Miller Park
2001



upscale food and drink, a private entrance, and a place for classier fans to schmooze without having to worry about crossing paths with the regular-admission crowd.

A single club seat sells for anywhere from \$2,000 to \$7,000 for the entire season, not including a \$5,000-to-\$30,000 “personal seat license” just for the right to buy the tickets. Fans desiring an even more exclusive experience can spring for one of the stadium’s 212 luxury suites, which accommodate up to thirty guests in a private enclosure. Each suite features its own bathroom, refrigerator, and wet bar, not to mention multiple flat-panel televisions. Some lease for as much as \$1 million annually.

Perhaps more than any other phenomenon, Metlife and the rest of the current generation of sports stadiums in the US encapsulate what Mike Davis describes as capital’s “recolonization [of] inner-city retail markets.” Far from signaling the retreat of the state from investment in urban economies, this process has witnessed the shift of robust public spending on cities away from public goods like affordable housing and toward spaces and structures designed to provide the elite with new opportunities to consume conspicuously.

The boom in construction of taxpayer-subsidized luxury stadiums and arenas during the last quarter-century exemplifies the breadth and intensity of this shift. Between 1987 and 2010, 104 new Major League Baseball (MLB), National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), or National Hockey League (NHL) facilities opened — most of them in or around the downtowns of major cities, and all of them financed to some extent by public money — while only 70 debuted between 1950 and 1986. The newer venues have invariably boasted new luxury amenities and dramatic increases in premium seating capacity. For example, Giants Stadium, the venue Metlife replaced in 2010, had only 119 luxury suites and a paltry 124 club seats.

Several developments have led major-league sports franchises to reconfigure their stadium-related growth strategies around elite consumption. Firstly, by the 1980s working-class fans had become less attractive to teams as consumers. Growth in real wages had ground to a halt during the 1970s

amid severe inflation, and wages actually declined in the next decade as a result of business’ assault on unions and the government’s retreat from policies that kept a tight lid on unemployment. The ultimate outcome: an upward redistribution of income that motivated firms in the entertainment sector to redouble their efforts to capture spending by those at the top of the ladder.

Moreover, by the 1980s, most franchises already enjoyed robust markets of ticket buyers from the professional and corporate classes, who had limited outlets for conspicuous consumption at older stadiums and arenas. Maximizing stadium-generated revenues took on a new urgency for team owners at the end of the twentieth century, as the organization and growing assertiveness of players’ unions (one of the few corners of organized labor that saw gains in this period) placed much stricter limits on the ability of team owners to control labor costs.

In some leagues, owners rushed to build massive banks of luxury suites not just because they added a new, robust revenue stream, but also because they offered teams a way to evade mandates for revenue sharing. In the NFL, for example, which has long required teams to commit a certain amount of their earnings to a shared pool in the name of competitive balance, league rules have historically exempted money from suite leases from the collective pot. In ceding to franchises the power to totally control money from luxury boxes, the exemption provided yet another incentive to construct as many of them as the market could sustain.

While this economic history is clear enough, liberal commentators have missed the boat as to why it matters. This is not to say that they have ignored the issue. Quite the contrary. Since at least the early 1990s, many journalists, nostalgic for an earlier era of allegedly more democratic spectatorship, have lashed out against the elitism of new major-league stadiums. Back in 1991, *Washington Monthly*’s Jonathan Cohn wrote, “Skyboxes, for all their cozy frivolity, speak to an essential flaw in American social life: the elite’s eagerness, even desperation, to separate itself from the rest of the crowd.” According to Cohn, increasing class stratification within stadiums threatened professional sports’ hallowed history as an “antidote to status anxiety.”

A couple years later, the *New York Times* lamented the fact that “the accursed sky boxes and ‘club seats’ are designed not so much to give you a better vantage point but to separate you from the rabble.” The piece added the requisite nostalgic nod to the past, noting that “while sky boxes might succeed in promoting snob appeal, they are death on the synergism and the shared appreciation that has traditionally tied sports fans together.” The *Atlantic* more recently joined the chorus, mourning a “luxury-box America” where “an afternoon at the ballpark is less often the class mixer it used to be.”

To be sure, the condescension of those in skyboxes towards the outside world deserves ridicule. In the early nineties, for example, a banker who leased a skybox at the Miami Dolphins’ Joe Robbie Stadium confided to one journalist that his rationale for the expenditure was “know[ing] there’s not going to be anybody behind you who’s really obnoxious.” But the journalistic critiques are symptomatic of a deeper issue. For all of the indignation about the snobbery and pretentiousness of skyboxes, these commentators have had nothing to say about the upward redistribution of resources — into the hands of both private stadium developers and rich sports fans — that has fueled the trend they find so odious.

The shapers of liberal opinion, in other words, have defined the issue in terms of wealthy fans’ behavior, rather than in terms of how class has increasingly come to shape access to urban social and cultural goods like spectator sports.

This shouldn’t come as a surprise. This is precisely the message which, according to Walter Benn Michaels, now dominates conversations about class “at every level of American life”: “there’s nothing wrong with being richer than everyone else as long as you don’t act like being rich makes you better than everyone else.” That is, the problem isn’t that only a handful of fans can afford skybox leases; the problem is that skyboxes make fans inside them *feel* superior and those on the outside *feel* inferior. For liberals, sports stadiums are no different from the rest of American life, where, as Benn Michaels writes, politics “has been reduced to nothing but etiquette.”

Academic critics are no exception to this myopia. Harvard professor Michael Sandel, in *What Money*

Can’t Buy, the oft-cited takedown of the “skyboxing of American life,” writes:

For most of the twentieth century, ballparks were places where corporate executives sat side by side with blue-collar workers... [but] the advent of skybox suites high above the field of play has separated the affluent and the privileged from the common folk in the stands below.

Again, the difficulty for people like Sandel is the unwillingness of the luxury box set to rub elbows with the non-rich — their refusal to partake in a charade of consumer egalitarianism.

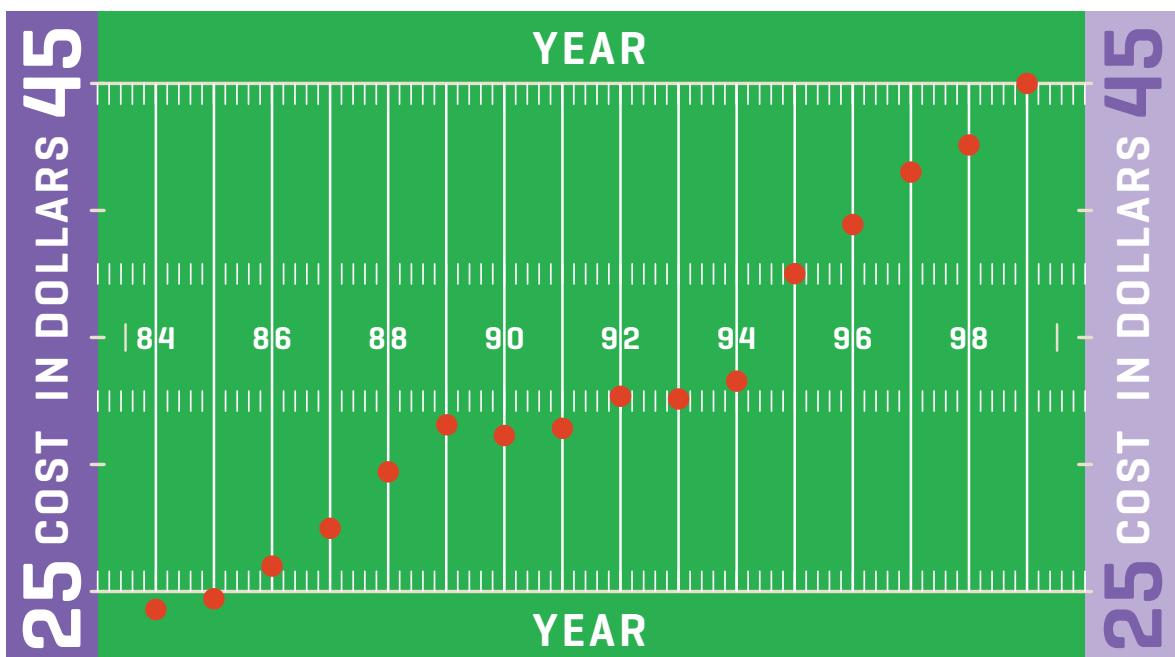
But if we reasonably define “common folk” as what economist Michael Zweig terms the “working-class majority” — that is, the more than 60 percent of Americans who work as something other than professionals, small businesspeople, mid- and upper-level management, or elite capitalists — the much bigger problem is that their presence at major-league stadiums, even in the “stands below,” is largely a figment of Sandel’s imagination.

Leagues, teams, and stadium designers have, time after time, reassured “regular” fans that skyboxes and club levels actually subsidize affordable seats in other sections. “They need to have premium areas that cost a whole lot of money,” says Ron Turner of the stadium architecture firm Ellerbe Becket, “so they can always have a ticket that the average guy can buy.” Such a claim seems plausible inasmuch as stadiums of the current generation are much bigger than their predecessors. (Metlife Stadium, for example, encompasses 2.1 million gross square feet, 1.2 million more than the old Giants Stadium.) In theory, this trend might reflect a design strategy through which teams have added luxury seating on top of existing general seating capacities in order to accommodate fans with a wide range of incomes.

The data suggest otherwise. I recently assembled a database that catalogues the number of premium seats (luxury box seats plus club seats) and non-premium seats (everything else) at the current and previous stadiums of 73 out of 92 active MLB, NBA, and NFL franchises for which data were available (all 73 inaugurated their current facility after 1987).



A Blitz on Workers



Even adjusted for inflation, the price of the average NFL ticket doubled between 1984 and 1999.

Even using conservative assumptions and estimation techniques, the numbers tell an unequivocal story: despite massive increases in the average size of major-league facilities during the last quarter-century, franchises have added premium seats in luxury boxes and club levels while simultaneously removing non-premium seats. Across all three leagues, I estimate that the typical franchise occupies a facility that, as of 2013, had approximately 4,900 more premium seats and nearly 6,800 fewer non-premium seats than the one it replaced. These are not trivial numbers. They translate into an average reduction of non-premium seating capacity of 15 percent.

Instead of using additional square footage to accommodate fans from a range of classes, teams are

devoting it to amenities like high-end team stores and cocktail lounges. Combine this with the fact that franchises have continued to expand the number of non-premium seats sold as season tickets, which require large up-front payments — by now some franchises actually sell all or nearly all non-premium seats as season tickets — and it's obvious that working-class fans have few if any opportunities to cheer on their teams in person.

This is not to say that the previous generation of stadiums actually fostered the idyllic, democratic spectatorship implied by popular commentators. As historians like Benjamin Lisle have documented, they did not. Stadiums designed and constructed in the immediate postwar period increased barriers



A Brief Social History of Stadium Seating



Late 1800s

Professional baseball team owners begin to enclose playing fields with fences to filter out the "rabble."



Late 1800s / Early 1900s

Seating arrangements at baseball stadiums become more readily stratified by ticket price. "Grandstand" seats closer to the action cost more than bleacher sections further away. This sort of stratified seating replicates practices at other popular spectator sports, such as horse racing.



1902

The Cincinnati Reds' new stadium, the Palace of the Fans, features a bank of 19 private "fashion boxes," early forerunners of modern luxury suites.



Early 1900s

The new concrete and steel ballparks, which replace older wooden facilities introduce additional crowd control mechanisms, such as turnstiles. Despite the increasing focus on screening out certain fans from the spectator market, at most venues even the most expensive tickets remain cheap by today's standards.



1945

New York Yankees' owner Larry McPhail installs one of the first members-only "stadium clubs" at Yankee Stadium.



1965

Houston Astrodome opens with 53 luxury suites, the largest concentration of skyboxes in a single venue up to that point.



1971

Texas Stadium, old home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, surpasses the Astrodome by opening with 176 luxury suites. These sorts of numbers, however, remain the exception for the next 10 to 15 years.



1987

Joe Robbie Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins, which features 216 suites and over 10,000 club seats, becomes a prototype for the luxury stadium building boom that follows over the next quarter-century.



1992

The MLB's Baltimore Orioles move to Camden Yards, which despite attempting to replicate the style and ambiance of the pre-World War II generation of stadiums, features large blocks of luxury suites and thousands of club seats. The "retro" ballpark trend that ensues largely follows this template.



21st Century

The stadium building boom continues, seemingly unabated, as does the push for increasingly gentrified venues.



to entry by reducing the amount of cheap bleacher seating that dominated venues before the war. But those barriers to entry have grown significantly higher and more impermeable in recent decades.

Few examples of this process are as straightforward as the Milwaukee Brewers' transition from County Stadium to Miller Park in 2001. At 800,000 gross square feet, County Stadium encompassed about 33 percent less total floor area than Miller Park; it contained no premium seats and more than 53,000 non-premium seats. The much-bigger Miller Park boasts more than 4,600 premium seats, but contains 15,900 fewer non-premium seats than County Stadium. Moreover, in recent years the Brewers have sold more than 16,000 of Miller Park's non-premium seats as season tickets, meaning that the stadium really only offers about 21,000 seats that Mandel's so-called "common folk" have any chance of purchasing.

Moreover, the constriction of supply has fueled a dramatic price spike even for these remaining seats. According to data released annually by the trade publication *Team Marketing Report*, the nominal cost of an average-priced, non-premium seat at an NBA game (weighted by the number of seats at each price level) rose from \$22.52 during the 1991–92 season to \$50.10 during 2001–02. After adjusting for inflation, this represents a jump of 73 percent over a period when real wages rose only around 10 percent. Such dramatic price inflation has manifested itself not so much in the stratification of consumers within stadiums, but rather in the near wholesale exclusion of the working class from them.

Admittedly, secondary ticket markets hosted by websites like StubHub have allowed for the transfer of some season tickets to non-season ticket holders. That said, there is no systematic evidence to suggest that they promote a significant increase in the number of more affordable single-game tickets. In fact, recent studies indicate that, with the exception of a very small window of time immediately before a game, average sale prices for single-game tickets on StubHub exceed those of direct sales from teams.

To appreciate the extent of the barriers to entry faced by wage-earning fans, it's important to keep in mind that most people don't go to games alone, and that tickets are only one of many costs involved

in attending games. In 2012, the cost of four average-priced, non-premium seats — in other words, the baseline cost of a family outing to a game — registered at \$313.42 in the NFL. This means that the average cost of a family outing to just one game amounted to more than six times the average annual expenditure on "admissions to sporting events" among all US households. Factor in transportation, parking, and concessions, and the financial burden of attendance becomes significantly greater.

No doubt, many fans prefer the comfort of their living room to the bustle of the stadium. The reason all of this matters, however, is that at the same time that major-league teams have transformed stadium spectatorship into a pastime accessible to a narrower and narrower subset of the population, they have invariably benefited from a dramatic increase in the amount of public subsidy dedicated to stadium construction and maintenance.

According to data assembled by Judith Grant Long, when we take into account both initial capital costs and thirty years of ongoing upkeep, taxpayers will have contributed, on average, \$352 million for each new major league stadium opened between 2001 and 2010. This dwarfs the \$223 million average for facilities that debuted during the previous decade. As pro sports venues have effectively slammed the door in the face of all but the most affluent fans, supplicant states and municipalities have unilaterally diverted more and more from public coffers — a third of a billion dollars on average for every new stadium — to pay for them.

There are few exceptions to this trend. Some public funding deals are so lopsided that even the spin doctors in team public-relations departments and local newspapers have trouble finding a silver lining. Miller Park, for example, will have siphoned off an estimated \$681 million of local taxpayer money over a projected thirty-year lifespan, while team owners chipped in only \$137 million for initial capital costs. But even venues like Metlife Stadium, which the mainstream press reported would be paid for in full by private investors, will cost taxpayers dearly. Long estimates that ongoing maintenance and upkeep costs at Metlife will ultimately leave New Jersey residents with a tab of \$376 million.

Teams are quick to differentiate stadium developments from typical urban real estate projects by touting the civic pride and community cohesion allegedly fostered by major-league spectator sports. As sociologists Kevin Delaney and Rick Eckstein demonstrate, franchises have increasingly talked up these “intangibles” when demanding subsidies in order to divert attention away from research debunking claims that stadiums promote local economic development.

Opponents of subsidies have been right to draw attention to this economic development literature, but they would also do well to adapt their rhetoric in ways that directly neutralize teams’ retreat into claims of intangible social benefits. The data cited above on the transformation of stadium seating over the last quarter-century offer one place to start. They show that rather than bringing residents together, and rather than functioning as legitimate public goods, the current generation of publicly funded stadiums systematically exclude an unprecedented percentage of American sports fans.

Of course, decisively rebuking the rhetoric of teams and leagues will not, in and of itself, solve the problem. This is especially true in a day and age when decisions about stadium subsidies have been largely removed from the democratic process, and when franchises continue to wield threats of relocation like a sword above the heads of residents and municipal officials. Nevertheless, reshaping fans’ consciousness is a necessary starting point.

Ideally, fans should see an intractable antagonism between the potential of spectator sport as a community asset and its current role as a venue for taxpayer-funded consumption by a handful of urban elites. Critics must also stress that, despite what leagues want us to believe, fandom is not

necessarily contingent on having a stadium — or even a team, for that matter — close by, especially when attending actual games is unrealistic.

In the short term, transforming this consciousness raising into effective resistance against the sporting arm of the real estate business requires wresting fiscal

control away from politicians competing to offer teams ever greater sums of state, county, and city money. This means making anti-stadium-subsidy campaigns part of bigger struggles for social justice in cities, like the rise of a new radical unionism in places like Chicago or recent electoral successes by socialists in urban centers, such as Seattle.

The games will go on even if the handouts do not. Franchises that have enjoyed relatively minuscule public subsidies, such as the New England Patriots (NFL) and Montreal Canadiens (NHL), rank among the most profitable in their respective leagues.

Looking further into the future, we need to imagine a system of publicly owned spectator sports that inverts teams’ current prioritization of growth over access. Many point to the Green Bay Packers (NFL), a team operated as a nonprofit and funded by fan “shareholders” who do not collect dividends, as an ideal worth replication in this regard. Indeed, the Packers stand as proof that teams can operate successfully outside the traditional growth model in pro sports. But the franchise’s atypical structure has not precluded an increasingly exclusive stadium experience — last season the average Packers ticket price climbed to more than \$82 apiece.

Advocates for radical urban development must do more than simply reject profiteering if they intend to build an equitable, widespread network of public recreational spaces. They also have to take pains to design these spaces in ways that promote communal experience inside and out. In the case of stadiums, this might mean the embrace of higher-capacity facilities with no luxury seating, linked to convenient and inexpensive public transportation networks. Or it might mean the creation of many new, smaller venues and teams dispersed throughout a given city. In any case, the new system would satisfy the unmet demand for game attendance by using team revenues to subsidize an idea as exciting as it is basic: an adequate supply of quality seats for everyone.

So enough with the skybox set, and enough with the thimble-sized servings of buffalo mac and cheese that set you back half a paycheck. Most importantly, enough with the perverse system of corporate welfare that makes it all possible. Fans of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but an obstructed view from the nosebleed section. ■

*Links to the raw data,
statistical coding,
and methodology used
to produce these
statistics are available
from the author
(dince@wisc.edu).*

*Derek Taira provided
research assistance.*

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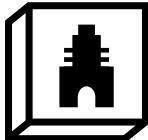
JACOBIN

REASON *in Revolt*



Edith Tudor- Hart

Edith Tudor-Hart (1908–1973) was an Austrian photographer who specialized in documenting cities and children's lives. In 1933, she fled Vienna for London. A committed leftist, Tudor-Hart saw her photography as a tool for propaganda and documented marches led by the Communist Party of Great Britain. During World War II, she played a critical role in organizing the Cambridge Five spy ring.



The Propaganda of Construction

The workers of Red Vienna struggled to secure their basic needs — through militant organizing and political power.

Jannon
Stein

C

an we address what Engels called “the housing question”? The architect Patrik Schumacher says no. During a keynote panel at a 2013 conference, he claimed that “reality is no longer posing that question.” Schumacher was rejecting the idea that public housing has contemporary relevance, arguing that it is naïve and “regressive” to return to this “bureaucratic” framework.

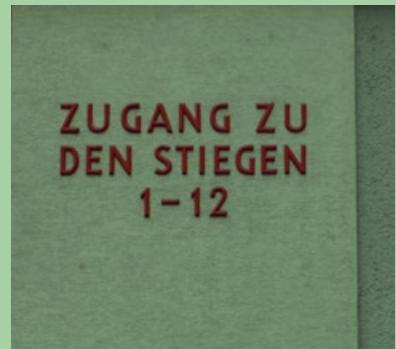
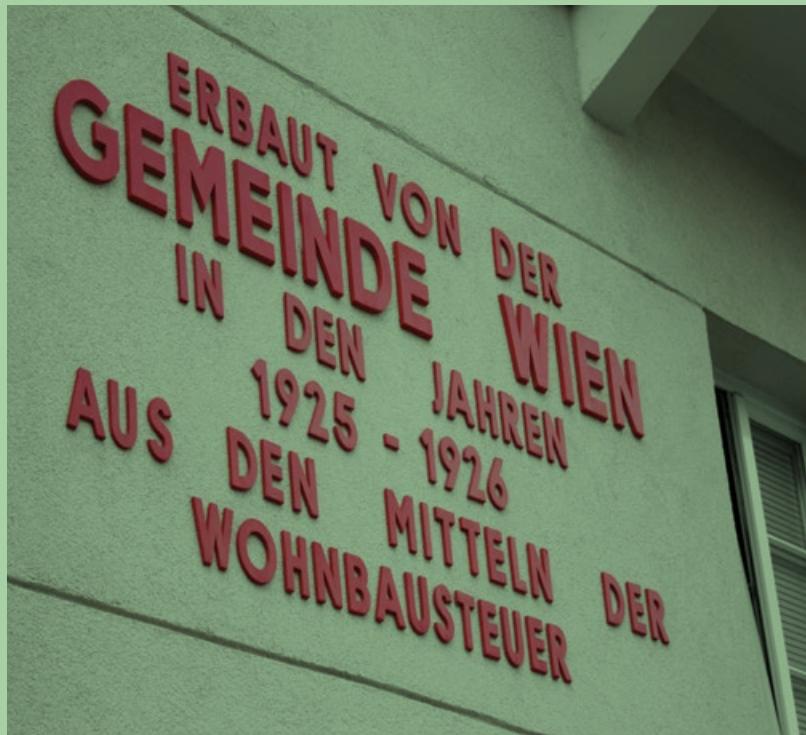
It was a stunning moment. Five years after a housing market collapse initiated a global financial crisis, a leading practical theorist of architecture was declaring “that question” off topic and outmoded. One hardly needs to recite the statistics of foreclosures, evictions, or market rents in major cities to understand that housing remains a problem for huge numbers of people. But from Schumacher’s perspective, the matter of how people organize where to live cannot be framed as an active problem in search of new approaches from professional architects.

Schumacher did have a salient point that day. He stressed that architecture adapts itself to “socioeconomic and political realities” — design styles do not solve political problems. If we want to transform how we use common space, we should engage in the politics necessary to make such projects more than aesthetic speculations.

Nonetheless, some aspects of how buildings are arranged seem to enable or prevent certain modes of life. Some street grids allow for semi-open, park-like spaces — plazas and courtyards — while others present narrow meandering paths through crowded shops and apartments. Some boulevards can be easily filled with tanks, some squares with millions of people. There’s a difference between a suburban cul-de-sac of single-family homes and a large complex of interconnected buildings with hundreds of apartments sharing common facilities like a swimming pool and a gym. The style of a building reveals nothing about how much the inhabitants pay in rent, taxes, or mortgage

Karl-Marx-Hof, Vienna Edith Tudor-Hart (1932)

Built by Austrian Social Democrats in 1930, the Karl-Marx-Hof was one of Vienna’s largest public housing projects. The Expressionist structure extended over a kilometer in length and housed nearly 1,400 apartments for Viennese workers, as well as numerous amenities such as laundromats, kindergartens, a library, and health clinics. Its reputation as a fortress of working-class power was put to the test in 1934 when socialist fighters took refuge behind its immense walls. The rebels were forced to surrender after fascist bombardment.



Photographs by Andreas Neustifter (2009)
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fees. It is mum about whether they had a say in the building codes or neighborhood zoning. It provides no knowledge of the workplace safety or level of compensation for the people who built it.

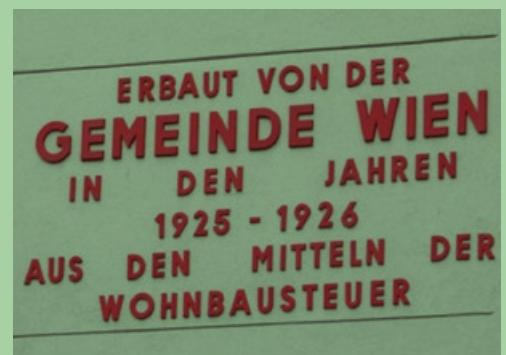
But sometimes the politics of a situation can yield new styles, new forms, new shapes for what we choose to build in the places in which we end up living. Perhaps in order to think through the complexity of the housing question, it's worth taking a look at one time and place in which its politics took center stage.

On the walls of certain buildings in the city of Vienna, there are large letters, usually red, arranged in short, simple sentences. The wording varies a little.

One common formulation could be translated into English as:



ZUGANG ZU
DEN STIEGEN
1-12



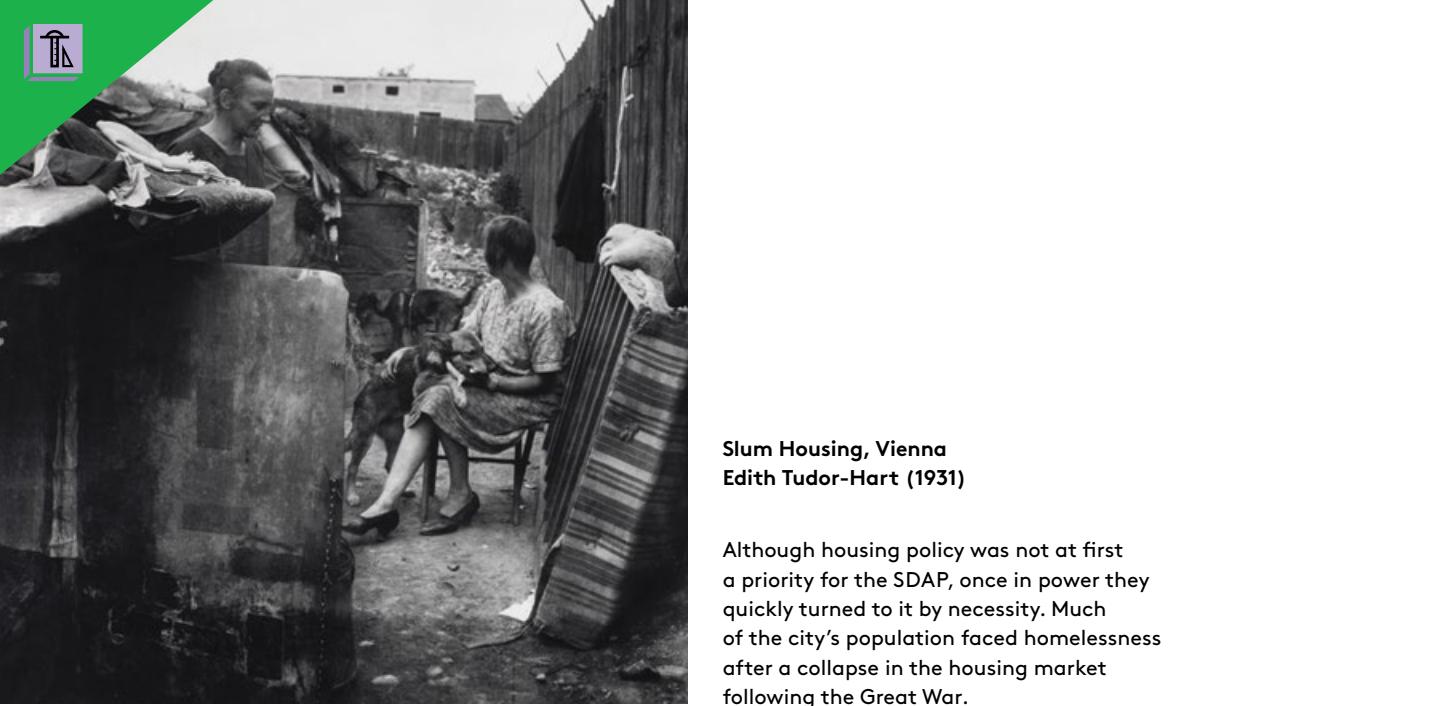
BUILT BY THE
COMMUNITY OF VIENNA
IN THE YEARS 1923-1934
BY MEANS OF THE HOUSING-BUILDING TAX

Versions of this text are affixed to the oldest of the *Gemeindebauten* — the public housing buildings that still provide homes for a little less than a third of the city's population. Currently, around 500,000 people live in the various apartment buildings owned and administered by the city. The 220,000 units within these buildings make up about 24 percent of all of the available housing in Vienna. Contained within that total are approximately 65,000 apartments built by the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei* (SDAP), mostly between 1923 and 1934. These socialists, also known as the Austromarxists, came to power in Vienna in 1919 through revolution and the first free and universal elections in Austria. They held a

solid ruling majority on the city council until defeat at the hands of the fascists in 1934.

During the fifteen years of “Red Vienna” — and ever since — the apartment buildings built by the SDAP were and have been a synecdoche for the entire project of Austromarxist municipal socialism. In the theory of Austromarxism, strategic interventions, even outside periods of full-scale revolution, could go beyond mere reformism and positively restructure social dynamics.

Johan F. Hartle, whose work focuses on the problematic visibility of the proletariat — an absent people, a people to come — in Red Vienna, has referred to the SDAP’s method as a “propaganda of construction,” in which newly erected buildings not only advertised and demonstrated an ideological program, but also addressed social needs and were intended to shift conditions on the ground in preparation for future socialist development.



Slum Housing, Vienna
Edith Tudor-Hart (1931)

Although housing policy was not at first a priority for the SDAP, once in power they quickly turned to it by necessity. Much of the city's population faced homelessness after a collapse in the housing market following the Great War.

The inscriptions vividly capture this attempt to turn Vienna from a collapsed imperial capital into a socialist city.

The texts are fairly simple; their claims are compact. In many ways, they are a stripped-down version of a keystone inscription. Responsible parties are named, a span of years is indicated, financial benefactors are acknowledged. Yet these texts are brief polemics as well. In letters that can be seen all the way down the block, they proclaim the work of community. Some even highlight the financial structure of a new housing system formed in opposition to the practices of private landlords. They declare a city built by its own people with their own means for their own ends, with greater transparency as to how the built forms of a common life are constructed politically and economically.

As historians have pointed out, housing policy was not initially the SDAP's preferred field. The SDAP felt that changes in housing would not alter fundamental labor relations. Yet they were drawn in by a combination of opportunity and extreme need. In the years leading up to World War I, Vienna experienced a significant housing shortage, with many residents living in poor conditions as subtenants or "bed-renters" — up to half of the members of most workers' families did not have a bed to themselves, while roughly a quarter of the Viennese population was known to be relying on a homeless shelter system in 1912.

The Christian Social government under the notoriously anti-Semitic mayor Karl Lueger did pursue some populist infrastructure policy: Lueger was successful at breaking up utility monopolies and bringing essential services under municipal control. But his reliance on a petty-bourgeois base of support meant that his administration upheld the interests of small landlords who relied on rent from tenants and subtenants to supplement income from small businesses and craft professions. The last days of the Habsburgs were characterized by growing demand for reform with little in the offing, aside from small interventions by larger employers, charities, and some mutually organized building societies.

The war further inhibited private building. The situation became so dire that Emperor Karl I intervened, declaring a system of rent control in 1917. It was still in place after the war, as refugees from the edges of the empire arrived in search of a new start and new homes. The SDAP defended it as they took over the machinery of the city. Meanwhile, due to postwar economics, land prices in Vienna were quite cheap, but new housing construction was uninteresting to investors.

Emerging radical competition spurred the Austromarxists along. *Wilde Siedler* — wild settlers — were occupying vacant land and buildings while also organizing more staid associations to build and administer new housing. Within this context, the SDAP leadership soon saw their work on the



Gemeindebauten as crucial — and it became their signature achievement.

The decision to pursue an aggressive social housing policy came quickly in 1919, but the agenda stalled until reforms made Vienna its own federal state within Austria, allowing it to pursue an independent taxation policy. Under the city's financial minister, Hugo Breitner, the SDAP seized on this as a powerful tool of policy and propaganda. Breitner shifted the overall tax burden towards a highly progressive regime and initiated luxury taxes aimed at the easily mocked excesses of bourgeois life, such as horse racing, gourmet pastry shops, and the employment of household servants. The *Wohnbausteuer* or housing-building tax was placed on all rental properties, but structured so that top-tier properties funded the vast majority of proceeds — all dedicated to the construction of new communal housing. In 1925, the tax yielded 22.6 million schillings; in 1927, roughly 65 million. By the end of 1926, the city had already constructed 25,000 units of new housing.

The building program was a massive effort, involving around four hundred different architectural offices. The early buildings in particular show a wide variety of styles, although most are fairly modest. They tend to stay in keeping with existing building patterns, street profiles, and decorative flourishes. There were mandates to ensure that each unit would be well lit, have its own bathroom, water, gas, and electricity, and have easy access to the street or to a courtyard. But nothing like a uniform style was mandated. While patterns did emerge, the *Gemeindebauten* of Red Vienna demonstrate a great diversity of multi-unit housing forms: row houses, multi-story buildings enclosing courtyards with large archways resembling medieval city gates, semi-connected suburban villas, and many ordinary infill apartment buildings. A core group of buildings were designed by students of Otto Wagner and show his influence. Later, more modernist forms appeared — blocks placed around open park-like courtyards and superblocks like the famous Karl-Marx-Hof. During the early period, a handful of larger projects were given particular attention and featured innovations that go beyond the mere provision of higher-quality apartments.

One of the first *Gemeindebauten* opened to new tenants was the Fuchsenfeld-Hof. Designed in 1922 by Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger, who together took the single largest share of all of the architectural commissions, it had 481 units and a communal laundry, swimming pool, playrooms for small children, and workshops. By 1925, it was the core of a larger group of eight interconnected superblocks, with nearly 1,100 apartments. The Reumann-Hof, designed by Hubert Gessner starting in 1924, had 478 units around a huge courtyard with a memorial to Jakob Reumann, the first SDAP mayor of Red Vienna, who died in 1925. It was described disparagingly as a *Volkswohnungspalast* — a palace for the people's apartments.

Of similar scale and ambition was the Matteotti-Hof, also designed by Schmid and Aichinger. Begun in 1926, it was named after the Italian socialist Giacomo Matteotti, who had been murdered two years prior by Mussolini's Fascists. It arranged 452 units around multiple courtyards with a monumental entrance gate and two fountains. Most of the early buildings, however, were simpler — the point was to build a lot of decent apartments quickly. Events at the end of the 1920s helped accelerate and shift the building program.

At the dedication of the Karl-Marx-Hof, the mayor of Vienna, Karl Seitz, framed the effort through a lens of prospective nostalgia: "Once we are no longer, these stones will speak for us." By that point in 1930, coming defeat could be seen on the horizon — indeed, it had already begun with the tragic and embarrassing outcome of the July Revolt of 1927. The police had killed eighty-four protesters after a crowd burned the Palace of Justice in response to the acquittal of right-wing paramilitaries who had shot up an SDAP rally in the small alpine town of Schattendorf earlier in the year, killing a man and a child.

Despite the SDAP's continued strong showing at the polls and solid membership numbers through the early 1930s, this debacle revealed just how weak the party's position truly was. As Anson Rabinbach and Helmut Gruber have pointed out, after 1927, the leaders of SDAP put greater weight on their cultural programs as they became increasingly isolated internationally, and their ability and willingness to



**Members of the Social-Democratic Youth Movement Marching Past
the Opera House, Opernring, Vienna
Edith Tudor-Hart (1928)**

In 1919, the city of Vienna became the first city of over a million inhabitants to elect a social-democratic administration to power. After the war, the SDAP also boasted a youthful membership. Up to 60 percent of the Viennese Social Democrats were under forty years of age, according to some estimates. They held a solid ruling majority on the city council until the ascent of fascism in 1934.



directly maneuver against reorganized opponents collapsed. Red Vienna threw its still significant weight into completing larger housing projects and erecting new buildings it hoped would shelter a new way of life.

In addition to the Karl-Marx-Hof, which stretches over a kilometer in length, the period after 1927 saw the completion of several other sizable complexes, including the largest, Sandleitenhof, in 1928. It housed 5,000 people at its peak and was described as a city within a city, because in addition to apartment buildings with community spaces, it had plazas, dozens of stores and workshops, and even its own cinema.

The same year, Schmid and Aichinger completed the Rabenhof: 1,109 apartments, along with a laundry, kindergarten, children's dental clinic, health-insurance office, library, and other facilities. Other larger *Gemeindebauten* finished during this period included the complex at Friedrich-Engels-Platz (1,467 units), the Goethehof (727 units), and two in the Floridsdorf area that were later named for SDAP leaders, the Paul-Speiser-Hof (765 units, renamed in 1948) and the Karl-Seitz-Hof (1,173 units, renamed in 1951). Despite these heroic efforts, housing needs remained substantial and worsened as the Depression set in. During this later period, an estimated 77,000 people in Vienna relied on homeless shelters every month. The bullet holes that remained in the façade of the Widholz-Hof from 1934 to 1948 were evidence that these palaces of the people could also be stormed.

The later renaming of these buildings to honor the leaders of the 1920s suggests how they continued to speak throughout the years. After 1934, and even more after 1938, many of the original inscriptions were removed from building walls. Several buildings were renamed, Jewish tenants were evicted, and "politically unreliable" city employees who worked for the housing department — ranging from municipal architects to swimming-pool attendants — were fired. Yet most of the buildings survived the war.

After the war, the successors to the SDAP, the SPÖ (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*, known as the *Sozialistische Partei Österreichs* from 1945 to 1991) were elected into the mayor's office and city

council again and again. They have never lost the municipal majority, but they have certainly become less radical and less ambitious over the years. New community housing was built well into the 1990s, and since that time, residential criteria have opened up to include citizens from across the EU as well as some non-EU citizens. But the last new building was completed over a decade ago. In 2004, Vienna decided that it was no longer in the business of reimagining and building new visions of socially owned housing.

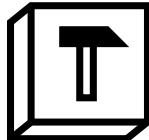
Vienna's *Gemeindebauten* are lasting monuments to past efforts, but also places where real people live. They remain sites of contest: politicians campaign on the question of who has a right to a communal apartment. While these buildings still stand, while they are still maintained, those large red letters will still call out a message: this community built these places — this is when, this is how. The people of Red Vienna tried to address the housing question as best they could.

What would it mean politically to do the same today? To ask ourselves how to build places to live, places to learn, places to rest, places to enjoy, places to work together that let us feel more free and equal? What would urban housing look like if we could build cities where buildings with hundreds of units wouldn't simply be machines for generating private rent? What might a new suburbia look like if it wasn't a way to tie people into the mortgage debts of a two-income, overworked, overstressed nuclear family? What would it mean to learn from Vienna — not just this or that technique for laying out apartments and houses, but methods for demonstrating the antagonisms at work in our cities and our plans for a better life?

What if we could learn to be polemical, provocative, and even transformative in our work while also striving to act with transparency — about who we claim to be, about what we are building, about our means? To take on the question of the shape of our cities and to be able to lay out a record of work — a propaganda that speaks to victories won today, while paving the way for more ambitious changes in the future.

But perhaps that goes a bit beyond the "housing question." ■





Imagining the Socialist City

We will not go into the socialist city blindly, but with lessons from a century of experiments.

Owen Hatherley



The Italian historian Manfredo Tafuri didn't believe that there could be an architecture that was distinctively socialist, given that we did not live under socialism. "There is no class architecture, only a class critique of architecture."

Tafuri, in his influential, sharply argued 1970s works — *Architecture and Utopia* and *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* — closed off a debate that had existed for nearly a century: whether it was possible or worthwhile to even think about a specifically socialist city under capitalism — and, more to the point, whether we could build fragments of it within capitalism. Tafuri's strident "no" to the second question accompanied a quieter "no" to the first.

But since the rise of neoliberalism, those little fragments of the "socialist city," unevenly built in the hundred years between William Morris and Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council, have gradually started to be seen not as a way of maintaining a quiet and healthy population for capitalism to exploit, but as objects of nostalgia.

Did the socialist city ever exist? Is thinking about it entirely pointless until we succeed in the much more difficult task of overcoming capitalism? And — if we break the rule that we're not supposed to conjure images of utopia — what could it actually look like?

Socialist Gothic

Kensal House, London (1938)

Edith Tudor-Hart

Designed by the British architect Maxwell Fry, Kensal House was one of the few modernist housing blocks of the period designed for workers. Shown here, the structure incorporated light-filled, semi-circular kindergartens at the foot of the high-rise flats.

Tafuri's interventions were partly intended as clarifications. Decades of social experiments in architecture, of council estates and new towns and egalitarian settlements, had not made capitalism weaker by creating subversive islands within it; rather, they had strengthened it. Citing Antonio Negri, Tafuri invoked the "Planner State" of a corporatist compromise where capital absorbed social democracy,



Het Schip Entrance

The most prolific of the Amsterdam School buildings, Het Schip (The Ship) was designed by Michael de Klerk in 1919 as a product of the 1901 Housing Act, which provided for the creation of cooperative housing associations.

making it all the more powerful in so doing. That his critique is still often cited is strange, given what a striking misreading this was of the way the wind was blowing in the 1970s, when capital was actually preparing to almost completely jettison this class compromise, favoring instead a war on everything from trade unions to municipal housing.

At the time, forgivably, Tafuri asserted that the end result of reformism of the Arts and Crafts movement — of expressionism, constructivism, brutalism — was the administered city of Fordist

capitalism. However, we do not need to make the same mistake, and can look more objectively at the islands of the socialist city, at those places that were, to quote another dissident Italian communist, Mario Tronti, “within and against capitalism.”

The designer who had perhaps the most influence on these enclaves of progress within and against the capitalist city did not think that socialism would have much use for the modern city at all. William Morris' *News from Nowhere* is a different creature from previous examples of utopian socialist city planning. Unlike those works, his are surprisingly free of paternalism. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Charles Fourier had proposed communal, centrally planned open living and working environments called phalanxes; they would be realized at least in part by progressive industrialists, as at the Familistere at Guise, built in the 1850s for the workers at an iron foundry. Robert Owen's utopian settlement at New Lanark, where tall stone



Het Schip Post Office

Het Schip included a meeting hall and post office at one end of the building.



tenements and social facilities were built tightly around a mill, was, at least at first, a way of ensuring happier, healthier workers for the sake of the firm.

But Morris' age of rest arrives, as the first part of the book describes, after a violent proletarian revolution. Many years after it, London has depopulated, the Houses of Parliament are used to store dung, iron bridges have been rebuilt in stone, and most of the population lives long, quiet, fulfilled lives in cottages among greenery, something which curiously does not seem to have produced a suburban mentality. No phalanxes, collectives, or communes feature in this vision of communism.

Morris, then a member of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and a correspondent of Engels, was conspicuous both for the radicalism of his vision of class struggle and the conservatism of his vision of the city. His disciples would lose the first trait, but cling to the second.

The architect and planner Raymond Unwin, a fellow SDF member, would return to the idea, ridiculed by Marx and Engels, of building the socialist

society in fragments under capitalism, drawing on the self-organized but otherwise deeply Fabian "common-sense socialism" of Ebenezer Howard's "Garden City of Tomorrow." Between 1903 and 1913, Unwin designed the garden city of Letchworth just outside of London, the Hampstead Garden Suburb, and the massive suburb of Wythenshawe to the south of Manchester.

The first two were funded by philanthropists, and aimed to mix, to the point where it would no longer be obvious which was which, cottages for workers and cottages for the middle class. It was the latter that soon dominated. Letchworth is a commuter town like any other, while Hampstead Garden Suburb — birthplace of Jerry Springer and Elizabeth Taylor and home to a generation of Labour Party leaders — is by some measures the richest part of London.

In Wythenshawe, meanwhile, where houses were rented out by the Manchester City Council to working-class residents on their municipal waiting list, the picturesque arrangements of homes with



The Frankfurt Kitchen
on display at the Museum
of Modern Art in New York.



Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky & the Frankfurt Kitchen

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000) was an Austrian architect best known for the Frankfurt Kitchen. The Frankfurt Kitchen was designed to improve the household working conditions of mothers and was installed in 10,000 apartments built for working-class families. In the 1930s, Schütte-Lihotzky worked in the USSR on a team of communist architects who designed new cities as part of the first five-year plan. In 1939, Schütte-Lihotzky joined the Austrian Communist Party and was eventually arrested in Vienna while organizing with the resistance. After the war, she was blocked from receiving any major commissions in Austria because of her communist politics.

large gardens along winding tree-lined streets housed tens of thousands. However, they lacked all the facilities — the institutes, the town centers — that were planned and built in the philanthropic settlements. Wythenshawe lacked a center for an astonishing forty years, before one was finally built in the 1970s. It never even had a railway station. This combination of partial failure for workers and total success for the affluent suggested that Morris' neo-medieval vision of the socialist city really was impossible under British capitalism. The state could build houses, but wouldn't pay for the social and collective facilities that might create real urban spaces; while private philanthropy created a deeply insular

middle-class utopia, where the conservatism of the suburban vision would become increasingly clear.

More interesting applications came from Morris' ideas about the alienation of labor, rather than the evils of the industrialized city. One outgrowth of these was the Amsterdam School, a group of expressionist architects in the Dutch capital who evidently took seriously the notion, popularized by the increasingly socialist-leaning High Victorian art critic John Ruskin, that repetitious, dehumanizing labor was common both to classical, renaissance, and baroque architecture and to the mechanized iron and glass products of the capitalist building industry.



In the United Kingdom, the architecture that emerged from these schools often meant merely a different kind of alienated labor, copying and reproducing Gothic detail rather than classical, with an equal focus on “correctness” — whether the mason of a neo-Gothic building was really able to express himself as a whole human being, as Ruskin imagined, was probably moot.

The Amsterdam School’s ornament, however, was vastly more creative, giving lots of room for expression — their buildings, usually in a handsome, robust red brick, are covered in delicate ornament of flora and fauna, bearing little relation to any historic precedent. Although the Amsterdam School

owed perhaps more to the architect’s blueprints rather than to the will of the building worker, these buildings were highly crafted objects, their labor obviously not mechanized but intensive.

Most of their buildings were designed for Amsterdam’s social-democratic municipal government or for trade-union building societies, and most, in line with Dutch tradition, were apartments rather than houses, along with schools, town halls, baths, libraries, cafés — an ambitious program that still characterizes the areas just north and south of the city’s historic center.

These areas, mostly dominated by social housing, are still incredible in their combination of fantasy and efficiency, their spatial and textual generosity and tactile nature. They also remain modern and urban, and a lot more attractive as a possible urban model than Wythenshawe or Letchworth. The Amsterdam School did not seriously challenge capitalism, but it could be said to have prefigured, at least for those able to enjoy it, a socialist city — made from the same material, egalitarian and densely collective, while remaining richly individuated to the point of eccentricity.

Taylorizing Architecture

The architecture of the 1920s in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, and the Soviet Union — whether social democrats or communists held power — oscillated between this sort of expressionism and a more futuristic form of architecture that seemed to aim at exacerbating alienation in order to provoke its transformation. After an initial flirtation with Morris and Ruskin — encapsulated in the early slogan “The Cathedral of Socialism” — reforming architects in Germany opted for a deliberately mechanized, technophile architecture that, in many cases, actually used Taylorist labor techniques, with time-and-management studies and on-site production lines.

In some cases, there were attempts to combine this with the notion of socialism as working-class self-activity — GEHAG, the trade-union building society that built several workers' suburbs in 1920s Berlin, tried ambitiously to promote both Taylorism and workers' councils, with one offsetting the other.

The architectural results — the interwar housing estates of Berlin, Frankfurt, Dessau, Rotterdam, and Moscow — are extremely elegant, precise, brightly colored, and laconic in their details, with a slightly false sense of extreme modernity (mostly, this is brick with render, not steel and concrete). Like the Garden Cities and unlike Amsterdam, they are swamped by a meticulously planned sea of undergrowth, with exotic trees and bushes flowing through the sharp, rectilinear, deliberately artificial buildings.

The self-expression of the worker in building was increasingly seen as a remnant, mere nostalgia for the pre-industrial age. When asked by the German expressionist playwright Ernst Toller how he justified the exploitation of workers, the former head of the metalworkers' union, Aleksei Gastev, claimed that scientific management was a step on the path to eliminating labor completely. With it, working hours would radically decrease until only a couple of hours a day would be necessary. After a time, the machines would do all the labor.

Aesthetically, the alienating effect of all those right angles was offset by trees, color, and dramatic, exciting experiments in geometry. In terms of the city itself, Berlin and Frankfurt were the closest to Morris, with single-family houses and gardens; Vienna and Moscow favored denser structures with integrated collective facilities, sometimes even eliminating private kitchens in favor of canteens, as at the famous “semi-collectivized” Narkomfin apartments or the “fully collectivized” student hostel for the Moscow Textile Institute.

Craft traditions were still practiced in the unusually radical social-democratic regime of interwar Vienna. Huge city blocks enclosing various collective facilities, almost mini-cities in themselves, were replete with statues, majolica, and mosaics, and were meticulous in their detailing and materials, with little sign of Taylorism. Partly, this avoidance

of mechanization was dictated by the need to create employment, creating intensive work in an oversized city that was no longer the capital of an empire.

The Workers’ Palace

It’s unlikely that a similar impulse was behind the Soviet Union’s sudden turn in the mid 1930s from modernism to a strange, eclectic neoclassicism, but the similarities can be striking. Engelsplatz, the last big project in Vienna before its estates were bombarded by fascists, was an immense, tile-clad, symmetrical neoclassical block with symbolic towers, beacons, and statues of burly, advancing workers.

It is a short step from there to the huge, rhetorical “workers’ palaces” of Stalinism. As if in compensation for overcrowding, piece rates, terror, and the absence of political representation, a large and lucky minority of workers — usually those who had distinguished themselves in “shock work” — were given palatial apartments. These boasted high ceilings, abundant surface ornament and an infrastructure of schools, clubs and cinemas, such as can be seen in workers’ districts of Moscow or in factory towns like Nizhny Novgorod.

Ridiculed, perhaps rightly, as pure spectacle, these structures, like the metro systems below, had the virtue of a “world turned upside-down” approach to the city. They repurposed forms that were invented for the enjoyment of eighteenth-century absolute rulers, Parisian bourgeois, or Khans and Tsars to house steelworkers and miners. Most, however, continued to live in tightly subdivided nineteenth-century apartment blocks, where several families would share a single small flat.

Rather than being seen as socialist, the Soviet city at its peak resembled what Rudolf Bahro called “non-capitalist industrialization,” owing more to local, non-Western spatial tradition than to mere emulation. The Stalinist city is Peter the Great’s stood upside down. The Tsar decreed the construction of a neoclassical metropolis of such spatial generosity and order that it couldn’t have been built under a system of speculators and individual ownership. Stalin’s “seven sisters” adapted the idea of the skyscraper to a system of despotic land use, where immense, Babylonian high-rise hotels,



offices, and luxury flats were placed in a circle around the Kremlin, with anything in their path mercilessly cleared away.

In so doing, they recalled an earlier socialist architectural idea — the Berlin architect Bruno Taut's notion of the “city crown,” where a city would be centered on one giant, pyramidal structure housing a concert hall, a town hall, a dance hall, and much else around which the community’s life would revolve. It is arguable that such a thing was actually achieved in the form of the Stalinist Palace of Culture and Science that was built in the center of Warsaw in the early 1950s, where the definitive building, visible from all points, was devoted to a hodgepodge of social functions, including swimming pools, two concert halls, a theater, a museum of technology, several bars, a cinema, a “Palace of Youth,” various offices, and a public observation point on the thirtieth floor.

The displacements caused by Stalin’s super-Hausmannism only exacerbated a disastrous housing problem — the first sign of de-Stalinization, in 1954, came with a decree recommending simplified, prefabricated construction and an end to architectural “excess.” What happened next is, of course, the familiar image of the socialist city in the world of cliché — the intensification of Weimar Germany’s cult of mechanization and prefabrication to the point where entire districts housing over one hundred thousand people, such as Ursynów, in Warsaw, would be built from identical concrete panels.

The results often lacked much in the way of collective facilities, as had been envisaged in the interwar years — visit many of them now, and you find that dispiriting big-box malls have picked up the slack. As in postwar Western Europe, Latin America, or Japan, there are many fascinating social experiments to be picked out from the era, some of which have proven more capable of surviving “within and against” than others.

An Index of Possibility

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, rather than a monolithic logic of incipient Fordism, the conjunction of socialism and architecture was conspicuous for its sharp shifts of argument, from

prefab to crafted and back, from suburban to ultra-urban, from the abundance of social facilities in Red Vienna to the paucity of anything but houses and churches in Wythenshawe.

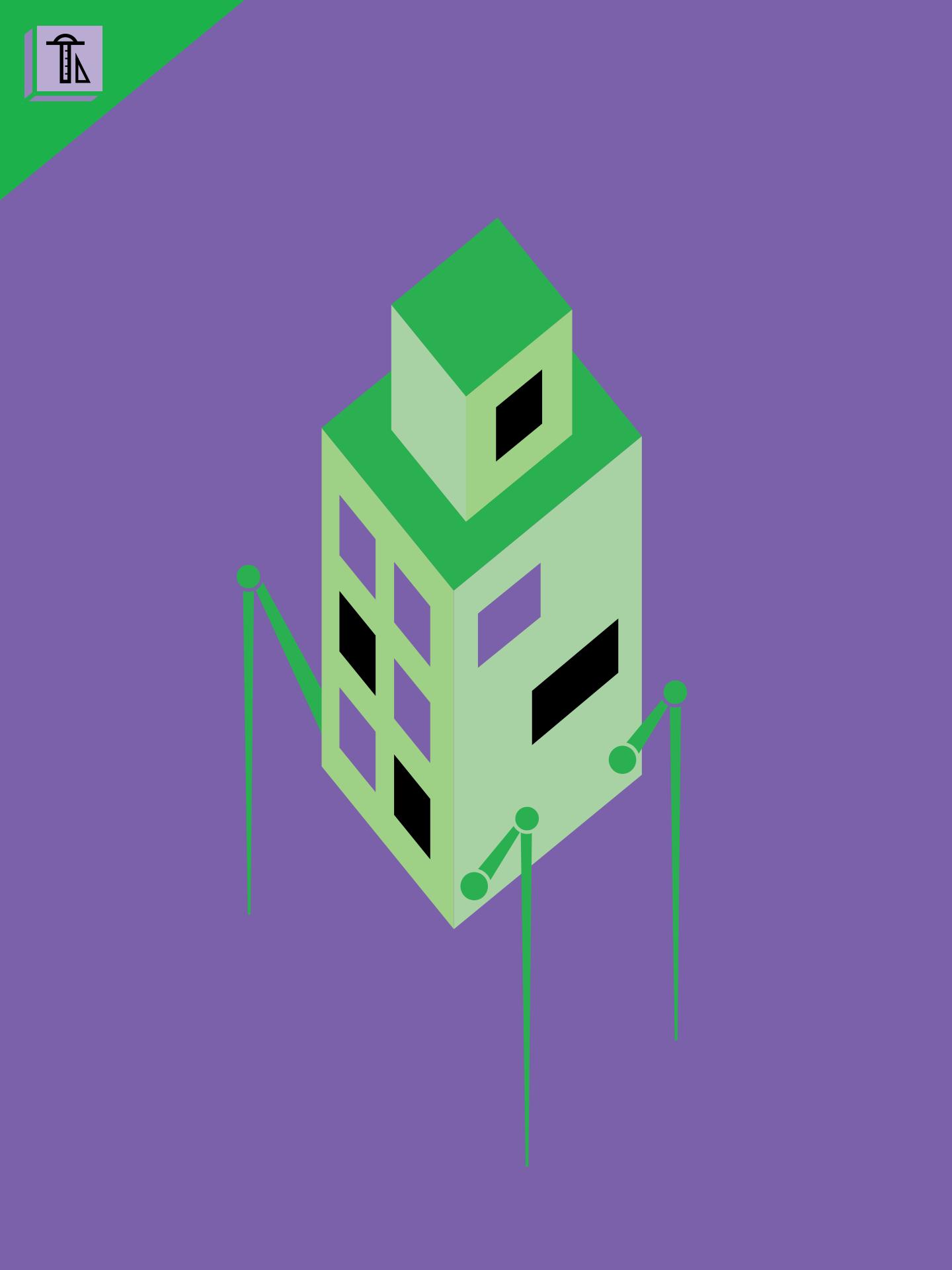
This presents a complex index of possibilities. Is there a need to choose which of them was genuinely prefigurative of the future? Trotsky’s suggestion in *Literature and Revolution* that competing schools of aesthetics would replace political parties in the “age of rest” would suggest not. Yet these are still live questions under capitalism.

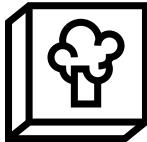
The enthusiasms of contemporary radical architecture are usually a peculiar emergency analog to those of Morris, favoring the apparently non-alienated labor of self-building, which usually takes the form of single-family houses; meanwhile, perhaps the largest-scale modernist municipal housing estates in history are being built in Chinese cities.

Curiously, it is disused skyscrapers in Caracas rather than municipal high-rises in Chongqing that cause the most fascination in the West. Self-activity and mechanization are still the poles between which reformism oscillates. But in this dialectic, we can perhaps discover more potential for imagining the future of labor, aesthetics, and the city than by relegating it all to an irrelevancy, to that familiar *after the revolution*.

We will not go into the socialist city blindly, but aware that dozens of attempts at islands of socialism have been established, some more successful and enduring than others. We will need to think about which were defeated because of faults intrinsic to them as architecture and as town planning, and which were simply defeated because they were impossible under capitalism. Of those that did succeed under capitalism, we could ascertain which worked because they reproduced capitalist values and which worked because they were impregnable islands that managed to exist both “within” and “against.”

Most valuable of all, this century-long experience is an index of possibility. These places weren’t just blueprints or paper utopias; they happened. People lived and live in them, and had their lives transformed. If we postpone any thought about architecture until a vague “after the revolution,” we ignore the fact that socialist architects have often created glimpses of what a different society could be like. ■





Nature's Metropolis

Experiments in design promise a better future for everyone, but only if they come with emancipatory politics to boot.

Alyssa
Battistoni

This summer, an unusual structure grew outside the MoMA PS1 in Queens. The building is called Hy-Fi. Designed by architectural firm The Living, it consists of three circular towers a few stories tall. It resembles a lumpy set of industrial chimneys, or maybe a giant aorta — a little strange, in other words, if not particularly remarkable. Hy-Fi didn't win the coveted MoMA spot for its looks, but for its substance: it's made of mushrooms.

A video explaining the project imports historic significance to the apparently unassuming building in text overlaying a field of mushrooms growing in time-lapse: "If the 20th century was the century of physics ... then the 21st century is widely seen to be the century of biology." The Living, the video goes on to announce, is building a structure from "biological technologies" with the aim of creating a "new paradigm for design" — one that is self-assembling, industrial, and compostable.

Elsewhere, The Living proclaims itself to be "creating the architecture of the future" — in and of itself not a particularly noteworthy statement for a New York architectural firm straining for recognition. The particular future The Living envisions, however, is striking. Declaring its belief that cities and buildings are living, breathing organisms, The Living aims to create "living, breathing design ecosystems." It's not a metaphor.

Hy-Fi, and the vision of the city of the future it represents, sits at the intersection of two powerful fields — sustainable urbanism and biotechnology — with ambitions of reshaping not only cities, but the world.

Hy-Fi is composed of two kinds of bricks: organic ones grown from a combination of corn husks and mycelium, and reflective ones coated

with a mirror film produced by the mega-manufacturer 3M. The organic bricks are supplied by a company called Ecovative, which produces what it describes as “disruptive material technologies” made from organic waste and mycelium, primarily for use in packaging materials and insulation designed to replace petroleum-based foams.

In — what else — a TED talk, cofounder Eben Bayer asks, “Are mushrooms the new plastic?” He touts the possibilities of combining mycelium with local materials — rice hulls in China, buckwheat hulls in Europe — and the vastly reduced energy and waste that come with using “nature’s recycling system.” Bayer goes on to explain that “the manufacturing process is our organism”: in Ecovative’s warehouse, trays of mushrooms sit in the dark, “quietly self-assembling materials.” After a few days, voilà: bricks.

The end result is a building that claims to be almost entirely compostable. When Hy-Fi is dismantled in September, the reflective bricks will be returned to 3M for more research, while the organic ones will be composted in a Queens community garden. Thus David Benjamin, the principal architect of Hy-Fi and The Living’s main visionary, describes the project as a “radical experiment” utilizing almost no energy and producing almost no carbon. Instead of extracting raw materials to build, it seeks to divert “the Earth’s natural carbon circle of growth, decay, and regrowth” into a structure that can eventually “be returned to its natural cycle.”

The Living’s ideas about the architecture of the future are thus tightly bound up with ideas about the future of the economy: as buildings and their cities become living things integrated into a “natural cycle,” the economy can become a continuously regenerating, self-sustaining loop rather than a unidirectional drain. Yet in crucial ways, this vision of the future economy doesn’t look so different from the old one. The parts that make up living buildings aren’t necessarily any less commodified than “dead” forms like lumber and coal.

Just as the scope of the metropolis stretches beyond city limits, urban politics are bound up not only in struggles over zoning or development, but in the resources that fuel city life and definitions of property and ownership that have evolved in the context of corporate labs and factory farms.

The question before us in the twenty-first century is: how to extend the much-touted right to the city to everyone — human and nonhuman inhabitants alike? Hy-Fi offers a glimpse, but the architecture of the future can’t do it alone. Reclaiming the city while simultaneously reinventing it will require challenges not only to the privatization of public space and rising real estate values, but to the privatization of life and protection of intellectual property rights.

Living Buildings

The Living is not, of course, alone in striving for a sustainable new architectural paradigm. Green building design has been warmly embraced by the private and public sectors, architecture high and low. New York’s Bank of America Tower is platinum LEED-certified, while a growing number of state and federal agencies require new buildings to meet LEED standards. Living greenery itself is creeping beyond rooftops and backyards as “vertical gardens” become increasingly popular: London’s Edgware Road tube station, for example, features a “living wall” of fourteen thousand plants, claiming to both beautify the city and reduce particulate-matter pollution produced by traffic fumes.

Though the capacity of living things to build complex structures has long been marveled at, biomimicry, in which artists and engineers purport to learn from nature, has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years. Architectural algorithms mimic the patterns of bone growth and silkworm cocoons; termite mounds and cacti provide models for internal cooling and circulation. London’s Gherkin, designed by Norman Foster, takes its distinctive exterior pattern from the skin of a sea sponge, while the self-proclaimed “iconic” design for a building aiming to be the world’s tallest, to be located in Wuhan, China, is based on the root structure of a mangrove tree. The latter building will boast solar panels, rainwater harvesting, and filtration systems for cleaning local air and water, among other environmentally oriented features. Nature is inspiring not only new kinds of buildings, but new building methods: engineers at Harvard, for example, have developed a team of building robots inspired by termites, in a method known as swarm



construction. “Robotic construction crew needs no foreman,” proclaims one headline — as opposed to human workers, who presumably still need a boss.

Some are going still further, seeking to incorporate the biological itself into their structures. The Living’s David Benjamin has elsewhere described his architectural practice as reliant on “human-cell collaboration”: rather than providing inspiration, muselike, nature here provides tools, materials, and even something like labor. In merging architecture and the burgeoning field of synthetic biology, Benjamin and other bioarchitects seek to drastically upend conventional ideas of what construction entails.

Self-proclaimed sustainability innovator Rachel Armstrong, for example, describes blueprints, industrial manufacturing, and construction using teams of workers as “Victorian technologies.” In place of such outdated practices, she proposes the use of “bottom-up construction methods” that replace inert materials with living ones. In her version of the architecture of the future, buildings would have the physiological capabilities to process nutrients, break down waste, self-repair, and interact with their environments.

Mitchell Joachim, a professor of architecture at New York University and copresident of the architecture design group Terreform ONE, has proposed constructing buildings via a venerable process known as pleaching, in which vines are grafted together into living structures. More fantastically, he’s also grown a prototype of an “in vitro meat habitat” from 3-D printed pig cells.

Such visions are about as far as can be imagined from the archetypal gray Soviet housing block, evoking instead the kind of enchanted world found in Hayao Miyazaki’s films, where engines rumble like beasts and buildings trundle across the landscape. At their best, these urban fantasies are spectacular in their otherworldliness, experimenting with forms of societal organization in which not only human populations are recognized.

Benjamin, for example, is collaborating with the artist Natalie Jeremijenko on a project called *Amphibious Architecture*, which uses lighting to turn New York’s East River into an interactive public space reflecting fish activity and water

quality, tracked using mussels as “bio-sensors.” He’s constructed a pavilion in Seoul that maps air quality through a spectacular display of LEDs; when people text the pavilion, it texts back with current air quality.

Such experiments may seem irrelevant or frivolous next to the daily struggles of so many to pay rent and stay alive in cities that are increasingly hostile to the working class. And indeed, they could amount to little more than fleeting moments of whimsy that do little to alleviate the struggles of city life, contributing instead to the continued gentrification of city centers as places for the rich to enjoy cultural and technological wonders while feeling secure in their eco-mindedness.

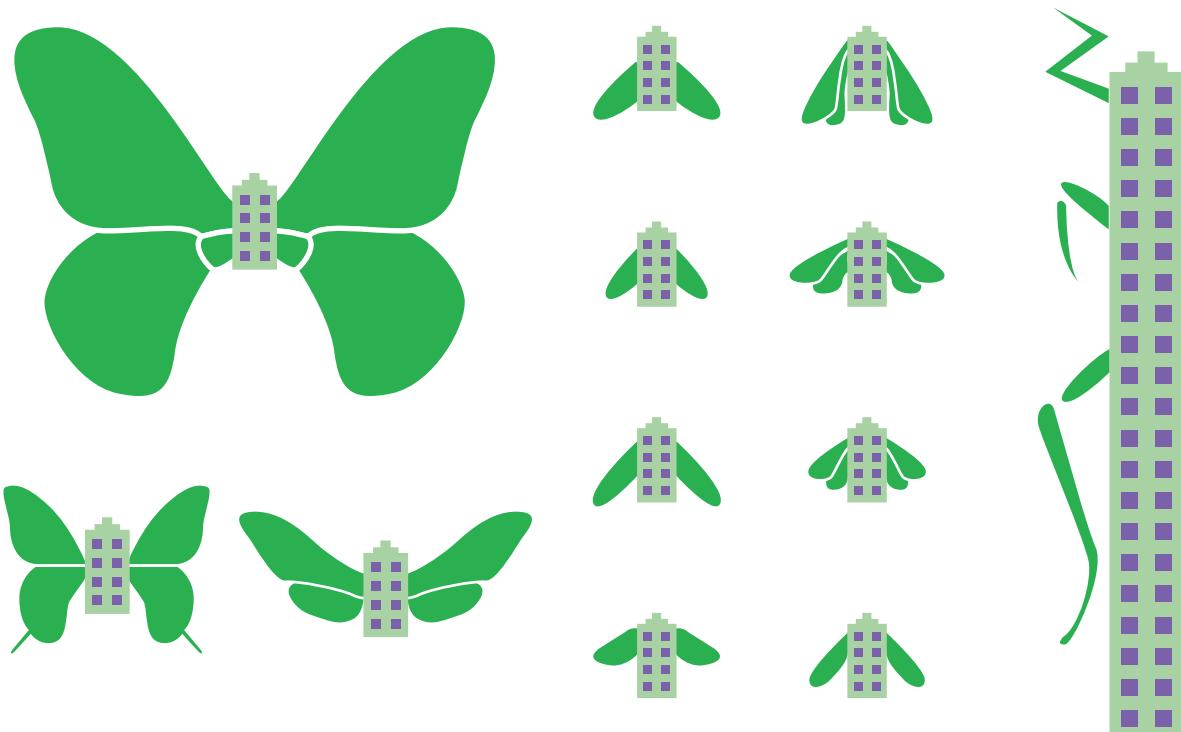
But biomimicry aspires to much more. The Living and others seek to transform systems that extend far beyond the level of the individual, the neighborhood, or even the city itself.

City Lab

City planners have long sought to bring order to the teeming life of the city. But new invocations of the “living city” take this even more literally, aiming not only to tame the traffic and crowds but to rationalize life itself in service of a more ecologically viable world. As Benjamin told *Metropolis* magazine, “our design involves working at vastly different scales simultaneously — from cultivating microscopic root structures that bind the bricks together, to redefining global supply chains of building materials.”

Supply chains, in particular, have long proved vexing for cities. Since at least the nineteenth century, modern cities have been seen as voracious consumers of resources drained from the ever-expanding hinterland, transforming the world beyond their limits to meet their needs, and heaving out waste in the process of converting resources into products for use elsewhere. It’s only recently that city living has acquired an environmentally virtuous sheen. But of course, however walkable their neighborhood or local their produce, urban-dwellers continue to depend on a vast array of products sourced from what by now is a global hinterland.

It’s in recognition of this classic urban predicament that some are trying to figure out how

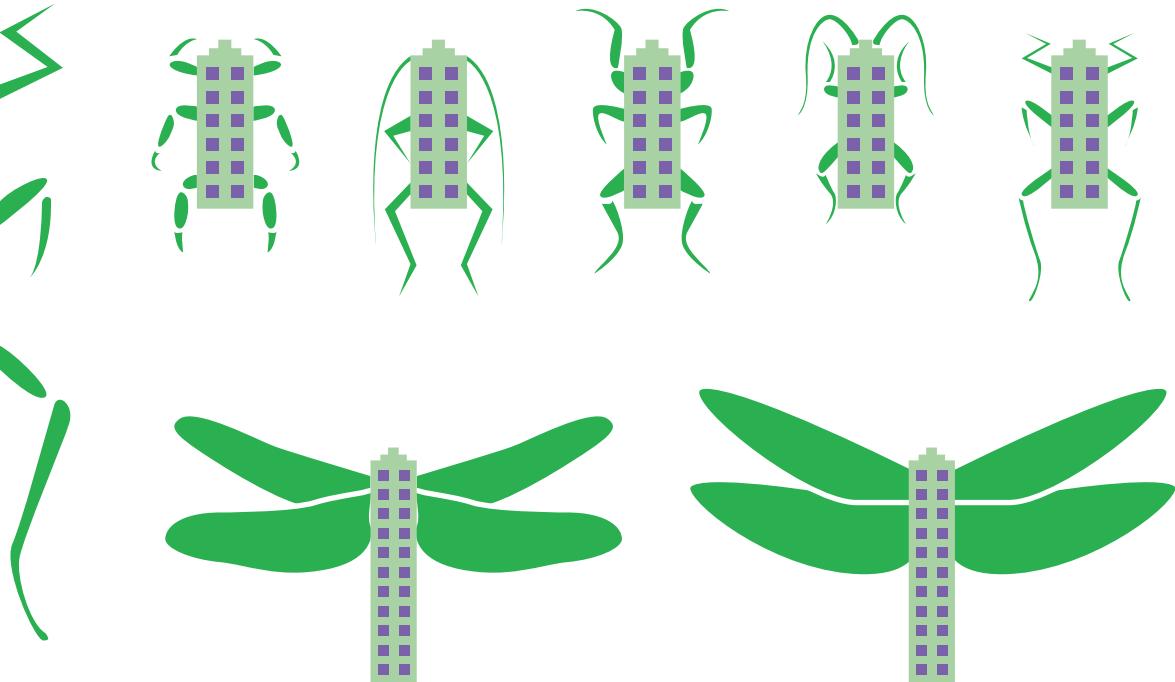


the city can not only reduce its use of resources, but perhaps even generate some of its own. LEED certification and similar programs amount to little more than expensive greenwashing: like buses powered by natural gas instead of petroleum, they might be less bad than business as usual — although some LEED-certified buildings actually perform worse on sustainability measures than uncertified ones — but they still use huge quantities of material and energy. Thus The Living and similarly-minded architects seek not simply to shrink their buildings' ecological footprints, but to upend such measures of resource use by integrating their structures into ecosystems themselves. Joachim, for example, proclaims the “biological supremacy” of growing materials “from scratch”: instead of simply using sustainable or renewable materials, he asserts that his projects are “inventing a new material and fully integrating it into nature’s metabolism.”

The idea that buildings and other seemingly inert objects can be integrated into the metabolism

of the living world is part of a broader hope that human economies can be made less ecologically destructive. The concept of metabolism has become increasingly prominent in sustainable design in recent years; while it’s unlikely that many of those using the term are followers of the Marxist sociologist John Bellamy Foster, their concerns echo Foster’s emphasis on the “metabolic rift” driven between human society and nature by industrial production. Where Foster specifically pinpoints capitalism as the source of ecologically destructive practices, however, others think capitalism can be made sustainable if the metabolism problem can be overcome through technology and design.

In this view, cities should be situated not at the end of a linear flow of resources, but as nodes within a self-sustaining loop of recycling and renewing, wherein wastes emanating from one site can act as inputs for production in another. Industrial ecologists seek to close this loop by measuring resource flows and designing technological systems accordingly. The new crop of bio-urbanists seek to do



something similar by modifying living organisms and designing living systems.

In another video produced by The Living, inspired by the famous film *Powers of Ten*, the camera zooms in on a tiny bacteria and out again to the pale blue dot of the Earth, explaining that contemporary designers work at “multiple scales simultaneously, from bacteria at a hundred-thousandth of a meter to the Earth at ten million meters.” By engineering bacteria, it proclaims, we can engineer a “glucose-based economy” to replace our petroleum-based one. By this account, energy systems depend not on politics but on configurations of bacterial DNA. The architecture, the city, and the economy of the future will be made sustainable through biological tinkering — in particular, the kind done by synthetic biologists.

Building Life

The field of synthetic biology considers itself a construction industry: rather than design living buildings, its participants build living things. Synthetic

biologists envision life as a technology that can be engineered like any other, arguing that biological functions are equivalent to mechanical ones. Thus cells become “nano-factories” and DNA a programming language; Stanford professor Drew Endy, a star of the field, describes the world as a “distributed manufacturing platform.”

Yet like any other working parts, biological functions need to be identified and standardized if they are to be used widely. The mainstream of the field emphasizes that DNA fragments — the building blocks of life — must be modularized and standardized so that they can be used widely to create new organisms and systems. Synthetic biologists have christened these core components BioBricks; they are the equivalents of mechanical widgets. And as such, they are potentially subject to the same kinds of property regimes that govern other forms of technology. Indeed, almost by definition, the most fundamental elements of living things are understood by synthetic biologists as parts — parts that, like other technological components, might be patented and privatized.

To their credit, many synthetic biologists have recognized this as a potential problem. They explicitly state their rejection of the monopolistic model of biotech pioneered by the likes of Monsanto; they aim to pioneer not only scientific innovations, but social ones. In particular, Endy's BioBricks Foundation promotes what he describes as open-source biology via the standardization of biological parts. Other core institutions in the field, like the Registry of Standard Biological Parts and the International Open Facility Advancing Biotechnology (BIOFAB) likewise proclaim themselves to be open source. Thus historian of science Sophia Roosth describes the current system as a “moral economy” of researchers dedicated to building, modifying, and exchanging these parts.” Benjamin, meanwhile, is working to develop principles and processes for open-source design.

Yet the existence of a moral economy doesn't necessarily mean the absence of a commercial one. Whether applied to software, biology, or design, the open-source ethos doesn't evince antagonism to private ownership. Most synthetic biologists, even those who support a scientific commons of open-access registries of parts, believe that any products or designs developed from these pieces can be privately owned. Indeed, champions of open-source biology tend to be more concerned with the effects of overly restrictive licensing — a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the tragedy of the anti-commons — on the development of new technologies than with the accessibility of end products to users.

The efforts of synthetic biologists to move toward a more sharing-oriented system should be taken seriously: the anthropologist Chris Kelty observes that open-source projects often operate as a form of political critique, one that expresses dissatisfaction with capitalism in its more rapacious forms. Yet as Kelty notes, “it is simply impossible to rely on a moral economy within a project of the scale of global biotechnology” — particularly given the past four decades of privatization and commercialization of intellectual property and scientific research, often driven specifically by the biotech industry.

Indeed, the rise of the contemporary American biotech industry is inseparable from the rise of neoliberalism. A biological century isn't necessarily a

neoliberal one — the dream of creating and modifying life forms for the benefit of humanity has a long history, spanning national borders and political persuasions. Yet the existing legal and political framework for biotech innovation and use was constructed in tandem with the drive to privatization of the seventies and eighties.

In 1980, the landmark US legal case *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* recognized intellectual property rights to living organisms, effectively opening the door to the modern biotech industry. Basic and applied research, public and private institutions, while never so distinct as those typologies suggest, have been increasingly intertwined in the wake of legislation like the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act, which effectively incentivizes the commercialization of academic research. As a result, individual researchers often have less control over what happens to their work than university technology licensing offices.

And while much of the field's groundwork has been laid in university settings, the private sector is beginning to get involved. Some DIY “bio-hackers” have funded their projects via Kickstarter, while venture capitalists are exploring opportunities for investment in a growing number of synthetic bio startups. And of course, where there are novel scientific developments, there's the US military: DARPA's Living Foundries program, which has funded Endy and others, states that its goal is to “leverage the unparalleled synthetic and functional capabilities of biology to create a revolutionary, biologically-based manufacturing platform to provide access to new materials, capabilities and manufacturing paradigms for the DOD and the Nation.” In the face of such economic might, open-source projects, for all their righteous rhetoric and genuine good intentions, tend to run into difficulty in their efforts to create alternative regimes with the legal force to protect a reconstructed commons. And left unprotected, the scientific commons may simply serve to provide private companies with early-stage research.

However well-intentioned many of the scientists working in this arena may be, the plea to create an open-source biology for the benefit of all is largely an ethical one with little political or legal force. That doesn't mean it's impossible to build a biology that's truly for everyone — just that it will require



a more concerted political effort, one that goes beyond the alternative economies of small groups to transform the political economy of contemporary biotechnology and the forms of property that underpin it.

Much of the current bio-enthusiasm, however, appears eager to eschew politics in favor of design, vague allusions to “raising awareness” notwithstanding. By this account, the future of the city — and, by extension, the world — will be determined not in the streets, but in the studio and the lab. Armstrong, for example, holds that “the real response to climate change is to create buildings that can heal the environment,” while Endy suggests that in response to problems like climate change, “maybe we should get really good at engineering matter.” Joachim thinks that the US consumerist lifestyle is responsible for overconsumption of resources, but states that “we have to accept that we can’t change the American value system. Everyone wants to own property and have a sovereign or autonomous lifestyle. We have to react by innovating.”

Reinventing the Future City

Admittedly, current political prospects don’t exactly suggest that we’re on the way to dealing with overconsumption by transforming the American (read: capitalist) value system. But we still need design and politics rather than design as politics. As always, the potential of synthetic biology, 3-D printing, and other new technologies to liberate us from labor, prevent catastrophic climate change, and deliver on a host of other promised social benefits will only be realized, banishing scarcity and drudgery, if social relations change accordingly. In fact, these technologies have the potential to make things worse for working people: they suggest shifts in human labor and compensation ever more toward the forms designated intellectual, like design and engineering, and away from the traditionally working-class occupations of construction, building, and manufacturing — or, as some architects now call it, fabrication.

Decisions about these technologies — about how to organize the patterns of work and life they seek to disrupt, about which kinds of natures to

preserve and create, about how to build future cities and economies — should be made publicly and democratically, rather than by small groups of scientists or corporations with an eye on a new space of accumulation. And the potential for accumulation is vast. The biotech industry is positioning itself to be the passage point for an ecologically sustainable future: the replacement of clunky old mechanical technologies with biological ones is proposed as a solution to everything from fossil-fuel use to food shortages. As the political theorist Melinda Cooper writes, “neoliberalism and the biotech industry share a common ambition to overcome the ecological and economic limits to growth associated with the end of industrial production, through a speculative reinvention of the future.”

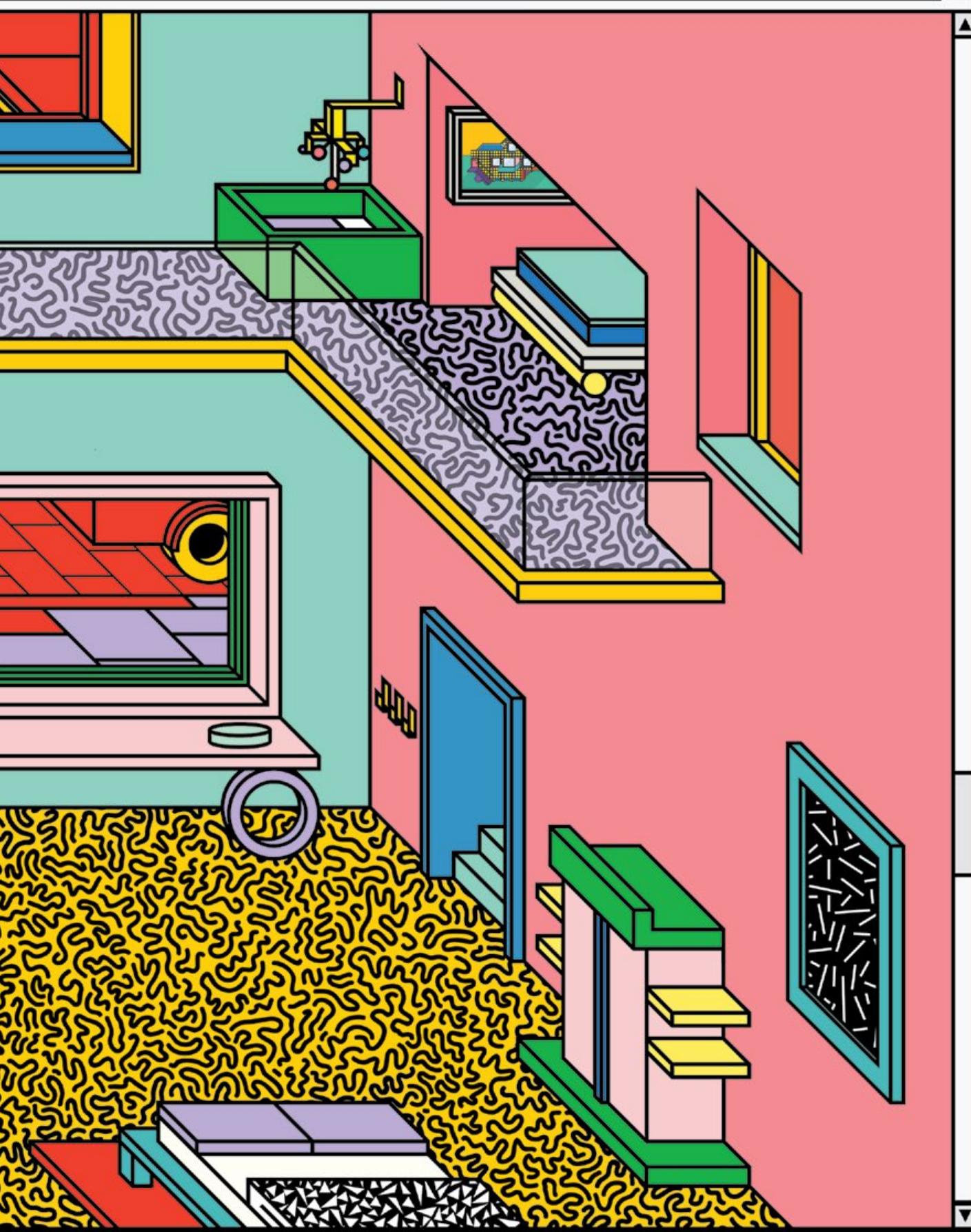
Of course, it’s not the speculative reinvention of the future itself that’s the problem — it’s that only capitalists seem to be engaging in it. Some, perhaps most, of these architectural and biological dreams amount to little more than cutting-edge one-upmanship, vacuous hype, and good old-fashioned hucksterism coasting on the present wave of ecological concern and technological optimism. But to dismiss them as only the latest greenwashing fad or TED-talk fodder would be a shame — they present genuinely exciting possibilities.

The profusion of liberal and libertarian techno-utopianism in recent years can make it easy to forget that utopian socialist projects have long imagined a better world built from the combined abilities of humans, nature, and technology. We *should* imagine how visions of the city as a laboratory, lively, cosmopolitan space for people can be extended to include greater interaction with non-human nature. And we should insist that those relationships can have the same creative, playful elements that we prize so much in our human ones. But without attention to social relations between humans as well, the ongoing stratification of the urban experience will continue unabated, as will the ecological damage wrought by modern cities.

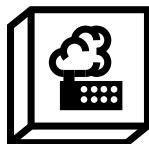
Hy-Fi and its counterparts show that another city is possible, one built for the collective good of the many living things, both human and not, that call it home — but only if “radical experiments” in design come with the politics to match. ■



WORKERS







The Urbanization of the Chinese Working Class

China's ambitious new urbanization plan comes with a set of contradictions the Communist Party won't be able to control.

Eli
Friedman

Tianducheng

A few years after Chinese developers began constructing the Tianducheng development in Hangzhou the area quickly became known as a knockoff of Paris with a scaled-replica of the Eiffel Tower and Parisian flats. Surrounded mostly by farmland, Tianducheng remains sparsely populated.

Photograph by Aly Song (2013)
for Reuters

C

hina has problems. Not despite thirty-five years of record-breaking growth, but because of it. The country's dependence on exports and investment-led development has resulted in stark inequality, underconsumption, over-investment, disappearing arable land, exorbitant housing prices, and a looming environmental catastrophe. This leaves China increasingly vulnerable to a number of potential crises: external economic shocks, housing market collapse, mass defaults on public debt, and fits of social unrest.

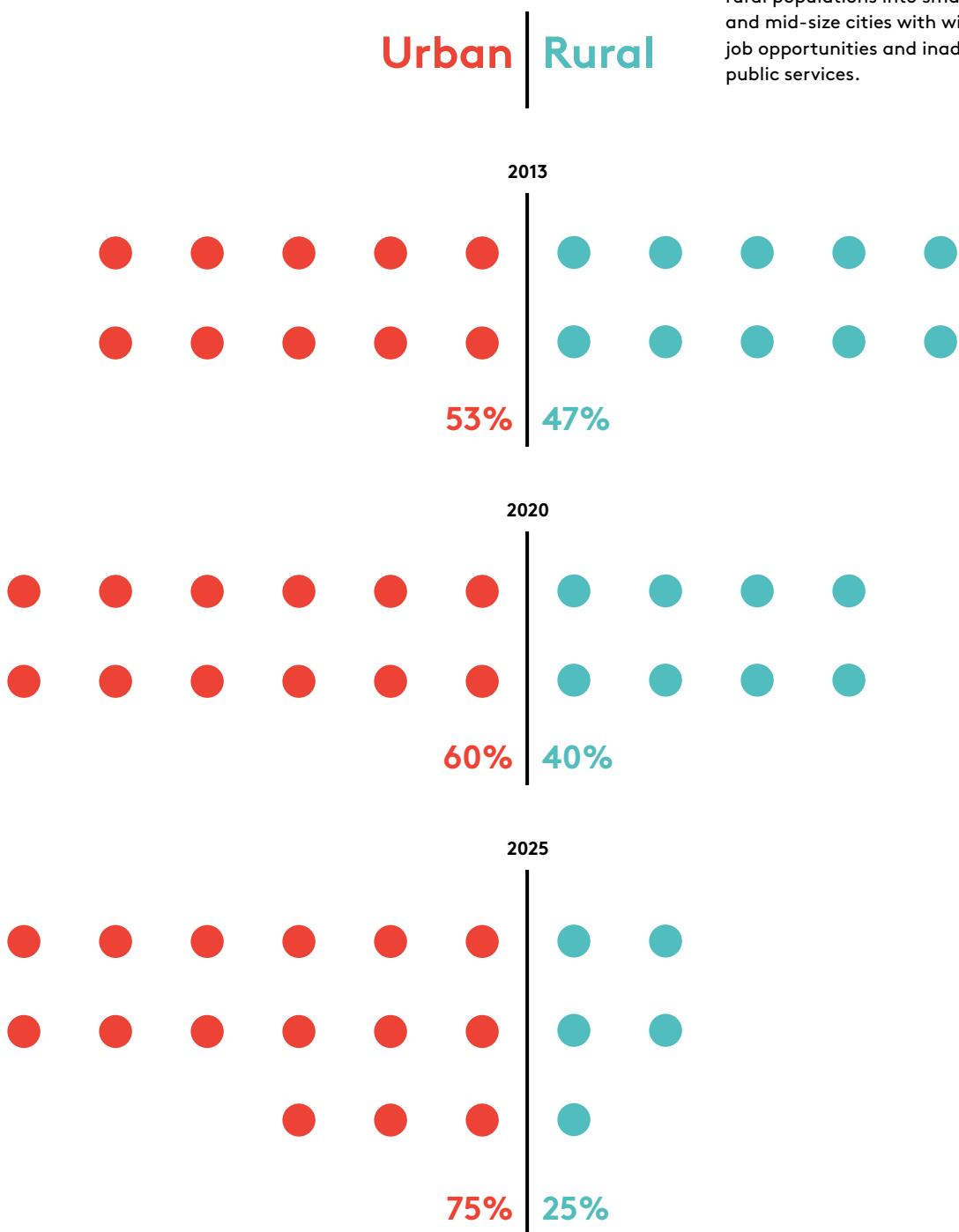
What, then, might ensure the stability of Chinese capitalism for another generation?

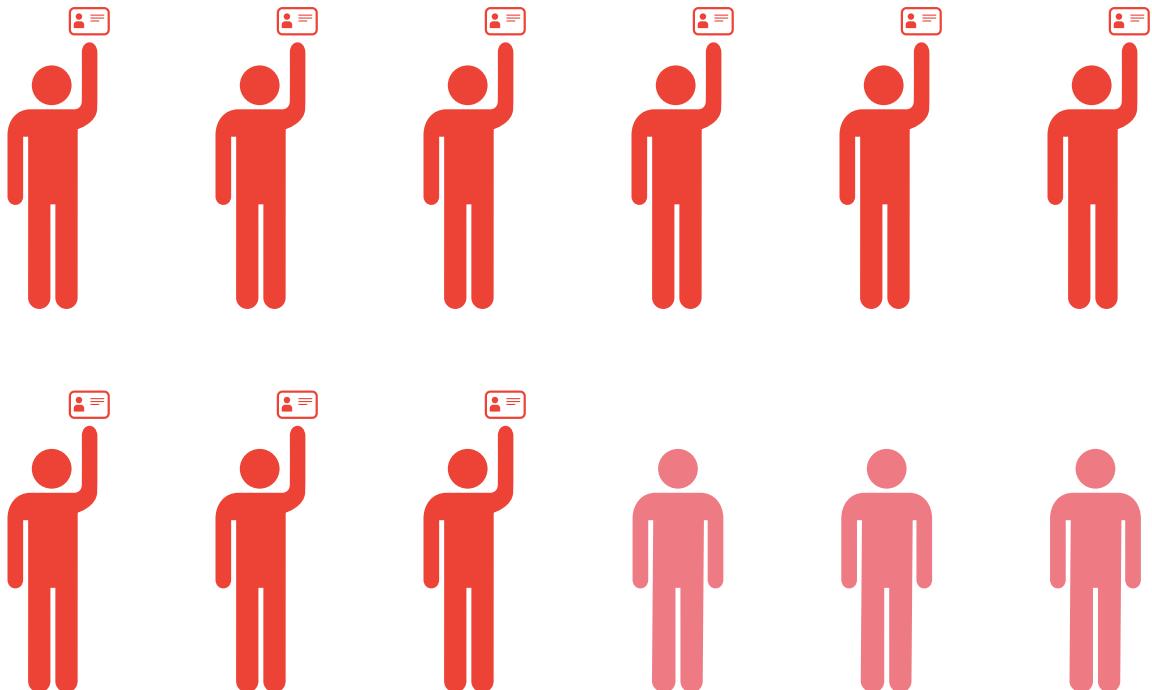
For the state, a big part of the answer is urbanization. In the recently released National New Urbanization Plan (2014–2020), the central government calls for more than 100 million people to move to cities by 2020, pushing China's urban population to 60 percent. The plan sets out admirable goals such as an expansion of public housing, education, and health services, a reduction in carbon emissions and other environmentally destructive activities, and preservation of agricultural land through limits on sprawl.



The Rush to Urbanize

With plans for rapid urbanization by 2020 and 2025, the Chinese government intends to largely move rural populations into small- and mid-size cities with few job opportunities and inadequate public services.





25%

of urban dwellers will still
not have *hukous* by 2020
according to the current plan.

The theory is that urbanization will encourage the shift to a less resource-intensive service-based economy, that better access to social services will allow for an expansion of domestic consumption, and that urban education and training will lead to an upgrading of human capital, thereby reducing inequality. The initiative is part of a package of reforms that are aimed at “rebalancing” China’s economy.

But the state’s hopes that urbanization will lead to a more equitable and sustainable form of capitalism will likely not come to pass. First, even if everything goes according to plan, there will still be a massive and restive second-class citizenry excluded from social services. This represents an ongoing political threat. Second, the state presumes (and *must* presume) that a technocratic solution to existing problems is possible. Without addressing politics, it is impossible to imagine how such a seamless transition to a different model of accumulation will be possible. Envision, for instance, twentieth-century Keynesianism without a labor movement.

The Communist Party would like to be able to produce and deploy labor power at the precise moment when the market requires it. But labor power can never be separated from the worker, and moving people around according to the dictates of market and state inevitably entails dispossession, divisions, and social friction. Farmers will continue to follow the well-trodden path to the city, but the fantasy of technocratic biopower perfected will remain just that — a fantasy.

“The Natural Historical Process”

The Chinese Communist Party’s quaint twentieth-century belief in Progress is on full display in its proclamations on urbanization. As the preamble to the National New Urbanization Plan states, “urbanization is ... the natural historical process of the rural population concentrating in cities. It is



the objective tendency of the development of humankind, and it is an important symbol of national modernization.”

For anyone that has traveled in the metropolises of Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou, it might seem as though China has already completed its “natural historical process.” These cities are so overwhelming in their scale, so densely packed with all the wonders and horrors of contemporary capitalism, that further urbanization exceeds the imagination.

In reality, however, China is by some measures under-urbanized. The country has 270 million rural-to-urban migrants, who have left their officially registered place of residence to work in the city. Although this represents the largest human migration in history, at present China has just over half of its population in cities. It’s a smaller percentage of city-dwellers than other countries at a similar level of economic development. This should not be surprising — state policy since the late 1950s has been specifically designed to demobilize rural labor.

The most important tool in managing the movement of people is the *hukou*, or household registration system. The *hukou* ties provision of social services to place, so that access to state-subsidized education, housing, healthcare, and pensions is not guaranteed if someone leaves their officially registered hometown. China’s capitalist transformation has heavily favored urban areas, meaning that hundreds of millions of people must leave their place of *hukou* registration in order to find employment. Acquiring *hukou* in urban areas is possible, but municipalities set their own conditions for admission. This has resulted in a spatially stratified citizenship regime in which migrants are often left entirely to the whims of the market in the areas where they work.

Under the new plan, the so-called “extra-large cities” with populations of over five million are to maintain tight population controls by continuing to restrict access to local *hukou*. It is these extra-large cities that, not coincidentally, are the





most economically dynamic and offer the best social services. The plan envisions the majority of new urban residents settling in poorer small- and medium-sized cities with populations of less than one million.

Thus, we have the first method of urbanization: by relaxing *hukou* requirements in small- and medium-sized cities, the hope is that people will forsake their megacity dreams and settle in the Chinese equivalents of Omaha, Albany, or Boise. They may not be the most glamorous places, but they are close to home. Most importantly, rural-to-urban migrants in these cities will have an easier time sending their children to public schools, enjoying subsidized housing and healthcare, and accessing loans and other assorted benefits.

Even if the quality of these services is far inferior to what a resident of Beijing or Shanghai might enjoy, it is likely an improvement over being outside the system altogether. By dangling the carrot of full citizenship rights, the government is using a

relatively hands-off approach to move people into specific spaces at specific times.

The second method of urbanization is more tightly managed, less voluntary, and wreathed in violence. In this case, the government deliberately moves people from the land to dystopian planned settlements, characterized by comically wide roads, row after row of drab and cheaply constructed apartment blocks, and public spaces (perhaps “state spaces” would be a better term) devised with seeming active contempt for human scale.

These developments — some of which have become ghost cities, filled with buildings but devoid of people — are built from the bottom up with the intention of getting people out of rural areas. The typical approach is to have farmers give up their land rights in exchange for a free or subsidized apartment in a new town. Although implementation is uneven, these developments are also supposed to be equipped with social services such as schools, health facilities, and public transportation. The state

Kangbashi

Located in the town of Ordos in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the Kangbashi district is now the site of thousands of residential apartments and office buildings. The city currently houses only a small fraction of the one million expected to move there.

Photograph by David Gray (2011) for Reuters





imagines this as a win-win process in which farmers are rescued from the idiocy of rural life and transformed into savvy urban consumers, all while freeing up land which can then be consolidated for better economies of scale.

The final officially sanctioned process of urbanization is aimed at attracting elite “human talent” (their terms) to elite cities. Although the extra-large cities are supposed to maintain strict population controls, they have been encouraged to establish a point-based citizenship system under which *hukou* can be granted on a limited basis. In order to be considered for these schemes, applicants must not have a criminal record, and cannot have violated the birth control policy (often incorrectly translated into English as the “one-child policy”). Additionally, they must provide leases, proof of social insurance payments, and labor contracts from within the receiving area for previous years. An applicant’s chances of success improve depending on their level of education and certain defined sets of skills that comport with the needs of local capital. Employment in a state-owned firm or as a civil servant helps. And it never hurts to know the right people and to liberally grease the right palms.

The intended consequence of this multi-tiered approach is to prevent the overaccumulation of people in the spaces of generous social service provision. Given the stark asymmetry between the mobility of capital and labor in post-socialist China, the state has been able to realize this ideal to an extent unimaginable in most countries. But even with the overweening authority of the state dedicated to this project, not everything will go according to plan.

A New Class Structure

What sorts of problems will emerge from China’s urbanization? There are two general categories: those that are important from the perspective of equity, and those that matter to state and capital.

With respect to the former, the first issue is that more than 200 million people will remain outside of their place of *hukou* registration. By 2020, the state hopes to have 60 percent of the population living in cities, but only 45 percent of them with permanent

residence. If these numbers are in fact realized, it will result in a slight decline in the “floating population.” But 200 million people with no guaranteed access to social services is hardly inconsequential.

The land-for-*hukou* deals have already generated major social problems, as is always the case in processes of accumulation by dispossession. Although most migrants are interested in living in urban areas, many fewer are willing to give up their land rights — one of the last meaningful vestiges of the state-socialist economy. Thus, it is not surprising that there is major resistance when the state attempts to requisition land in exchange for an apartment in a depressing and economically stagnant town that has sprung up overnight. In fact, resistance over land grabs in China has probably been the largest source of social unrest in recent years, and in some cases has led to mass confrontations. For this approach to be viable, the state will need to continue to employ violence on a tremendous scale.

Accumulation by dispossession is not just a rural phenomenon, as the urban subaltern has also come under the threat of the bulldozer. The government has announced that it will spend 1 trillion yuan (\$160 billion) to redevelop shantytowns. If experience is any guide, this redevelopment will in fact consist of forced demolition and relocation to make way for real estate speculation. The urban poor will be pushed further into the periphery of the city, adding even more hardship to their work and social lives.

The state’s plan to funnel people into small- and medium-sized cities through a relative relaxation of *hukou* requirements will certainly have some effect, and may even encourage growth. But two fundamental problems remain. The first is that the large majority of migrants are currently living in the extra-large cities that are now tasked with tightly restricting population growth. They have come to these cities because China’s model of accumulation has heavily favored urban areas, and these are places where they can make enough money to survive. The state would like to shift growth away from these megacities so that people will be able to survive in smaller cities — but this adjustment is neither inevitable nor instantaneous. As a result, tens of millions will be caught in between, only able to access full



Falling Behind



citizenship in places where there are not likely to be enough jobs. Thus, huge migratory flows will continue outside of the plan.

The second problem is that the state now seeks to solidify an already emergent system in which those cities that are hardest to gain access to are the places where public spending is greatest. A resident of Beijing can count on having the best schools and hospitals and the most generous pensions, and their children enjoy a huge leg up in admission to local universities — which, not coincidentally, are the best universities in the country. The non-local residents with the best chance at getting access to Beijing's public services are rich, highly educated, and well connected — in other words, precisely the people that need it least.

Those migrants working in factories or construction sites, as nannies, waiters, or truck drivers, will never collect enough points to be considered human talent. From the state's perspective, it may seem

perfectly reasonable to demand that people produce proof of several years of employment contracts, rental leases, and payment of social insurance. But these requirements exclude all informal workers, those who live in informal housing or have faced forced demolition, and those employed in places where the boss doesn't pay social insurance — in other words, almost all of the working class. And those people that were born in violation of the birth control policy — "surplus children" — are categorically excluded from consideration of citizenship rights.

Given this setup, a rural resident may very well make the calculation that they should settle for a smaller regional town. Even after getting local *hukou*, this newly-minted urbanite will send their kids to inferior public schools and receive worse healthcare and a smaller pension. To get into elite universities in Beijing and Shanghai, their children will need to get a much higher score on the entrance



exam than the children of local residents. There is no guarantee that they will be able to find employment, and if they do, it will likely be for lower pay. The implications for intergenerational class reproduction are obvious.

Will It Work?

Even if one is willing to accept such a rigidly unequal socio-spatial hierarchy, there are real doubts as to whether this pattern of urbanization can solve the problems that the state recognizes as such. As far as reducing inequality is concerned, there is a somewhat greater likelihood of addressing regional inequality. The central government has been redistributing funds to poorer rural and western regions for more than a decade now, and there have been some important results. But there is little to suggest that the urbanization plan will do anything to address class inequality at the national level. As suggested above, it is actually likely to be intensified.

Will the plan increase domestic consumption? Perhaps, but implementation will be decisive. The reason Chinese people have historically high savings rates is that they face a radically uncertain future. Although the plan calls for expanded access to public services, it is notably silent on the question of how much money the central government will contribute to this end. Given that the social welfare system is largely devolved to the municipal level, the question remains as to whether these local governments will be willing to fund major expansions to include migrants. Will healthcare coverage be sufficient such that people don't live in constant fear of illness? Will pensions be generous enough that middle-aged workers don't have to worry about supporting their elderly parents? In an area of rampant real estate speculation, how much of people's income will have to be devoted to housing?

These are crucial questions that will determine how much spending money new urbanites have. Given the paltry sums that have been devoted to social welfare thus far, there is ample reason to believe that people will continue to hedge against future risk.

What's more, there are important and powerful urban interests that have benefited immensely from low wages and a booming real estate market. China's

export and construction sectors are unimaginable in their current form without wage repression, theft, and avoidance of social insurance payments. These powerful groups will do everything in their capacity to ensure that they do not have to pay full price for labor.

There is similarly scant evidence that the proposed urbanization will lead to a more ecologically sustainable future. Although China's cities have made commendable investments in public transportation, car purchases continue to skyrocket and have already overtaken those in the United States. There is little reason to believe that local governments' penchant for attracting capital — including the ecologically toxic variety — will be diminished by urbanization. The green innovation economy that urban boosters the world over dream about will remain in the realm of fantasy for most places. What's more, the desire to increase consumption and shift to a more ecologically sound mode of accumulation are fundamentally at odds with each other — imagine a world in which 1.4 billion Chinese people shop like Americans. The possibility of shifting certain features of the ecological crisis to another country remains, but this hardly qualifies as a long-term solution.

Finally, it seems likely that urbanization will only increase the possibility of widespread unrest. Urban and rural dispossession will continue to cause violent resistance. The concentration of migrants in economically stagnant ghettos is not a recipe for winning their allegiance. And those migrants that gain urban *hukou* closer to home may feel disillusioned with public services that are far inferior to those of their compatriots in the megacities. A "harmonious society" remains elusive for the Chinese Communist Party.

Neoliberalism Meets Stalinism

At the heart of the contradiction is the mobility of capital over and against labor. This asymmetry is, of course, central to capitalist expansion globally, but it is unusual for the differential to be so vast *within* a given country (and when it is, it tends to be racialized as in the apartheid systems of South Africa or Israel). So we might think of post-socialist urbanization as a

wretched synthesis of neoliberal capital flows and Stalinist labor control. The consequence has been explosive growth for more than a generation while countless millions of lives and communities have been pulled apart.

This reveals a major shortcoming in liberal thought, which holds that formally free labor is the basis of sound economic growth. Indeed, liberals in contemporary China yearn for the day in which the formal hierarchy of the *hukou* system can be replaced by freedom in the market and informalized domination of capital. China's experience demonstrates that pre-modern (or state-socialist) forms of control and hierarchy are not only compatible with, but can in fact be conducive to, capitalist expansion. Far from undermining this inherited and status-based form of inequality, capital in China has seized on and benefited enormously from the prior socio-spatial hierarchy.

That being said, it is probable that the formally tiered citizenship regime will diminish in relevance over the medium to long term. Economically, capital has already found that it is increasingly difficult to pin down a labor force. *Hukou* restrictions make it impossible for migrants to reside permanently in the places where there has been the most capital accumulation. Eliminating or reducing this market imperfection will be necessary to address China's persistent labor shortages.

Politically, formal discrimination is likely to generate discontent. As a form of domination, it is simply too crude, too obvious. We are now witnessing an attempt by the state to use authoritarian tools to stabilize a new class structure, which before long can be legitimated by invisible market forces rather than the all-too-visible cudgel that is the *hukou*.

There is little to suggest that the Chinese central state has the capacity to realize the more equitable and sustainable form of capitalism that it claims to want. The state's vision of urbanization over the next six years suggests a rigidification of the class structure and a continuation of policies that funnel public money to elites. The parts of the plan that might benefit those without property will certainly engender resistance from those with power. And we have no reason to believe that those who have benefited enormously from existing arrangements will willingly cede control in the interest of the system's long-term sustainability.

Ultimately, overcoming entrenched interests will require the use of political force. If Chinese workers want a right to the city, they will have to take it for themselves. ■

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world,
in various ways.
The point, however, is to

change it.”



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The Suburbanization of the US Working Class

Much of the working class
is being forced out
into suburbia. We must adapt
our organizing
strategies to keep up.

Karen
Narefsky



Imagine a city council meeting filled with engaged residents. Following a discussion of school sports leagues and property taxes, it's decided that the body will "pursue ceaselessly the task of education and combat to substitute for false bourgeois democracy the true democracy of the people against its profiteers."

It's difficult to envision this taking place in any US city. It's even harder to see it happening in the suburbs. Yet these words were spoken eighty years ago in Bobigny, a small town on the outskirts of Paris. Is that kind of working-class consciousness possible in US suburbia?

Cities have always been hubs of worker organizing in the United States. The class geography of US cities has traditionally been the inverse of European ones. In the US, the rich took to the suburbs,



The Life of Great American Cities

Many American cities expanded their borders dramatically in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

leaving workers to occupy urban centers. There, many found easier access to social services, job opportunities, and cheap housing. The social connection that density offered helped workers build strong movements, from the sweatshop laborers of turn-of-the-century New York City to the cultural frontists of the 1930s and the civil rights leaders of the 1960s.

In the last three decades, however, the bourgeoisie has returned to claim the city as its home. Driven in part by their embrace of high-density, environmentally friendly living, and in part by speculative investments of public and private capital in high-end restaurants, luxury housing, entertainment centers, and other amenities, the elite are transforming cities at a shocking rate. Meanwhile, working-class residents are being displaced to suburbs, where job opportunities are scarcer, public services and benefits are harder to access, and people are spread farther apart.

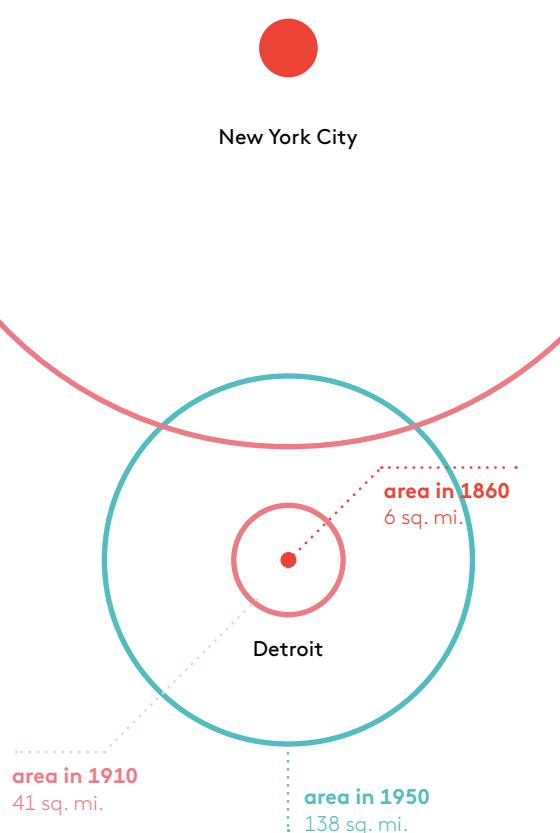
The migration of the working class to suburbia and the colonization of inner cities by the leisure class represents a significant shift in our understanding of the geography of political movements. And yet, it also has the potential to create a new theater for the twenty-first century's class struggles.

All Together Now

Since the Industrial Revolution, residential patterns in the United States have been characterized by the ideal of the workplace as a public space and the home as private. As factories sprang up, transportation networks spread, and those who could afford it chose to live away from the dirt, noise, and chaos of the urban neighborhood.

In his classic study of suburbanization *Crabgrass Frontier*, Kenneth Jackson notes that the early streetcar suburbs of the nineteenth century were not socioeconomically homogeneous, though they satisfied the anti-urban desires of rich industrialists. The servants of the wealthy lived in the same suburbs as their employers — job security was even then a primary factor in dictating where workers could live. As cities expanded, extending their growing network of public services to outlying areas, urban dwellers subsidized the outward spread of roads, sewers, and utilities to these areas.

New York City

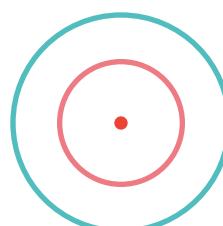


San Francisco

Baltimore



Boston

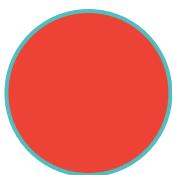


Cleveland



Chicago

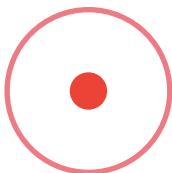
Philadelphia



Washington, DC



Milwaukee



St. Louis



Pittsburgh

In the late 1800s, cities responded to the extension of public goods by annexing neighboring communities. Between 1850 and 1910, the twelve largest cities in the US — Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago among them — collectively added more than eight hundred square miles of land. Manhattan annexed the entire city of Brooklyn, along with the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. This practice enabled cities to consolidate and coordinate municipal governments, as well as increase their control over outlying areas.

The process of annexation, whatever its aims, increased both diversity within municipal boundaries and the amount of residential and industrial neighborhoods under the jurisdiction of centralized local governments. Greater concentrations of population and infrastructure made cities an ideal destination for migrant workers. The great waves of migration from Eastern Europe and the Jim Crow South brought millions of workers to cities, where they often lived in tenements or cramped apartments and labored in factories. While many of them found support and gained political awareness in these surroundings, their presence provided the middle class with another reason to escape to the suburbs.

White Flight

In the interwar and postwar eras, the federal government acted to further incentivize suburban living for the middle class, primarily through veterans' benefits and government investment in single-occupancy homeownership. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the Home Owners Loan Corporation, and the mortgage-interest deduction made suburban living extremely attractive for those who could afford it. Suburban homeowners, not coincidentally, made for ideal workers as far as the bosses were concerned. They didn't live close to their coworkers or their jobs. They were invested in the meritocracy that had supposedly allowed them to succeed. And they were in debt for the length of their mortgage, which was extended at that time to an average of twenty or thirty years.

William Levitt, the creator of the pre-fabricated “Levittown” communities that defined postwar suburban living, is supposed to have said, “No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist. He has too much to do.” Homeownership continued to be the centerpiece of the American dream, though black Americans and others were systematically excluded from that dream. By the time



Growing Suburban Poverty

the FHA began authorizing mortgage insurance for inner-city neighborhoods, even the middle-class families who had remained in those neighborhoods had already moved to the suburbs. The result was inner-city neighborhoods populated by the poor and working class.

In the 1960s, radicals affiliated with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other groups centered their movement-building strategies on those urban communities. In his chronicle of SDS leaders *Democracy is in the Streets*, James Miller describes the young organizers who participated in the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), moving to places like Cleveland and Chicago to mobilize the urban poor.

The ERAP volunteers, rather than organizing factories or campuses, tried to radicalize interracial coalitions of the unemployed. They set out to build a base by knocking on doors and attending community meetings, eventually addressing joblessness, tenants' rights, and welfare rights as they affected community members. But without a deep understanding of the problems facing the communities they had entered (ERAP set out to organize the unemployed in Cleveland just as unemployment rates were falling in that city) and beset by internal problems, the experiment was short-lived.

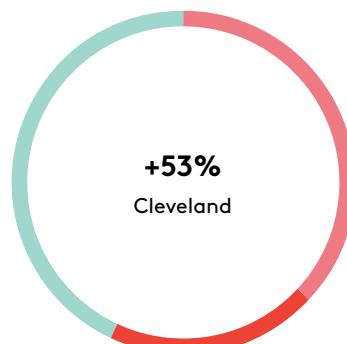
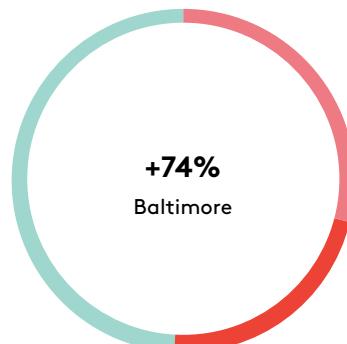
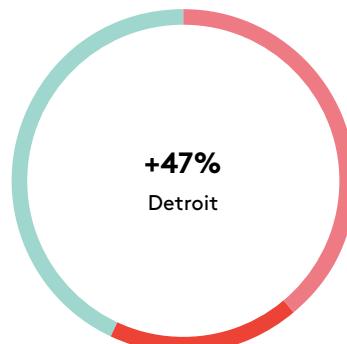
As the SDS organizers moved on to other projects, the federal government and wealthy investors entered those neighborhoods with wholly different intentions. Starting with the urban renewal efforts of the 1970s and 1980s, which displaced so many inner-city residents that they were popularly known as "negro removal," the balance of poverty began to shift. In an effort to consolidate capital, the affluent have invested heavily in urban centers over the last thirty years, driving up land values and displacing entire communities. Neighborhoods that were once solidly working-class and home to strong political movements, like Boston's Roxbury or San Francisco's Mission District, have seen drastic changes.

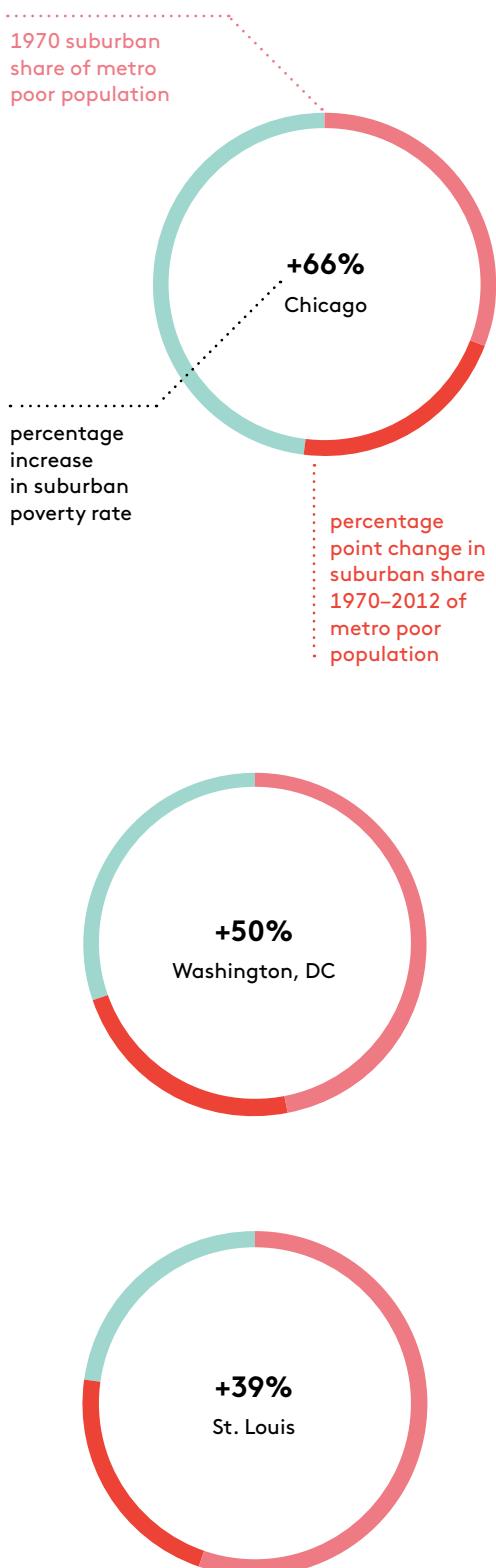
A recent report by the Bay Area grassroots organization Causa Justa :: Just Cause sums it up: "In a full-circle reversal, the white populations that fled urban centers in the postwar era have returned to city centers that now drive Internet and communications technology development rather than manufacturing. Conversely, communities of color are being evicted to the suburbs."

Urban Boutique

American cities have begun a new life as desirable commodities for the ruling class. In his 2012 book *Rebel Cities*, David Harvey notes that "quality of urban life has become a commodity for

Between 1970 and 2012, the suburban share of poverty has grown significantly in dozens of major metropolitan areas throughout the country.





those with money,” and that the 1% increasingly shapes the development of cities to its advantage. Developers create mixed-use entertainment districts for the leisure class and luxury apartments multiply like \$3000-a-month rabbits, while private interests take over contracts for water treatment, subway fare collection, and trash pickup.

In Harvey’s analysis, the surplus value created by the mere existence — not to mention hard work and organized efforts — of residents is being appropriated and sold to investors and visitors. The city as commodity is on the rise, and so are rents and home prices in urban areas, driven by speculation as much as by public investment:

The primary means by which [this surplus value] is appropriated in an urban context is, of course, through the extraction of land and property rents. A community group that struggles to maintain ethnic diversity in its neighborhood... may suddenly find its property prices (and taxes) rising as real estate agents market the “character” of their neighborhood to the wealthy as multicultural, street-lively, and diverse.

Meanwhile, as housing prices increase and once-affordable apartments are converted into luxury condominiums, cities are becoming inaccessible to the poor and working class. This not only displaces actual residents, but also creates a barrier to entry for potential new residents. Cities have always been havens for new immigrants because of their dense social networks and easy access to public services, but this, too, is changing. “Affordable housing” now means formally subsidized units rather than de facto cheap rents, and the subsidizing entities rarely accept tenants without social security numbers or clean criminal records.

Because of this, working-class Americans increasingly live in suburbs or exurbs. As of the 2010 census, three-quarters of all metropolitan-area residents lived outside the urban core. This suburbanization means that workers are less likely to have easy access to public transportation, and that they will have to travel farther to visit the post office, bring their children to daycare, or join a rally. Isolated and disempowered, the suburban poor must work even harder to meet basic needs, leaving less and less time for “what they will.”

For leftists, the suburbanization of the working class should be concerning for another reason. Organizing has never been easy, but as long as workers have been concentrated in urban areas, it’s been more geographically efficient. As the working class moves into the suburbs, we will need to adapt in order to successfully mobilize and create change.



Class War, 90210

What does this mean for those hoping to build class-based movements? If we had all the answers, we'd already have expropriated the country clubs and turned them into socialist summer camps. As with all organizing, it will be vital that different groups share strategies and learn from one another. These thoughts, however, may be a useful starting point:

Be flexible.

Cities are dynamic places to live and to organize, for some of the same reasons that they are now becoming inaccessible to the working class. But the work of movement-building shouldn't be confined to cities, especially if the workers are increasingly elsewhere. Organizers and working-class leaders should view suburbs as sites of untapped class anger.

However, there are important lessons to be learned from the SDS activists and their brief ERAP project. Despite the obvious logic of organizing dispossessed urban dwellers in tight-knit communities, the ERAP volunteers were unsuccessful in creating strong working-class movements. Savvy about Marx but ignorant of the local communities, the ERAP organizers struggled to take hold and build relevant grassroots campaigns.

We don't have to follow in their footsteps. Many working-class activists displaced to the suburbs retain a connection to the cities they have left, and they bring with them knowledge and tactics that can be adapted to new surroundings. Organizers should learn from those leaders about the issues that could most effectively bring people together. Activists who belonged to a tenants' rights organization in a city might lead a campaign for better public transit in the suburbs. Tactics might be different as well; while we've grown accustomed to the power of a large rally, movements that draw from a wider geographical area might find greater strength in smaller coordinated actions.

Identify relevant local campaigns.

We must resist the assumption that most people respond instinctively to an injustice without understanding how it affects them personally. A campaign to cut the US military budget is unassailable in principle, but it will attract mostly New Leftists seeking to relive the glory days of the antiwar movement. Local leaders know what the most pressing and specific issues in their communities are — an organizer's task is to facilitate a unified movement around those issues and connect them to the bigger picture.

Rather than follow the Alinskyan model of organizing for organizing's sake, we should recognize that base-building is a step toward political power and systemic change — but the process is slow, and we have to meet people where they're at in order to get where we need to go. In the meantime, local campaigns should educate people about the economic relationships that connect suburbs, cities, and metropolitan regions, as well as the larger structures that govern capitalist society.

Underlying these campaigns, however diverse in nature, should be David Harvey's right to the city — the idea that the people have a right to the value they create in a particular location, and that they have the right to remain despite speculative pressures. Fundamentally, it's a question of creating consciousness and using that consciousness to build strong relationships and organizations.

Target local political systems.

Local governments can be provincial, and they are undeniably bit players in the grand scheme of things. However, they can also be more responsive than urban-machine politicians, as well as more dependent on an organized bloc of voters. Beyond that, local politics can provide a platform for progressive politicians. Bernie Sanders, the only US senator who publicly identifies as a socialist, began his career as mayor of Burlington, Vermont. If the work of organizing is seen not just as a series of campaigns, but as the building of a political movement with strong leaders, the dispersal of those potential leaders to far-flung communities can take on the gleam of a silver lining.



Annex the suburbs.

For those seeking a utopian political project to expand the powers of the public sector, annexation is a historically viable and comparatively recent example. As suburbs became wealthier and more homogeneous, they pushed back more strongly against association with the urban core, whether by taxation or by shared resources. But as they fill with working-class residents, including immigrants from countries with a stronger social safety net, the benefits of a large municipal government may start to regain some of their appeal.

A tongue-in-cheek manifesto in *Boston Magazine* last year proposed that Boston annex affluent neighboring Brookline, one of the original streetcar suburbs — by force if necessary. Though it depends on Boston for jobs, public transportation, and infrastructure, Brookline's school system is separate, funded by the property tax dollars of its more affluent homeowners. "Brookline residents, who voted for Barack Obama over Massachusetts' own Mitt Romney by nearly four to one, would surely agree that with great wealth comes great responsibility to open their hearts — and school doors — to the underserved children of neighboring Roxbury and Jamaica Plain." Schools, incidentally, are sites of civic participation and class struggle in many working-class suburbs, as parents and teachers resist the hegemony of standardized tests and the creep of charter schools.

In addition to redistributing the resources of wealthier suburbs, municipal annexation would consolidate working-class suburbs within a single municipal system, providing a central target for political campaigns and a single identity under which to unite. It's certainly not a flawless proposal — annexation does nothing to solve the privatization of public services or other neoliberal reforms. But it sets the stage for those battles to be fought.

Create banlieues rouges.

We should follow the example of the *banlieues rouges* — the red suburbs of Paris. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Parisian working class — including many immigrants — was driven out of the city by Baron Haussmann's reforms and a severe housing crisis. Those forces, combined with rapid industrialization, brought many workers to the suburbs, setting the stage for a class-based politics there.

That class consciousness eventually strengthened into several municipal chapters of the SFIO (*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*). The party emphasized local urban issues like housing and municipal services, and integrated local workers into city government to give them training in administrative skills. They formed mutual-aid societies in the name of working-class solidarity and held demonstrations and festivals, including "red baptisms" to protest the enforcement of Catholic norms. Although many of the people living in the suburbs that came to be known as the "Red Belt" left for work during the day, in their leisure time they met in cafés and public spaces and formed interest groups to petition the local government.

The Red Belt encircled Paris and remained a stronghold of the French Communist Party (PCF) until the early 1980s, when right-wing forces like the National Front began to grow in strength. Despite the more recent history, they provide an inspiring opportunity to think outside the bounds of the city itself for worker-led movements.



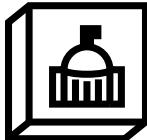
Ultimately, David Harvey concludes, the struggles that concern workers in the factory are the same struggles that concern them once they return home to their neighborhoods. Taking this conclusion one step further, we must assume that the struggles of the urban working class will also be the struggles of the suburban working class. Exploitation, political disenfranchisement, lack of access to resources — these are injustices universal to capitalism. We must learn to confront them outside the familiar comforts of our cities. ■



FY1976

FY1975





If You Can Make It Here

The resolution of New York City's fiscal crisis became a template for neoliberals around the world.

Joshua
Freeman

T

he 1970s New York City fiscal crisis commanded the attention of the world. The possibility that the largest city in the United States — the center of its financial industry, home to more corporate headquarters than anywhere else; its capital of art and culture — might go bankrupt became, like the proverbial car wreck, an irresistible spectacle.

Initially, the crisis was portrayed as a local story, a reflection of New York and its “mongrel” population, liberal social policies, profligate spending, and powerful unions. But the means of its resolution became a template for the imposition of neoliberal policies around the world. Ruling elites took seriously the call to “think globally, act locally,” making a municipal finance problem into an event of world significance.

Public debt — seemingly arcane and technical, yet in the end all-powerful — was at the core of New York’s brush with financial meltdown. From the 1960s on, the City’s debt ballooned, reaching \$11 billion in 1974 (the equivalent of \$54 billion in today’s dollars). Government played an unusually expansive and expensive role in New York life, as a liberal political culture and decades of popular struggle had led to the creation of massive public healthcare, education, housing, and transportation systems and — compared to much of the country — generous welfare benefits.

Local tax revenues and federal and state aid lagged behind spending, including municipal labor costs pushed up by extensive unionization. An exodus of largely white middle-class families to the suburbs, an aging and increasingly poor population, and the movement of jobs out of the city all added to the fiscal woes, obscured by the increasing use of borrowed funds for operating expenses. The brokerage firms and banks that underwrote City bond offerings and held much of the debt happily went along, profiting from trading activity and high, tax-free interest.



How Elites Took Back New York

III City Hall

Unions

Education

+ Health and Hospitals

Infrastructure

07.09.74	III	Comptroller Harrison Goldin refuses the offer of a Chase-led syndicate to buy \$438 million in City bonds, citing prohibitively high interest rates. This is the first time in history that the City rejects a bank offer.
09.01.74		Mayor Abraham Beame warns of a huge deficit in the 1975 budget.
10.16.74	II	City and four municipal unions announce creation of a Productivity Council, headed by First Deputy Major James A. Cavanagh.
11.08.74		The mayor's office initiates \$330 million in service cuts, including a job freeze and layoffs of 1,519 workers.
12.11.74		Beame orders additional 3,725 layoffs and forced retirements of city employees.
01.15.75		Beame declares need to cut budget by firing more than 4,050 city workers.
01.24.75	+	The New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation adopts austerity program, including staff reductions.
02.03.75	●	CUNY temporarily averts layoff of 500 employees.
02.06.75	III	Mayor Beame and New York Governor Hugh Carey meet with Vice President Nelson Rockefeller.
03.21.75		Comptroller Goldin and Beame lobby Treasury and Federal Reserve officials asking for a loan or purchase of City bonds by the Federal Reserve Bank.
04.04.75	II	City announces it fired 1,941 workers during the winter months, rather than the 12,700 originally planned.
04.22.75	●	Beame announces 3,975 layoffs in fiscal year 1976, a 10% increase in real estate tax, and calls for the closing of forty-three "underutilized schools."
04.23.75		Beame proposes an increase in CUNY student fees to \$90, as well as the introduction of tuition at \$25 per credit.
05.08.75	+	Health and Hospital Corporation Board votes to close Delafield Hospital. 4,000 people picket meeting.
05.29.75	III	Beame presents two budgets for 1976: "crisis" and "austerity."
06.04.75	II	10,000 workers march on Wall Street protesting cuts.
06.10.75	III	The state creates the Municipal Assistance Corporation.
06.10.75	●	The city postpones \$35.9 million in payroll for 13,000 CUNY employees until end of month.
06.19.75	III	A 1976 budget is adopted, which includes 42,097 fewer public sector jobs and \$1.3 billion in cuts.



But when the deep recession hit in 1973 — sending the unemployment rate in New York to 12 percent by 1975 — assets turned into liabilities, and investors grew reluctant to buy City bonds. Nonetheless, the City had to keep borrowing to refinance debt coming due. Each month, a dwindling pool of lenders demanded higher interest rates. In the spring of 1975, the lenders disappeared entirely, raising the prospect of default.

With billions of dollars at stake, the cardinals of finance — led by David Rockefeller, chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank; Walter Wriston, chairman of First National City Bank; Donald T. Regan, chairman of Merrill Lynch; and William Salomon, managing partner of Salomon Brothers — got personally involved in New York City government affairs, an arena normally well below their radar. They were appalled at what they found, including archaic accounting practices and gimmicks like putting operating expenses into the capital budget. More importantly, they confronted elected officials who were resistant to their insistence that the City adopt austerity measures like reducing the number of municipal employees and increasing their productivity, cutting services, slashing capital spending, and raising taxes and fees.

At the helm of the City sat Mayor Abraham Beame, a longtime civil servant and Brooklyn machine Democrat, as unimposing in his manner as in his stature (he stood only 5'2"). Beame's seeming obliviousness to the scale of the crisis, his clubhouse values that placed loyalty over competence, and his susceptibility to municipal union pressure led the financial powers to see him as an obstacle who needed to be circumvented in order to carry out their agenda of fiscal reform and social transformation.

For some financial leaders, the main concern was simply making sure that holders of New York City debt, including their own institutions, got repaid. For others, the crisis presented an opportunity for a bold attack on New York's social democratic cast, with its high level of unionization, generous social wage, and pervasive government regulation (including rent control). Conservative leaders in Washington, including Secretary of the Treasury William Simon and White House Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld, promoted a radical resolution

to the financial crisis. They aligned themselves with national business leaders to pursue a social and political environment conducive to the restoration of robust profitability and ruling-class power after the decade of leftward drift resulting from civil rights struggles and subsequent social movements.

The tension between the two elite approaches became evident when New York's political and financial leaders turned to the federal government for loans to help the City repay its debt. Titans of finance like Rockefeller and Ellmore Patterson, chairman of Morgan Guaranty Trust, had no objection to state intervention in the market if it meant protecting lenders and forestalling municipal bankruptcy. In Washington, however, they ran into ideologues with grander aspirations.

Simon, who had helped build up the City's debt as a bond trader, now saw it as a pry bar to move the national "philosophy of government," as he called it, away from liberalism and the welfare state. Simon rejected the city's plea for help, as did President Gerald Ford. In Congress, New York faced hostility not just for its alleged profligacy but also for its seeming un-Americaness — with its large Jewish, African-American, and Puerto Rican populations and well-advertised contempt for what *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross famously called "the old lady from Dubuque."

With no federal money forthcoming, New York governor Hugh Carey took charge, working with corporate and financial leaders to develop a series of new governing structures he forced the City to accept. First was the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC), authorized by the state to sell bonds to retire City debt and assume control over City sales and stock transfer tax receipts. The unelected board wielded vast power, since it had the discretion to decline to lend to the City unless its demands were met. In spite of a wave of union and popular protests, MAC forced City officials to lay off tens of thousands of workers, freeze wages, cut welfare benefits, raise the transit fare, and impose tuition at the historically free City University of New York.

When MAC and the cutbacks proved inadequate to revive the market for New York City debt, the state created a new body, the Emergency Financial



07.01.75	+	Sanitation workers conduct wildcat strike.	
07.02.75	+	Wall Street Journal calls for National Guard to collect garbage.	
07.22.75	●	CUNY takes measures to save \$87 million by raising student fees, increasing the tuition of graduate students and part-timers. CUNY bosses, however, rebuff the mayor by reaffirming free undergraduate tuition.	
07.25.75	+	City Council approves increase in Staten Island Ferry round trip fare from 10 cents to 25 cents.	
07.31.75	●	Additional firings of sanitation workers postponed.	
08.07.75	+	Health and Hospital Corporation Board votes to close Van Etten Hospital and part of SeaView Hospital, and to layoff 1,593 workers.	
08.27.75	●	City applies to use CETA funds to rehire 549 sanitation workers and parks department workers.	
09.01.75	+	Subway and bus fares rise from 35 cents to 50 cents.	
09.07.75	III	New York State creates the Emergency Financial Control Board to oversee the city's finances.	
09.18.75	●	Chairman of the Board of Higher Education, Alfred Giardino, rejects the imposition of tuition at CUNY.	
10.17.75	III	New York City comes closest ever to default. The United Federation of Teachers agrees to buy \$150 million in MAC bonds to prop up the city.	
10.30.75	+	Health and Hospital Corporation closes Fordham Hospital, cuts another \$18.25 million from its budget, and eliminates 11 dental clinics.	
10.30.75	●	City receives \$17.8 million from federal government, enabling it to rehire 140 fire fighters, 450 sanitation workers, 100 parks department workers, 275 police officers, and 688 school support staff.	
11.24.75	●	Both the CUNY Faculty Senate and the Council of Presidents call for a New York State takeover of the university system.	
12.29.75	●	City Planning Commission recommends the smallest capital budget in eight years, which includes no new construction and halts several projects including 11 partially finished public schools, the new Queens subway lines, and the North River Pollution Control Plant.	
02.05.76	+	HHC votes to close Gouverneur, Sydenham, Cumberland, Fordham, Morrisania, and Greenpoint hospitals eliminating over 3,000 jobs.	
02.13.76	III	Beame announces that \$410 million of cuts necessary in each of the next two fiscal years.	
02.23.76	●	Chancellor Kibbee proposes cutting CUNY costs over three years by closing schools and reducing enrollment by 30,000 students.	
03.12.76	+	Emergency Financial Control Board announces that beginning in 1977, the City will stop financing CUNY senior colleges.	
03.25.76	III	Mayor Beame proposes \$379 million in cuts for FY1977 and \$483 million in FY1978, the loss of 8,100 city jobs, and shifting \$250 million in court and college costs to the state.	



04.01.76		Shinn commission releases report calling for additional employee pension contributions of \$208 million a year.
04.05.76		Board of Higher Education adopts most of Kibbee proposals. Vice-Chancellor Franklin H. Williams resigns in protest. CUNY still has \$76 million deficit.
04.16.76		A few days early, the city pays federal government the first installment in \$1.26 billion loan repayment.
04.27.76		Board of Education announces closure of 29 K-12 schools.
05.01.76		HRA announces closing of 49 daycare centers effective July 1.
05.26.76		CUNY does not meet its payroll.
05.28.76		Kibbee orders indefinite closing of CUNY effective at midnight.
06.14.76		CUNY reopens.
06.18.76		HHC arbitration panel recommends layoffs of 842 provisional workers, closing of selected units at Sydenham Hospital, and the conversion of Gouverneur Hospital into a skilled nursing facility.
06.30.76		Fordham and Morrisania Hospitals closed.
07.01.76		Congressman Herman Badillo calls for New York City default.
07.06.76		Chancellor Kibbee announces \$69 million of budget cuts throughout CUNY, necessitating layoffs of tenured faculty.
07.21.76		Revised CUNY plan submitted to EFCB restores most laid off tenured faculty.
08.30.76		Transit further reduces services, eliminating 215 daily train runs. Total train cuts stands at 885 since beginning of fiscal crisis.

Control Board (EFCB). It had even greater power over City finances than MAC, including the ability to reject labor contracts and remove the mayor and other elected officials if they refused to go along with its policies. Yet investors still stayed away.

In the end, the City had to turn elsewhere to get the cash it needed to make good on its debts. First, it began tapping the huge reserves of the public pension funds, which required the acquiescence of the very unions whose members were supposed to be fund beneficiaries. Second, it went back to Washington. This time they met with more success, as Ford's mean-spirited approach to the city — captured in the immortal *Daily News* headline “FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD” — turned out to be bad politics. Sober heads were concerned with the potential ramifications of a New York City bankruptcy amid global economic turbulence and the Cold War. The federal government agreed to give seasonal loans to the City, but imposed yet another set of controls that Simon then used to force up local taxes and shift some pension costs from the municipality to its workers.

With MAC, the EFCB, the pension fund loans, and federal seasonal lending in place, bankruptcy was avoided and the city was remade. The financial sector and business in general saw their power and ideological legitimacy restored while ordinary New Yorkers faced years of misery. Steep budget cuts combined with the recession meant laid-off city workers, overcrowded schools, shuttered hospitals, high crime, widespread arson, broken subways, and collapsing streets. Yet the victory of the financiers and conservatives proved limited, as the municipal unions, partially because of the pension fund investments, preserved collective bargaining and much of their power. Rent regulation was not killed, and social democratic tendencies were moderated but not rooted out.

Nationally and internationally, though, the blitzkrieg of finance and free-market ideologues against New York's welfare state had profound effects. It provided a model for using debt crises to force restructuring along neoliberal lines and



09.08.76	CUNY starts fall semester with tuition for undergraduates and 17% fewer students.	06.22.77	City Council passes FY1978 budget, reducing tax rate to \$8.75 per \$100 of assessed valuation.
10.15.76	Beame submits Financial Plan calling for \$200.7 million in additional cuts for FY1977.	10.04.77	City announces that FY1977 deficit was half of what was originally projected.
11.30.76	Banks and pension funds claim City owes them \$819 million.	01.01.78	Edward Irving Koch sworn in as 105th Mayor.
12.10.76	NYC Task Force on the HHC urges a major reorganization.	03.10.78	City proposes workforce reduction of 6,345.
01.01.77	Cuts in bus and subway service initiated to save \$30 million.	04.25.78	Koch proposes \$13.5 billion FY1979 budget, which includes, for the first time since 1974, money for the purchase of new sanitation and fire equipment.
01.05.77	Banks propose extension of Municipal Assistance Corporation, independent monitoring of City books, automatic controls on spending and revenue projections, and segregation of real estate taxes in a trust fund.	01.04.79	Koch proposes cuts in non-uniformed services and rejects contract agreed to by the Board of Education and the UFT in June of 1978.
01.06.77	Beame presents to EFCB a three-year Financial Plan, calling for 7,500 job reductions mostly through non-renewal of contracts.	03.10.79	City proposes workforce reduction of another 6,345 workers.
01.12.77	HHC Board votes for new financial plan to close gap of \$153 million over next 18 months.	04.26.79	Mayor's office presents balanced budget, by making cuts to policing, sanitation, and education.
02.07.77	City unable to meet deadline, Court of Appeals imposes 30-day deadline on City to repay moratorium notes.	08.14.79	Koch announces City ended FY1979 with \$200 million surplus.
03.04.77	Banks propose new fiscal monitor with veto power over City borrowing, but unions reject it.	12.12.79	Koch says City cannot afford wage settlements of 7.0%, the guideline set by President Carter.
04.22.77	Beame proposes \$13.9 billion FY1978 expense budget, declaring it the first "balanced" budget under 1975 legislation.	01.16.80	Koch needs tax increases of \$175 million, calls for reduction of 13,000 city jobs by the end of FY1982, 7,186 in education.
		07.01.80	Subway fare raised from 50 cents to 60 cents.
		07.01.81	Fare raised again — from 60 cents to 75 cents.
		10.31.81	Goldin states that the FY1981 budget, the first to be GAAP balanced, ended with a surplus of \$128 million.



revealed the possibility of taking bold steps against accepted social arrangements. The terrain was set for future routs, such as Ronald Reagan's attack on striking air traffic controllers and Margaret Thatcher's on British coal miners.

The New York City playbook was also put to use in 1979, when Chrysler, one of the country's largest corporations, faced bankruptcy. Officials in the Carter administration, involved in supervising federal loans to New York, worked with Congress to offer loan guarantees to the automaker that were contingent on financial concessions from creditors, suppliers, dealers, and most importantly, labor. The Chrysler bailout, like the resolution of the New York crisis, was far from a free-market solution, which would have been to allow the company to collapse. Instead, it was an example of aggressive corporatism — using public credit to bail out private interests while making labor accept austerity. It again proved the power of using debt relief as a weapon to change social and economic relationships to the detriment of workers and to the benefit of large corporate and financial interests.

Three years later, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) picked up the ball. When Mexico found itself unable to repay its sovereign debt, the IMF negotiated a program that required the Mexican government to adopt a variety of austerity measures. Soon, the IMF was routinely linking debt relief for floundering countries to "structural adjustment" measures that lowered the standard of living for workers, diminished government benefits and subsidies, promoted privatization, and opened the door for foreign trade and investment. The New York fiscal crisis solution — impoverish workers and the poor to pay back investors, use non-elected bodies to supersede local democracy, and force a move away from social democratic policies — had gone global.

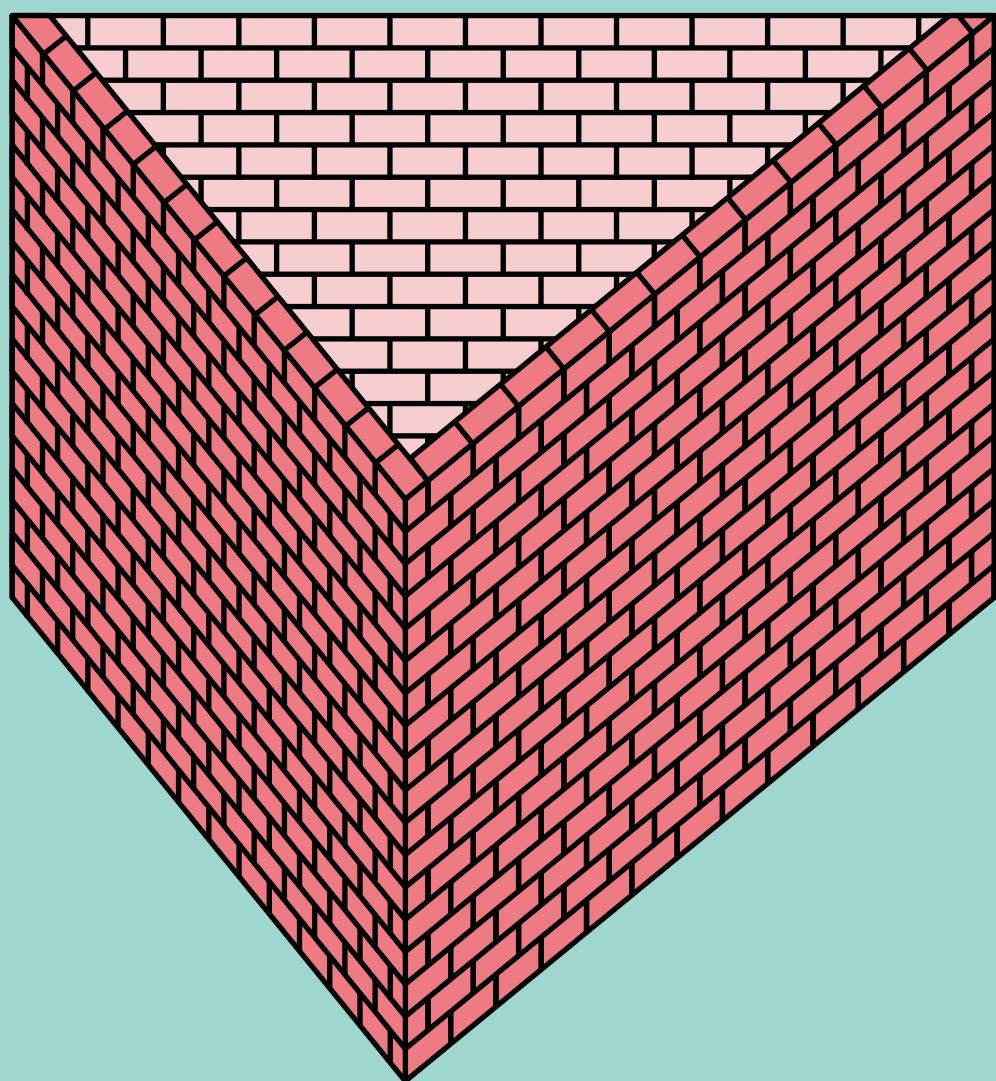
In a broad sense, Thatcherism and Reaganism were likewise extensions of the New York counter-revolution, as they shifted power to economic elites, denigrated the efficacy of government, extolled the market, and prioritized private over collective solutions to shared problems. In doing so, they laid the basis for an era of greed, inequality, and high-level managerial incompetence.

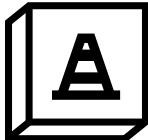
Rupert Murdoch was a link between the fiscal crisis and the conservatism of Thatcher and Reagan. In 1977, his newly purchased *New York Post*, a long-time liberal stalwart, endorsed Ed Koch, a liberal congressman turned neoconservative, in the New York City mayoral primary. Once elected with the help of the *Post*, Koch institutionalized the financial community's priorities of fiscal probity, government austerity, and a hard line toward municipal unions. Murdoch papers went on to endorse Thatcher and Reagan, serving as cheerleaders for the free-market revolution they had ushered in.

The New York fiscal crisis was only one of many steps along the uneven road to neoliberalism, whose triumph has sometimes been overstated. In New York City, rent regulation lives on, as do still-powerful municipal unions, a low-cost if no longer free public university system, and extensive public services. Bill de Blasio, the recently elected mayor, has declared confronting economic inequality his highest priority, and unions and community groups continue to campaign for higher wages and expanded municipal services. Nonetheless, it is a markedly different world, in part as a result of the fiscal crisis of the 1970s.

Nothing makes that clearer than the political and public reaction to the plummeting fortunes of Detroit. President Ford received so much pressure after his initial refusal to aid New York that he ultimately reversed his position. By contrast, President Obama and the current Congress have faced virtually no criticism — at least outside of Detroit — for not even considering federal intervention to prevent a municipal bankruptcy. In New York, financial and state leaders hemmed in local elected officials with new, unelected bodies. In Detroit, the governor and the courts weakened local democracy even farther, appointing an emergency manager and placing the city in receivership.

What William Simon could not do in New York — use bankruptcy to radically restructure a major city and break longstanding social covenants — has been achieved in Detroit. And so what first seemed like a local crisis in Gotham turned out to be a glimpse into a global future of financial rule, decayed welfare states, and diminished democracy. ■





Safe Space for Capital

How did a brand of gay-friendly values become synonymous with those most prized by capitalist urban redevelopment?

Eric
Peterson

Throughout the recent string of gay-rights victories in the United States, the most vibrant celebrations could be found in so-called “gayborhoods” like New York’s Greenwich Village and San Francisco’s Castro district. Whereas gay parts of town were once associated with derelict urban districts (think of the old Times Square or the Tenderloin in San Francisco), these neighborhoods are now some of the country’s most desirable. So much so, in fact, that theories of the “creative city” that emerged in the early aughts often cited the presence of gay people — implicitly, white gay men — as a sign of areas ripe for urban regeneration, whether as arbiters of culture, diversity, or safety. It would appear that a particular brand of gay-friendly values has become synonymous with those most prized by contemporary capitalist urban redevelopment.

Christina Hanhardt’s new book, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*, looks at how the creation of “safer urban streets” became a central goal driving both LGBT activism and neoliberal urban regeneration agendas. The tactics devised by some LGBT activists for the purpose of creating “gay spaces” safe from violence have been adopted by property owners and policymakers, often with negative consequences for other marginal urban groups — including those in the LGBT community, such as queer and trans* youth of color.

The book opens by contrasting the 1969 Stonewall riots, often credited with kickstarting the US gay liberation movement, with a 2002 rally called “Take Back Our Streets,” at which West Village resident groups called for increased police enforcement of quality-of-life laws with the stated goal of creating safer streets. Resident groups like the Christopher Street Patrol emulated tactics used by LGBT activists, including community street patrols targeting groups loitering in the



neighborhood's public spaces. In the Christopher Street area, these groups are most often queer youth of color and transgender women.

The irony here, Hanhardt points out, is that the now-sanitized Stonewall riots were protests against police raids targeting queer communities — trans* women and gender-nonconforming people in particular. Those activists had linked up with similar radical protests by Black Power and Third World decolonization organizations. How is it that subsequent LGBT organizing helped to create neighborhoods and cities that perpetuate the marginalization of lower-income communities and people of color — including many who themselves identify as queer?

The first several chapters trace the post-Stonewall emergence of a mainstream LGBT agenda that became detached from its late-sixties alliance with other marginal urban groups, instead foregrounding the creation of “gay spaces” as a primary organizing goal. This strategy emphasized and publicized the importance of a gay visibility tied to urban space and saw individuated violence against lesbians and gays as the movement’s primary threat. To this end, in the 1970s and 1980s, groups like the Lavender Panthers in San Francisco and the Society to Make America Safe for Homosexuals (SMASH) in New York pioneered the use of safe-street patrols, gathered data about crimes committed against individuals, and called for greater police protection.

But Hanhardt also draws attention to groups that criticized this strategy and instead highlighted the structural forces uniting gays and lesbians with other disenfranchised urban populations. Groups like the Third World Gay Coalition and Dykes and Faggots Organized to Defeat Institutionalized Liberalism (DAFODIL) pointed to the poverty and violence created by displacement through the private real estate market, and asserted that claims to queer space should challenge the logic of property rights rather than enforce it. Over time, however, these intersectional groups paled in impact and longevity next to an increasingly mainstream national

LGBT movement whose activity centered on combating a narrowing definition of violence — and a narrowing definition of its victims.

Examining this history of LGBT activism in an urban context makes it clear that the strategy of claiming “gay space” often came at the expense of disadvantaged populations. Liberal social-science theories of the “culture of poverty” advanced a racial and behavioral basis to crime that gave rise to zero-tolerance approaches to crime management and to a pathology of homophobia. Hanhardt admits that many of these links are causal, but they do help explain how anti-violence campaigns played off and solidified a narrative of white gay victims and prejudiced, often non-white, perpetrators of violence. These assumptions, when embedded in technocratic tools like broken-windows policing, have had the effect of codifying police enforcement along lines of race and class.

A look at contemporary Greenwich Village reveals the success of LGBT organizing strategies as well as the ways they have exacerbated the uneven development that has become a defining feature of contemporary cities since the 1970s. By the 2000s, the Village was fully gentrified, while its identity as a “gayborhood” made it home to an array of institutions offering social services and support to queer people throughout the New York metropolitan area. Conflict continually erupted over the neighborhood’s public spaces — most visibly the piers at the western end of Christopher Street, a popular gathering spot among queer and trans youth of color who were targeted as an unwanted presence by Village residents and by the pro-development Hudson River Park Trust. Residents used the local community board to issue periodic calls for increased police enforcement of quality-of-life laws, like those prohibiting loitering or rowdiness, to curtail the presence of those deemed outsiders.

Hanhardt points to the community board’s ironic fate under neoliberalism: designed at the height of 1960s Great Society liberalism as a means of empowering marginalized groups, community



boards have since become one of the primary vehicles through which property rights are asserted. Meanwhile, Village residents of various sexual orientations adopted the tactics of anti-violence LGBT activists, forming a Christopher Street Patrol to “take back” the streets. Hanhardt thus shows how the goals and aims of gay anti-violence organizing — here used to target queer youth of color — have become indistinguishable from those of private-property protectionism.

But Hanhardt also looks for ways activists might claim space without defending capital. She profiles a group called Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE), made up primarily of queer youth of color who organized to protest the policing and enclosure of public spaces in Greenwich Village. FIERCE became a regular presence at community board meetings, adopting a strategy whereby those most affected by quality-of-life policing strategies spoke out in opposition to them. “We *are* property values,” asserted FIERCE activists, pointing out that their poverty and vulnerability to police violence was part of the process of uneven development and real estate speculation.

In the end, members of FIERCE, despite their non-resident status, reclaimed the participatory ideals of the community board as they became part of local decision-making and were included in design and governance processes for the waterfront redevelopment. Their success demonstrates how culture, identity, and experience — their status as queers claiming a gay space — could be animated not just in support of homeowner hand-wringing but also against it. In so doing, they successfully challenged the logic of a model of urban citizenship tied to private property and accumulation.

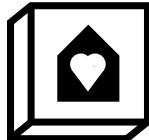
What lessons does this success offer to other activists? Neoliberal urban policies, by denigrating the public sphere, have been highly effective at pitting the groups impacted by its policies against one another, precluding more radical political programs and the coalitions necessary for structural change.

For instance, many community groups formed in response to Black Power calls for black ownership of neighborhood resources have, with the decline of federal funding for community development, come to rely on economically productive activities that generate rental income. These rental incomes serve to sustain piecemeal subsidized housing projects developed by community groups attempting to fill the gap left by declining funds for public housing — a partnership that effectively abets privatized real estate development rather than challenging it.

Meanwhile, since the 1970s, the homeless population has grown at astronomical rates and waiting lists for public housing are several years long. In response to calls for more affordable housing, policymakers incentivize the construction of scores of luxury condo towers — occasionally with smatterings of “affordable” units. This model, which enlists housing advocates in support of accommodationist solutions, reinforces a model of urban citizenship tied to property ownership, perpetuates the development machine, and ensures a permanently homeless class disproportionately populated by minorities and LGBT youth. If these patterns are to be interrupted, activists of different stripes will have to unite to challenge policies that privatize urban space.

Against the fractured landscape of cities characterized by uneven development, *Safe Space* is a clarion call for radicals to recognize the common deterrents facing all those working for more just cities. While developers and policymakers advocating urban regeneration make use of the rhetoric of diversity, organizers need to call attention to the inequalities these agendas create and examine how imperatives like urban safety or increased housing development often benefit certain populations — usually the wealthy and white — at the expense of others. *Safe Space* recognizes that claiming the city as an equitable space for all will require a broader understanding of identity, its use as a tool for development, and its latent potential as a site of resistance. ■





Caring in the City

Ending the exploitation of urban care workers requires radically democratic alternatives that go beyond the rhetoric of “work-life balance.”

Johanna
Brenner

I f I had a dollar, or maybe only a dime, for every word that has been penned about solutions for “balancing work and family,” my personal wealth would be approaching that of Alice Walton. As with many dilemmas central to capitalism, the policy solutions offered over the past thirty years appear sensible; yet, like the carousel’s brass ring, they remain ever beyond our grasp.

The Nordic welfare states appeared for a while to provide a shining example of family-friendly capitalism. There is no doubt that this model benefited working-class women and single mothers. Yet while appreciating the high-quality childcare, paid parental leave, and other policies that facilitated mothers’ engagement in paid labor, feminist critics argued that these measures tended to aggravate occupational segregation along gender lines, limit women’s employment in the private sector, and reproduce the gender division of labor in the household. This held true even in Sweden, where additional months of parental leave were offered if taken by men.

Certainly, the welfare state is worth defending against the neo-liberal austerity policies now increasingly in force. But even at their height, Nordic welfare states never came close to truly socializing

the labor of care — especially when we think beyond childrearing to the many kinds of care that people need over their lifetimes. Direct care, and allied labors like shopping, cooking, and cleaning, remain the private responsibility of households and predominantly of the women within them. We can debate the levels of change that have occurred in men’s participation in domestic labor, but even the most democratized two-income nuclear family household cannot meet its care responsibilities alone without overworking its

**Woman and Child, Camphill School,
Bieldside, Aberdeen**
“A School Where Love is a Cure”
Edith Tudor-Hart (1949)

Karl König, an Austrian refugee from fascism, established the Camphill School at Bieldside in 1940 as a progressive school for children with learning disabilities. Tudor-Hart documented the school in a photoessay titled “A School Where Love is a Cure.”



own members or exploiting low-paid workers in the care and service industries.

Many households solve the problem of squabbling over who will clean the bathroom by hiring other women to do household work. This “solution” rests on the exploitation of immigrant labor — much of it informal and undocumented, whether it involves Eastern European women cleaning homes in Germany or Latina nannies in Los Angeles. Few families in the US could afford nannies, home care workers, or home health aides if the workers were making a real living wage or even the fifteen dollars an hour that fast-food workers are fighting for.

Most households cannot afford to hire even low-paid domestic workers, so they balance caring and waged work by working part-time, working shift-work, or creating informal arrangements with family and neighbors. Or they rely on other low-waged workers and cheap services — understaffed, low-quality, for-profit chain childcare centers and overburdened family daycare providers.

When mothers migrate to work as caregivers, leaving their families behind, emotional nurturing becomes another extractive industry in which resources are transferred from the Global South to the Global North. We all might agree that children can be well taken care of by people other than their parents. But should severing relationships with one’s children or parents be the price paid for economic survival? Caring for others is a fundamental human activity; choice with regard to how we give care to the people we love is an important human right — as important as the right to be cared for.

Exploitation of paid and unpaid labor, distress and overwork, fears about old age, worries about our kids, and intimacy strained by the burdens of caregiving pervade our lives. The social-democratic welfare states achieved brief and unique victories against capital’s drive to force the costs of reproducing the labor force onto workers themselves. The privatization of the humanly necessary work of care is endemic, despite the fact that capital needs healthy workers to exploit. We need to envision radically democratic alternatives that go beyond helping households shoulder what are understood to be their care responsibilities. To truly socialize the costs of care will require a monumental shift

away from capital’s control of our social wealth. As we imagine what this might look like, we can draw on decades of socialist feminist thinking.

Beyond Free Daycare

In thinking about alternatives to the nuclear family household as the primary institution for sustaining care, socialist feminists have envisioned collective forms of living in which a broader set of people can care for each other, meet our everyday physical needs, raise our children, and support our elderly friends and relatives. Socialist feminists have also argued for degendering care work. These ideals are linked. So long as care is a woman’s responsibility, it will remain devalued. And so long as it is a private responsibility, it will remain gendered. Collective care encourages a deeper capacity for empathy and social identification beyond the narrow sphere of one’s immediate relatives. For socialist feminists, enlarging relational life beyond the small circles defined by kinship is an essential part of any liberatory project.

From nineteenth-century French revolutionary Jeanne Deroin to Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai to “second-wave” feminists Sheila Rowbotham, Hilary Wainwright, and Lynne Segal, many socialist feminists have engaged, along with radicals from other revolutionary traditions, in experiments in cooperative work and communal living. Partly because of where they live and work, but also because of the many working-class women’s movements that have flourished in cities, socialist feminists have been particularly interested in transforming the urban environment.

Cities are often sites of cultural and political radicalism. With its spaces of anonymity, the city has been a place of refuge from bourgeois conformity and has nurtured subcultures from which emerged new identities and social movements. The density of the built environment and the mixture of residential and commercial spaces in many urban neighborhoods provide a more supportive economic and social environment for women both as wage earners and as unpaid caregivers. Out of necessity, women in working-class neighborhoods have created cross-household networks through which



they share caring labor. These caregiving networks in turn have formed the social base for women's organizing around a variety of issues relevant to their responsibility for sustaining households and families: tenants' rights, consumer issues, welfare policy, environmental justice, and community-based healthcare, to name a few. Some of these movements are rooted in a defense of and demand for the expansion of public space; for example, safe streets, parks, and after-school recreation programs. In this sense, working-class women have long recognized their "right to the city" and struggled to have access to the wealth and resources that flow within it.

Since the early twentieth century, feminist urban planners, architects, and academics have challenged urban policies that assume male breadwinners and privatized care work. They have envisioned new kinds of built environments that offer collective possibilities for care. In a groundbreaking article published in 1980, Dolores Hayden described public housing projects that incorporated childcare centers, laundries, dining rooms, and play spaces in order to meet the needs of households headed by working single mothers.

Public housing in the US might have developed along these lines. Instead, after a long period of disinvestment, it is now being demolished in many cities, forcing more poor families to rely on Section 8 vouchers and the private housing market, trapping them in an environment that inhibits rather than encourages collectivized space. Racialized "culture of poverty" discourses have been used to justify the shifts. These discourses are embedded in neoliberal urban policies that offer "choice" and "opportunity" as a rationale for gentrification, dispersion, and the unraveling of community ties and networks built up over generations. Along with welfare reform, housing policies of accumulation by dispossession have posed serious challenges to the women-led social justice movements.

The Rebuilt Environment

Ironically, while public housing came under attack, affluent middle-class pioneers were organizing to create a new kind of built environment: cohousing projects that encourage caring communities. In any

collective project, there is a tension between the particular needs of individuals and the demands of group life. Cohousing seeks to manage this tension by balancing private and communal space so that residents can participate in community life at different levels of intensity. Cohousing combines individual living units with a large, comfortable common house that can accommodate the whole community for meals and social gatherings. The common space can include, in addition to a dining room and kitchen, a children's space, a library, recreation room, meeting rooms, a workshop, an office, shared laundry facilities, and guest accommodations (allowing individual units to remain relatively small while community members can still accommodate visitors).

Cohousing offers promise as a strategy for socializing care, because adults share caregiving in reciprocal relationships among an extensive group of people. In cohousing communities, adults can participate in childrearing without necessarily producing their own child, and share the burdens and pleasures of caring for one another. Taking the sting out of living single, cohousing creates a ground for real freedom about coupling up.

Cohousing members are expected to share responsibilities for organizing collective life, serve on committees, and participate in decision-making. They are also expected to participate in community meals, although how this is organized, the frequency of the gatherings, and the frequency of expected participation varies across cohousing communities.

Most cohousing projects in the US have been built on vacant land, but some have been developed in urban areas by retrofitting older buildings; for example, Swan's Market in San Francisco, which was converted into mixed-use retail and cohousing. The inclusion of rental housing along with owner-occupied units has emerged as a strategy for bringing single parents and other moderate- and low-income individuals and families into cohousing. In 2013, the City of Sebastopol, California built the first all-rental cohousing project for low-income seniors and families. The non-profit developer, Satellite Affordable Housing Associates, funded a community organizer who worked for two years with tenants as they developed their community guidelines and norms and their consensus decision-making skills.



Caring Communities

Decisions about the built environment are some of many that shape possibilities for socializing care. Organizing care in more collective and social, rather than individual and private, ways inevitably raises concerns about power, privilege, and oppressive group control. Who will set the rules? What kind of choices will we have about how to care and about who will care? What does it mean to make care work a public good? One of the most complex of these important questions is the role of democracy, community, and the state.

Public goods can be produced, administered, and delivered in ways that are bureaucratic or participatory, hierarchical or accessible, centralized or localized. As the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued, our dispositions are developed through practice, through enactment, so that ways of imagining ourselves in relation to others become deeply embedded in our identities and in our habits. When public goods are produced and administered within institutions that involve shared governance and decision-making, they create a social environment within which people develop the dispositions that are fundamental to social solidarity. Local control will encourage a variety of forms for these institutions so that people can experiment with different ways of organizing daily life.

Decentralizing the welfare state and providing care through local neighborhood-based institutions would help build more broadly democratic communities. One pitfall of this approach, however, is that community groups can be oppressive and intolerant, maintaining their cohesion by exclusion and unable to resolve conflict through negotiation. We need to think about the kinds of collective arrangements that would minimize these potential dangers. Local control is a necessary but insufficient condition for creating democratic communities. Unless those communities interact with one another in meaningful ways, local solidarity can too easily turn into parochial protectionism. Local decision-making allows communities to develop their own strategies for using resources and organizing their caregiving responsibilities. But the distribution of resources among communities and the establishment of a

framework for making such decisions is a matter for a higher level of governance. Expanded democratic decision-making puts local groups into contact with a wider public.

One model is a council-type system of public governance, where local groups send representatives to broader regional decision-making institutions. For example, daycare cooperatives — rooted in neighborhoods, connected to housing complexes, drawing on volunteers from every child's caring community, and employing highly skilled and well-paid childcare workers — would send representatives to a citywide daycare cooperative association. Decision-making about caregiving at the level of the cooperative would be made jointly by the children's caring community and the daycare providers. And through their representatives, who would regularly report back, they would also engage in dialogue about policies and resource allocation on the regional level. Control over as many decisions as possible would stay locally rooted, but active participation would be expected at the regional level and would be a condition for receiving resources.

It is important to recognize that there are many “good enough” ways to do care. Our vision of socializing care ought to include flexibility, variety, and choice. These are important values, because they force us to appreciate the complexity of human relationships and be willing to let people experiment with different strategies for living together and caring for one another. There will be different preferences about how much people want to rely on paid caregivers and how much on their communities, on each other. There will be cultural differences to be negotiated as well.

Cities have an advantage in this regard, because it is relatively easy to move from one community to another, increasing choices about how one lives. Additionally, with good public transportation, people from diverse communities have expanded opportunities to meet face-to-face in order to engage in respectful dialogue about the full range of complex issues that arise in care work — whether we do it as unpaid labor for those we care about or as skilled workers — and make no mistake, all care work is skilled, although these skills are rarely acknowledged.



Music Lesson, Camphill School, Bieldside, Aberdeen (1949)
“A School Where Love is a Cure”
Edith Tudor-Hart

Indeed, it is a testament to the resilience of humans and the power of social attachments that so many paid caregivers, as underpaid and underappreciated as they are, find meaning in their work and do it as well as it can be done under the circumstances. Imagine how good paid caregiving would be if it was done through publicly funded cooperatives where care workers had the opportunity for intellectual and professional development, where they had control over the work itself, where they had the time to do the work to meet the needs of the people they care for, and of course where they earned high wages and social recognition.

We already have glimpses of how such institutions might work. Quebec’s publicly funded childcare centers are jointly administered by unionized workers and parents, who serve on elected boards. Quebec’s childcare workers earn well above the wages of their peers across Canada. The workers and their union, along with parents, have been a powerful organizing force in the province to maintain and expand the system and to fund it through increased taxation.

Worker cooperatives are growing in the care sector. According to one estimate, one third of all cooperative enterprises in the US are service



providers. Philadelphia's Childspace operates three worker-owned and -managed childcare centers. Five worker-owned cleaning businesses in Oakland established with the help of cooperative incubator WAGES, have ninety-five worker members, and Beyond Care Cooperative in Brooklyn has forty-two members who provide childcare services. Most cooperative enterprises are of relatively modest size. But even a very large care work enterprise can be cooperatively run. Cooperative Home Care Associates in the Bronx is a unionized provider of home care to seniors and disabled people, and also a workers' cooperative with 1,600 worker-members, almost all women of color working as caregivers, who make key decisions about how to invest the coop's resources. Home care workers also participate in developing training programs and improving services to their clients.

These organizations provide a window into the possibilities for local shared governance for high-quality care. They tell us little about how we might organize to govern public services across an entire city. Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, which originated under the Workers' Party (PT), offers another glimpse into a possible democratic socialist future. The participatory budgeting process starts with assemblies open to all residents in the city's sixteen districts, where officials provide general information about the city budget. These are followed by neighborhood meetings where budget priorities are discussed. At a second round of district assemblies, district representatives are elected for each neighborhood based on the number of people attending from that neighborhood. This proportional representation rule ensures diversity among elected representatives. The district assembly also elects two representatives and two alternates to represent the district on the citywide Municipal Budget Council. In the months following the elections, the delegates meet in District Budget Forums to develop districtwide priority lists. The Municipal Budget Council then determines how to distribute funds among the districts.

The government of Porto Alegre invested enormous resources into deepening democratic participation. Community organizers fanned out into the many poor and working-class neighborhoods on



**Basque Boy Playing Cricket,
North Stoneham Camp, Hampshire
Edith Tudor-Hart (1937)**

the periphery of the city that had been excluded from political decision-making. New district offices were created, bringing city administration into closer contact with the population. While people often entered into the participatory budgeting process with only their particular needs in mind, over time they began



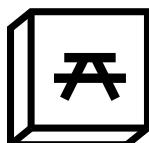
to feel solidarity for others and to see their own interests more broadly. As Rebecca Abers found in her study of participatory budgeting in one of the poorest areas of Porto Alegre, many individuals “who began to participate for the sake of their street were, a year or two later, champions of ‘districtwide’ issues, defending projects that would promote the economic revitalization of the southern part of the city or protect ecological reserves in the rural area of the municipality.”

Cooperative and democratic institutions like participatory budgeting, care-worker cooperatives, and cohousing are inspiring, but they can only realize their potential in the context of other fundamental changes. First among these are a universal shorter workday and workweek that free up time for caring, community participation, and political engagement. Second are workplaces where the job expectations and career trajectories are organized around the assumption that all workers have caring responsibilities and will engage in work accordingly. The universal character of these workplace norms is crucial. One of the reasons women earn less than men over their lifetimes is that employers differentially reward employees based on their “commitment” to work, years of experience, and availability to work overtime. Employees pay a long-term penalty for even relatively short exits from the labor force. Women are far more likely than men to shape their employment around the demands of both childcare and elder care, so they fall behind. Generous paid family leave has many virtues, but does not address this problem.

So long as employers have a stranglehold on workers’ time, the conflict between paid work and care will remain. So long as care services are either underfunded as public goods or thrown into the competitive pressures of the market, households, and primarily the women in them, will feel forced to “choose” to shoulder these “labors of love.” A movement is emerging in the US to challenge the so-called flexible scheduling that now dominates the retail and food service industries. Opponents have focused attention on problems faced by parents, especially single mothers, who are continually on call or given only one or two days’ notice of their work schedules. Here we see very clearly how the profit motive undermines care. As we engage in and support these struggles defending life against profit, we should continue to look beyond the narrow horizons imposed by capital’s current domination, engaging in prefigurative projects and imagining alternative ways to care in social relationships and institutions that are collective but also democratic, self-reflective, and open to difference. ■

*Many thanks to
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for her comments
and suggestions.*





Seize the Hamptons

We should all get the chance to escape the city and enjoy leisure — without the hefty ecological footprint.

Daniel
Aldana
Cohen

C

entral Park was once the greenest piece of Manhattan. Now environmentalists and politicians trumpet the city's towers and subway tunnels, emblems of an energy-efficient density, as the island's greenest assets. With global warming threatening to kill millions a year, and inter-state negotiations stalled, pro-density planning is an increasingly vogue strategy for cutting carbon emissions.

The basic idea is sound. Cluster home, work, and services and you reduce car traffic and improve daily life. Assemble people in large buildings and they'll use energy more efficiently. Everyone is jumping on board — from big think tanks and international institutes to progressive planners and politicians. Make the suburbs more like Manhattan — or at least Brooklyn — they shout, and we'll get more livable cities that also mitigate global warming.

The Density Fetish

If the story seems a touch too neat, and a touch too easy on rich New Yorkers, that's because it is. Density as such is rarely associated with lower carbon emissions. But as a recent round of peer-reviewed studies shows, including consumption's global carbon footprint and controlling for class and lifestyle make all the difference. When the people clustered are prosperous professionals, the carbon benefits of density can be cancelled out by the emissions their consumption causes. The smokestacks, of course, are elsewhere.

When the poor and working class live densely, meanwhile, the carbon savings are compounded. As geographer Roger Keil writes, "Density as a site-specific quality is almost meaningless if one doesn't look at the broader societal context and patterns of use as well." There is more to the story than a jurisdiction's ratio of people to square foot.

Lido, Mödling, near Vienna
Edith Tudor-Hart (1932)

Responding to high levels of disease among workers, Vienna's socialist administration encouraged municipal bathing. By 1927 public swimming pools in the city received nine million visits.



Living in a dense city doesn't guarantee a carbon-free lunch. If you're working-class and live in a public housing tower in Manhattan's Lower East Side, your carbon footprint is pretty low. But if you're a prosperous professional living in a modestly sized apartment in Manhattan's Upper East Side, you're part of the problem. You likely don't drive much and you might live a little lighter on the earth than your McMansion-dwelling in-laws, but you probably spend utility and gas savings on a second home, extra imports produced elsewhere, carbon-rich vacations to Aspen and Aruba, or all of the above. Money gets spent, and spending in a fossil-fuel-powered economy exacerbates climate change. The richer you are, the worse you probably are for the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, with the growing movement to make cities' peripheries denser, the distinction between core and suburb is softening. The starker tension is between individual and collective consumption. It's by expanding collective consumption — in housing, transit, services, and leisure — that we can democratize and decarbonize urban life. The point here isn't to demonize pathological consumer behavior, or to simply suggest alternative architectural best practices. Increasing collective consumption is about transforming, together, our built environment and social relations.

Planner Arthur Nelson's projections indicate the scale of what's possible. By 2030, he reports, \$20 trillion in new money will be spent on expanding and repurposing US metropolitan built environments, with over 30 million residential units at stake. The whole urban fabric is changing. But we're off to a bad start. The density fetish is being used to greenwash the return of mostly white professionals to inner cities. They aren't just gentrifying and displacing one block at time; they are transforming social logics.

Forget displacement within cities. From 2000 to 2010, Chicago lost a net total of 180,000 blacks, most to suburbs and outlying towns. New York City lost 110,000 black residents. And as inner-city rents climb, immigrants are for the first time settling directly in suburbs. Journalist Alan Ehrenhalt calls this a "demographic inversion." He predicts that prosperous North American cities will soon resemble late-nineteenth-century European capitals:

stylish professionals will dominate the core, while the poor and working class mass in denser suburbs.

For Ehrenhalt and others making similar arguments, that's not so bad. If yuppies are modeling a low-carbon future for all, we should probably get out of the way, deregulating en route so as to make urban cores even denser. Most housing activists disagree. But many ignore the climate piece altogether, focusing narrowly on strategies to increase or preserve affordable housing in downtown cores, where people already live close to their jobs and to crucial services.

It's an important fight — but the urban future won't be made there. As arguments about the fate of city centers rage, we ignore other huge questions: How should suburban life change as it gets denser? What form should this density take? How might Americans live with levels of density most now find appalling? We could learn from the experts. From Roman Senators to nineteenth-century European





**The Dance of the Biscuit Workers
La Courneuve (June 1936)**

Striking biscuit workers dance outside the British-owned factory of Huntley Palmers.

© Roger-Viollet /The Image Works



**Loading the Bicycles
Gare Saint-Lazare (July 1936)**

In the summer of 1936, France's sub-minister of leisure and sport mandated 40 percent discounts on train fares for once-a-year getaway trips.

© Roger-Viollet /The Image Works



bourgeois to today's hedge-fund managers, the rich have swung as they pleased from the crowd's exhilarating crush to open space's swallowing grace. For them, dense cities are defined by culture, the sublime countryside by serenity or adventure. The trick is to get some of each.

Slashing greenhouse-gas emissions doesn't have to doom the great majority to a joyless clumping into buses and threadbare parks, contemplating a dull horizon clotted by gray towers. Quite the opposite. We should fight shamelessly for an expansive, leisurely urban good life for everyone, lived mostly in and about crowds, but sometimes in gloriously wild, open spaces. Many have argued persuasively—including in these pages—that a just low-carbon future means that some will earn less, we'll all work less, and we'll all live better. This is a vision that can be urbanized. Done right, expanding leisure runs not against, but with, the low-carbon current.

Performance Urbanism

Pro-density developers have already begun retooling cities' edges. To see some of this transformation up close, I spent eight hours in May cruising the suburbs of Toronto, from Mississauga to Markham. Unlike much of the US, where the Tea Party is waging a paranoid war against regional governance schemes that it attributes to United Nations conspiracies, Ontario is ruled by a government of progressive-neoliberal hybrids. The province has tightened Toronto's greenbelt, limiting sprawl, and passed a "Places to Grow" plan to press densification. It's more or less working. Bus rapid transit is expanding, with the showpiece VIVA system building sleek right-of-way stations along Highway 7 and promoting onboard comfort with the peppy hashtag #thenewmetime. Meanwhile, densification projects span the spectrum, from New Urbanist neighborhoods with too-perfect back alleys, to multistory shopping strips surrounding the Pacific Mall, to clusters of high-rises anchored by big-box mega-malls anchored by Walmarts.

More often than not, high-speed developer-driven densification employs crude instruments. Toronto planner Andrea Friedman deadpans, "It's not clear that we're building better places." In part,

this is because the projects are instigated by big developers. No one is building public space, and retail earnings are used to finance development. As a result, this kind of densification encourages residents to spend free time in malls, shopping for fast fashion and replacement end tables, the manufacture of which is spewing carbon into the atmosphere. According to a study of Seattle's consumption-driven carbon footprint, clothing purchases cause some of the highest greenhouse gas emissions per dollar spent. North Americans buy more every year.

We'll always need to get things in stores. But we can still do better than anchoring our newly dense neighborhoods with traditional malls. We can organize our lives less around the exchange of objects, and more around the exchange of meanings. It's the flip side of working less and using less stuff. When we congregate, our leisure needs to be low-carbon. Besides watching Netflix, this means socializing in public space, using our time to do interesting things in energetic ways. That includes sports, picnics, and lounging in parks, learning in schools and libraries. It could also mean a massive expansion of the performing arts everywhere.

Some Broadway-type shows are opulent. But most plays, concerts—even operas—are not that materially intensive. Shoestring postmodern dance and stand-up comedy are even better. Moreover, the performing arts are vital to a mobilized democracy. In California, San Quentin's inmates escaped (or at least critiqued) alienation in their infamous reproductions of Samuel Beckett plays. Harlem's political culture developed in part on the Apollo Theater's stage. Brecht reminded us that we need to experiment to properly democratize the performing arts. And so we should, on and off the formal stage—think not Shakespeare in the Park, but the insurgent populism of Paulo Freire's Theatre of the Oppressed.

An older Toronto suburb called Brampton suggests another kind of suburban concentration along these lines. Brampton's central streets are a less white version of Toronto's hipper neighborhoods. The area's centerpiece, near rail and express bus stops, is the Rose Theatre. Even with endemic mismanagement, a strike leading to a public battle over



Little Girl in a Hammock
Deauville, Calvados, Lower Normandy (1937)

For many workers, implementation of a mandatory paid vacation meant the opportunity to escape the city and visit the beach for the first time.

© Lipnitzki/Roger-Viollet/The Image Works



a baby grand piano, and electricity problems, the theater has thrived in its first decade, putting on big shows to big crowds and offering space for community arts activities.

Of course, in the age of “creative cities,” critics have good reasons to mock the idea that expanding the performing arts would reset Rust Belt urban economies. Even Richard Florida has admitted that “creative city” policies mainly benefit the already affluent. But all this is beside the point. David Koch doesn’t donate to the Lincoln Center to create jobs in Midtown, but because he enjoys the performances. What’s good enough for the elite is good enough for everyone.

Developers may not appreciate this agenda. The key is to stop trying to convince them on their own terms, and instead to package the arts in a broader movement for a just, democratic urbanism. It was thus that the São Paulo Workers’ Party mayor between 2000 and 2004 both reorganized and consolidated the bus system to help the residents of the periphery get around the city, and established a popular network of multi-dimensional cultural centers in the peripheries themselves.

There’s also a country-sized precedent. In the spring and summer of 1936 in France, over two million workers went on strike. The freshly elected Popular Front government, led by socialist leader Léon Blum, was under pressure from workers and its coalition’s left flank. In early June of that year, it negotiated substantial pay raises with labor and business leaders, then passed laws mandating a forty-hour workweek and two weeks paid vacation. These and other measures revolutionized a popular culture that was feeding the growing labor movements.

The Popular Front funded the construction of mass theaters and financed popular productions — often in partnership with unions, which subsidized access for members. Historian Jessica Wardaugh has shown how the performing arts were at the core of Popular Front efforts to represent and mobilize a unified people, channelling the arts’ increasingly populist currents.

Before Blum’s election, the socialist playwright Jean-Richard Bloch had dreamed that “Drama will increase from a few thousand spectators to a few

million, from a national public to a universal public.” To achieve this in our urban future would require a massive multiplication of performing arts spaces, always used to anchor dense communities geared toward collective consumption.

We might also remember that the most articulate case for clustering homes, work, care, and public culture was made in the last century by left feminists focused on working women’s needs: Dolores Hayden argues that homeownership and consumerism are flip sides of a unified capitalist and patriarchal coin and advocates models of cooperative living that both abolish the sexual division of care and “maximize real choices for households concerning recreation and sociability.”

Into the Wild

Still, even the spindliest flâneur needs a break from the crowd. In June of this year, a New York subway advertisement showed a grimacing brunette squished under a man’s armpit in crowded train. Headline: “Stranger’s armpit. Just. Too. Close.” Advertised: A website to book flights, hotels, and cruises. Global tourism is already one of the world’s biggest industries. But cheap flights aren’t the solution to cramped cities in the age of climate change. Besides the massive carbon footprint of air travel, there’s a deeper question of urban justice.

Imagine a mixed-income building in Queens with poor and prosperous families in small apartments side by side. For the family able to travel to the Hamptons in summer, Aspen in winter, and Caribbean beaches in between, the experience of density differs by degree from the family stuck in the same spot 360 days a year. One New Yorker’s occasional armpit is the other’s existential condition. Parks and swimming pools are glorious — but are they enough?

There are good reasons why working-class New Yorkers have sprung for beachfront property on Staten Island’s flood-prone South Shore. And no wonder Americans like suburbs with yards, even while aspiring for something more Manhattanesque. In *The Great Inversion*, Alan Ehrenhalt marvels that while 45 percent of twenty-to-thirty-five-year-old Americans wish they could live in New York, almost



every densification project proposed in a suburb faces instant resistance. For many suburbanites, an increase in area armpits is the last thing they want.

A fuller vision of urbanizing low-carbon leisure should indulge yearnings to escape, but without burning fossil fuels. That means comfy coach and rail access to open spaces well outside city limits. There must be affordable, well-designed leisure options in the wild, from day-trip getaways to overnight lodges. Unions and other working-class organizations once tried hard to establish this kind of option for their members. Now we must treat this “rural” imperative as the reverse of the (sub)urban design coin. It doesn’t have to mean nationalizing the Hamptons—but why not?

You might object that the elite have no intention of facilitating a massive program to democratize regional leisure for the masses. But they once did, in Europe at various points during the twentieth century. Again, France’s Popular Front provides a stirring precedent. The summer it legislated two paid weeks off work, the sub-minister of leisure and sport mandated 40 percent discounts on train fares for once-a-year trips. Hundreds of thousands took advantage right away, nearly two million the following year. Many visited the beach for the first time, while others traveled to see relatives or camp in the countryside. Photographs from the period show workers cramming into train stations, piling dozens of bicycles on rail cars, clustering in the sun amidst small square pavilions at seaside. Blum’s office filled with postcards, most bearing thank-you messages of fraternal simplicity. One read, “Dear President and comrade, some comrades on paid holiday in beautiful Roussillon have charged me with expressing their respectful recognition.”

Blum retained fond memories of that first summer. His biographer writes that he thought his mission was to help “develop the idea that man could find in society a specific place beyond simply that of a peon in the production process, instead developing his body and soul.” When Blum took the stand during his trial by the Vichy regime in 1942 for his government’s ostensible betrayal of France, he reminisced about the summer of ’36. He recalled workers riding tandem bicycles down Paris’s boulevards in colorful sweaters. He remembered feeling

that “the idea of leisure awoke a sort of natural and simple coquettishness” among ordinary people.

His earnestness might read as sentimental now that leisure and flirtation have become the domain of ironic publicists. But he—or at least, his coalition—earned the right to reminisce.

Two million workers in interwar France forced the state to enable leisure in a way it never has in North America. Today French labor law guarantees thirty-one days of paid vacation. The infrastructures that sprung up around the first mass vacations laid the foundation for one of the world’s most successful tourism sectors. Mixed in with now-conventional consumption, there remain elements of the original spirit of solidarity. Many public-sector unionists still holiday together with colleagues in well-serviced camps. Teachers and arts workers get into museums for free.

Novelist Michel Houellebecq mocks the middlebrow quality of French leisure culture, but in New York, it’s taken years of bitter campaigning just to safeguard every worker’s right to five sick days a year. And anyway, what people do in their low-carbon free time is their own damn business. Who cares if vacationers, like Houellebecq’s autobiographical protagonist in *Platform*, amuse themselves on the beach by masturbating into the pages of the latest John Grisham?

There’s something to be said for left critiques of mass leisure undertakings. When sincere postwar German planners aimed to relieve workplace discontent with magnificent parks fostering social harmony, critics savaged the plans as liberal palliatives for simmering class conflict. The aughts’ fantastically profitable explosion of Northern European tourism on Southern European shores seemed like an economic and cultural win-win. It turned out to be an environmental and financial disaster, ruining coastal ecologies while inflating a massive property bubble. And note: British studies found that while the absolute number of low-income air travelers increased very modestly with the rise of ultra-cheap flights, their share of total air trips actually declined, while the upper middle class reaped the rewards. Ryanair is no Robespierre.

But remember, most elites weren’t impressed by mass leisure either. In 1938, British pop



Picnic in the Countryside (1954)

Léon Blum's biographer asserted that the socialist leader's mission was to help "develop the idea that man could find in society a specific place beyond simply that of a peon in the production process, instead developing his body and soul."

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intellectual C. E. M. Joad grew horrified that the suburbs relieving London's congestion also spilled poor people into the countryside, moaning that he found them "wherever there is water, upon sea shores or upon river banks, lying in every attitude of undressed and inelegant squalor, grilling themselves, for all the world as if they were steaks, in the sun." A French worker who took his first vacation in 1936 remembers that the rich, on their erstwhile exclusive beach, withdrew in the face of workers' arrival to an isolated corner of the sand, warning their children to avoid the invading "congés payés" (paid vacations) — as if the law and a living worker were equivalently abstract.

All this still leaves us room to experiment with new options for democratized, open leisure space. We can't steal everything from the French. Our principles should be fairness (to other people, to non-humans) and fearlessness. Obviously, massive sculpture gardens are great, as are campgrounds, beaches, hiking trails, and so on. If we can't see the stars every now and then, it's not our revolution. But we can be even more imaginative. There's no necessary contradiction between the wilderness and a bold modernity.

British journalist George Monbiot has made a compelling case for re-wilding tracts of land — not restoring, but unleashing them — to relieve us of suffocating ecological boredom. Among the suggestions: restore giant animals where they have been wiped out, and their analogues where the original is extinct; for example, elephants in the Americas





where mastodons once roamed. When I canoed in Northern Ontario as a teenager, I was given the horrifying impression that a mislaid square of toilet paper could spoil acres of pristine boreal forest. This was conservative conservationism at its unscientific, puritanical extreme. If we really commit to buttressing our ecosystems, they'll be able to withstand leisurely intrusions. The more we restrict sprawl and densify suburbs, the more space we'll have to play with. None of this could go forward without leadership from indigenous nations, who have suffered over and over at the hands of settlers' dreams of an empty wilderness. Some may prefer other kinds of economic activity. But we can hope that others will embrace and help direct more profound and affecting experiences of the outdoors.

Specific proposals aside, for ordinary people in the twenty-first century to escape urban pits of despair, the most important lesson to learn from France's interwar working class is that organizing and building coalitions works — and not just to raise wages. Their banner read: "Life belongs to us." Ours could too.

Too often on the Left, we let the pessimism of our intellect corrode ... well, our intellects. The point isn't to be willfully optimistic, but intelligently so. Climate change is on the verge of shaking things up: fast, profound shifts to the economy's material basis are coming. We should chase what we want, using what we know and already have. It's good that solar panels are improving. And we need to point out that the wealthy are the chief ecological culprits, even if they live in Manhattan townhouses and applaud Bloomberg's climate advocacy. But cursing the rich and cheering cheap renewables won't be enough to spare the atmosphere — or to get us out of bed in the morning. The shameless, confrontational pursuit of low-carbon leisure, building on the victories of poor and working-class movements around the world, and mixing in the most useful expertise around, could produce democratic, decarbonized cities — not cramped, dull warehouses, but diverse, stimulating metropoles with plentiful access to the wild beyond.

Yes, there will still be tedium and struggle. But we'll also prowl boulevards in bright sweaters woven by robots powered by windmills. ■

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

Dear Friends,

This is a really short note, easily lost in a massive 164-page issue, but it's the most important thing in here.

With your help *Jacobin* has become one of the focal points of a resurgent intellectual left. Over the past year, our website registered 3.8 million visitors, offering them perspectives to not just understand but change the world. And, over the next, we'll put out 500 original essays, release more paperback books, start reading groups in dozens of new locations, and host an international event series.

We do all this while maintaining a commitment to developing socialist thought that is both rigorously produced and freely available online for public use.

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And yet, we're in a bit of a bind. Not because of our current level of support, but because much of it is on the verge of slipping away. 3,200 subscribers — roughly 45 percent of our base — are up for renewal with this issue.

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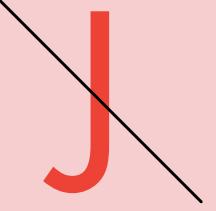
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**“If you want to be happy
In the name of God,
Hang your landlord!”**

—a verse from
“Le Père Duchesne”