PART V

Spaces
In the late 1980s Frankfurt, Germany’s global city, had become one of the early laboratories of the incipient urban neoliberalization which we have now experienced as a globe-sweeping reality for more than a generation. In a much publicized image, the then mayor, Wolfram Brück, a devout believer in the possibilities afforded by the opening of world markets to his city’s industries – trade, transport, banking, fairgrounds – and New York developer Jerry Speyer look on as Frankfurt Fairgrounds director Horstmar Stauber puts the model of an iconic highrise building into a sandbox style display of development areas. The highrise, designed by Helmut Jahn for Tishmann/Speyer, was meant to mark the awakening of Frankfurt to a new era of postmodern architecture, economic expansion and global reach. A big smile on his face, Brück was certain in his conviction that nothing said runaway economic success and international appeal more than a skyscraper skyline. Making Frankfurt’s land and airspace available to global investors and ‘starchitects’ was a prime strategy of a set of policies that were recognized as the sign of a new era of the entrepreneurial city (Harvey 1989). In hindsight, these elements were also the starting point of a pervasive neoliberalization in cities and through urbanization.

For local activists at the time – full disclosure: I was one of them – the planting of the model in the sandbox of global city development and the public–private coalition of municipality, public company and international developer signalled what Keil and Lieser at the time called an ‘attack of the neoliberal conservative city government of Frankfurt on the local post-war Social Democratic mode of regulation’ (1992: 53). Yet, in 1980s Frankfurt, the neoliberal phantasmagoria were just that. There were still alternatives: in the experienced past of a social democratic city of public collective consumption services and democratic urbanist discourse; and in a possible future in which the right to the city would be extended to the city’s immigrant population – a sizeable third of the entire city – that was disenfranchised, and to local communities threatened by deindustrialization and urban policy agendas; in addition, the debate about urban futures was just about to be expanded to include fundamental socio-ecological concerns as green (protest) politics was at an all-time high in response to the building of the Runway West at Frankfurt’s international airport. Given these strong counter-tendencies, neoliberalism in the city still seemed like a partisan pipe dream, its policies not yet realized, its opponents not yet wiped off the terrain of political possibility, its process still considered an outside, foreign, intervention.¹
No image captured this sense of alien aggression more than Tommy Lee Jones’s American developer rolling into a Newcastle, UK, ballroom in Mike Figgis’s 1988 film *Stormy Monday* under the smiling images of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Cosmo’s gigantic redevelopment scheme for Newcastle – fought against valiantly on the ground by Sting’s jazz musician-entrepreneur Finney, his humble Irish assistant Brendan, played by Sean Bean and his girlfriend Kate (Melanie Griffith) – appeared positively outlandish at the time. Resistance to such corrosive megalomania still marked the possibility of a different narrative of urban everyday life and economy. This story has since been replayed a thousand times as neoliberal capitalism is remaking our cities in its image. While communities of artists and activists continue to fight gentrification, social injustice, environmental degradation brought upon their cities in the neoliberal age, the terrain of their engagement has shifted dramatically. No longer a fantasy, the neoliberal city has become a brutal reality to many around the world. How did we get to this point?

Urban neoliberalism as discussed in this chapter refers to the interaction of processes of neoliberalization and urbanization. Accordingly, this chapter will trace the histories of the intersection of urbanization and neoliberalization. It provides a clear working definition of the operational terms of neoliberalization and neoliberalism as they relate to urban matters. The moments of roll-back, roll-out and roll-with-it neoliberalization will be explained. It will be argued that there are distinctive schools of thought that provide insights on neoliberalism and that can be mobilized for a critical understanding of the process of neoliberalization. The chapter proceeds to discuss the history, geography and ideological origins of urban neoliberalism with a brief glance at the current crisis and the emergence of post-neoliberalism. A concluding section deals with
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the pervasive materiality of neoliberal urbanization. Throughout, the chapter will assume that the current ‘urban age’ – often portrayed as an almost natural demographic, morphological and economic force – has, in many ways, been a product of, and has been productive of neoliberalization. Urban neoliberalism is not a mere consequence of larger scale or upper level processes or dynamics but it is itself a workshop of neoliberalization (Keil 2000, 2002). While ‘urbanism’ and ‘neoliberalism’ are mostly open-ended ideological formations, urbanization and neoliberalization are material and discursive processes that lead to real (and imagined) constellations through which modern capitalist societies are being reproduced. Roll-back and roll-out neoliberalization through urbanization have led to what Brenner et al., among others, have called ‘variegated’ forms of neoliberalization (2010). I am adding the notion of ‘roll-with-it neoliberalization’ here to denote the inevitability of forging today’s political strategies inside an immanent logic created by a generation of neoliberalization (Keil 2009). I treat these three aspects as both moments and periods of neoliberalization and as heuristic devices to explain their significance for cities.

At the outset, we need a working definition of neoliberalization and neoliberalism. I follow Sebastian Schipper here, who has recently identified two ‘lines of development’ along which we can observe neoliberalization: first, this includes the role of the state in facilitating market rule and, second, this entails an expansion of market mechanisms and thinking to extra-economic sectors – in fact, ultimately, ‘all social relations’ (Schipper 2014: 238). It must be noted, in particular, that the first line of development suggested here marks a clear departure from early representations of (urban) neoliberalism as a retreat of the state. That was an important aspect of early phases of neoliberalization, which Peck and Tickell (2002: 388) have named ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism, the transition from neoliberal ideas into practice, often accompanied with a destruction of existing forms of social regulation, such as trade unionism, tenant rights, etc. By contrast, the state has more recently been seen as a facilitator, not victim, of neoliberalization. It has played an especially important role in ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism, defined by Peck and Tickell (ibid.: 389) as a phase characterized by ‘new forms of institution-building and governmental intervention’ during which ‘neoliberalism is increasingly associated with the political foregrounding of new modes of “social” and penal policymaking, concerned specifically with the aggressive reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of the 1980s’. The second line has become ever more prominent in recent times as we can barely differentiate any more in everyday life between the rule of market logic and other dynamics.

We can broadly differentiate two main modes of explanation of urban neoliberalism: one is the Foucault-inspired critique of urban neoliberalism that focuses on the recalibrated relationships of the citizen/client/taxpayer to the state and the corporate economy, or its ‘governmentality’. The idea of ‘governmentality’ originates from the work of French theorist Michel Foucault. Following Wendy Larner, governmentality refers to the changing roles of political subjects in neoliberalism that allows ‘governing at a distance’, meaning increased reliance on people seeing ‘themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well-being’ rather than relying upon direct state intervention (or repression) (Larner 2000: 13; see also Magnusson 2011). In the neoliberal city we can then expect a governmentality that incites ‘the subjects to conduct themselves after the model of the enterprise and the general norm of competition’ (Dardot and Laval 2009: n.p.).

A second mode of explanation derives from the neo-Marxist critique of neoliberal reason as a capitalist project based on and fuelling the neoliberalization of cities and communities, that is more or less a hegemonic ruling-class project to create a new ‘ecological dominance’ of neoliberal modes of operation over capitalist cities. The notion of ‘ecological dominance’ is derived from Bob Jessop, who defines it as the capacity of one system to impose itself onto other systems (Jessop 2000) – which is what urban neoliberalism has done over the past generation.
The predominance of neoliberal ideology in all areas of social life goes along with an increased intensity of capital accumulation processes, the near complete commodification and financialization of urban life and space; it includes a reinforcement of exchange value-oriented activities, a general liberalization as well as the strengthening of the coercive power of competition and a reinforcement of shareholder value in the economy. Everything is now competitive. Brand and Sekler (2009) call neoliberalism a theory and intellectual movement as well as an elite strategy to reconfigure the Fordist compromise. It is ultimately a social practice.

Combining both Foucauldian and Marxist approaches, Schipper postulates that ‘the manifestation of the neoliberal or entrepreneurial city can be interpreted as a political rationality that is based on a double inscription of economic thinking into urban politics’ which combines an external representation of any place as a ‘competitive entity in a global space of competition’ and an internal implementation of ‘market and competitive mentalities’ through new management and similar practices (Schipper 2014: 238). The first dimension has historically always been a key element in the emergence of the neoliberal policies that drive cities, their governments, business and civic organizations as well as individuals and consumers alike. Everyone wants to be a winner and the city is the screen and the red carpet at once. That is, of course, largely a zero-sum game. Some will inevitably be losers in the game. Still, even by minimal standards, some municipal governments fail miserably at putting together a plausible set of representations that make them successful actors in the (now mostly international) arena. That may have to do with their historical circumstances (such as deindustrialization, shrinkage, etc.) but it may also be because the responsible politicians, business representatives and civic leaders regress to a tunnelled inward perspective where the strategic goals of ‘internalized globalization’ and neoliberalization are at odds with the tactical spontaneous combustion of a local elite in crisis. Toronto, under hapless mayor Rob Ford, would be in that category. During Ford’s tenure, Toronto’s administration made little effort to connect (or compete) with other cities, the mayor’s trips to Austin and Chicago notwithstanding. The big themes of environmental modernization, creative economies, cultural excellence, diversity management and the fight against climate change that had characterized Toronto’s international stature under Ford’s predecessor David Miller, once the director of the influential C-40 alliance of cities, all but disappeared in favour of restrictive fiscal populism and visionary stasis.

The historical origins of urban neoliberalization

The emergence of neoliberalism as a force through which urban processes could be affected and ultimately determined, reaches back to the late 1970s and early 1980s. David Harvey (2005) dates the onset of neoliberalism to the end of the 1970s with the fallout of the crisis of Fordism/Keynesianism, the experiment of neoliberal government in Chile after the putsch against elected president Salvador Allende, the election of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in what turned out to be the ‘heartlands’ of neoliberalization in the UK and the USA. At a larger scale, urban policy-makers in the UK and in the USA deployed state spatial strategies such as ‘urban enterprise zones’ – envisioned as import substitution gateways to higher-profit, less regulated regimes of accumulation – to liberate accumulation and markets and to free them from the fetters of the welfare state. Conservative economic dogma, increasingly influenced by neoliberal thought, posited that Keynesian demand-side economics and ubiquitous state intervention had created immobile and inflexible economies that sucked energy out of the market and overburdened the consumer with unnecessary taxes. The alleged outcome was a society hooked on state transfer instead of individual initiative. Neoliberalization, as a centrally hatched plan, often associated with the long-marginalized members of the Mont
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Pelerin Society and the Chicago School of economics, focused on the crisis-ridden cities of the late Keynesian period.

Reagan’s neoliberal economic policies in the USA and Thatcher’s campaigns in the UK worked as disciplining strategies against the urban working class who occupied factually (as shown in the uprisings of Brixton and Toxteth in 1981) or potentially uncontrollable spaces of violent contestations or just general discontent. Campaigns against collective consumption, considered the hated hallmark of the Fordist–Keynesian city, became a particular target of Tory and Republican political candidates and their think tanks in the 1980s. The crisis of mass housing, whether in the form of large-scale suburbanization or ‘inner city’ social housing, of mass automobilization after the first oil crisis, and the American model overall can be counted as influential in the emergence of a mode of urban regulation that was built on self-reliance, responsibilization and market provision of basic services propagated by neoliberal economists and politicians (Peck 2015).

In the early 1980s, some characteristics of what we now recognize as neoliberalization in cities appeared in plain sight. The (inner) cities, all but given up after the economically disastrous and riotous 1960s and 1970s, slowly became the object of desire for investors in real estate who stood to benefit from the huge ‘rent gap’ afforded by their deterioration (Smith 1987). While it had been observed as early as the 1960s in the UK, gentrification came into its own as the signature process of neoliberalization in inner city neighbourhoods of crisis-ridden American cities such as New York and San Francisco. We witnessed then the ubiquitous use of the term ‘yuppie’ to describe a new and dynamic generation of urban professionals who ‘return’ to the city in an age of rampant suburbanization. Gentrification worked particularly smoothly in those jurisdictions where deregulation of rental properties and ‘revanchism’ against poor and racialized populations were rampant. Those carrot and stick-type policies – or, in other words, policies that oscillated between incentives for capital accumulation and the ostensible maintenance of law and order – became central pillars of neoliberalization in cities around the world.

Postfordism – an emerging regime of accumulation based on flexible production processes – and world city formation – the process of creating urban decision-making centres for global capitalism – can be seen as concrete arenas through which neoliberalization proceeded in the 1980s and 1990s (Keil 1998). These processes created new landscapes (Sassen 1994), some of which were urban, some sub- or ex-urban (meaning new and self-propelling urbanizing formations beyond the classical centre–periphery dialectics; Orange County, California is often cited as the prime example of this development, which has also been called ‘postsuburban’). Eventually all coalesced into a sprawling constellation of increasingly de-nationalized, often deregulated spaces, characterized by ‘horizontal strategies of surveillance, dispersal, and consumption’ (Quinby 2011: 139). The demise of the Keynesian–Fordist model in some of the larger capitalist countries of Europe and North America triggered the roll-out of new just-in-time economies of horizontally disintegrated production processes.

The geographical origins (and spread) of urban neoliberalization

The neoliberal push in the Anglo-Saxon core countries against welfare state Keynesianism was perhaps a case of ‘early adopters’ of what proved to be a pervasive phenomenon in the decades since. The late 1970s also saw the ominous rise to power in China of Deng Xiaoping, who set his country on a course of liberated market capitalism under tight state control. In that country, the emergence of a neoliberal regime of capitalism has been associated strongly with new forms of urban and suburban expansion: between 1978 and 2013, the urban population there grew by 196 per cent (Vanderklippe 2014).
In some parts of the world, the onward march of neoliberalization was also seen in step with urbanization more broadly and the ascendancy of urban policy more specifically. Ananya Roy notes:

The urban question has not featured prominently in the plans that have guided the many decades of development in postcolonial India. It is the liberalization of the Indian economy, enthusiastically adopted by the Indian state, in the 1990s, that cast attention on India’s cities.

(2011a: 260)

This elevation of the urban dimension in development during neoliberalization occurred pre-dominantly through ‘three socio-spatial technologies to implement the world class city: slum evictions, Special Economic Zones, and peri-urban towns’ (ibid.: 261). Importantly, the Indian example highlights two things about urban neoliberalization. First, the neoliberal turn in Indian cities demonstrates the endogenous development of many path-dependent variants of neoliberalisms. Roy (ibid.: 262) speaks, accordingly, of ‘homegrown neoliberalism’ in this context. The homegrown neoliberalisms of the rapidly sub/urbanizing global South are simultaneously subject to far-reaching ‘inter-referencing’ through which local politicians across the globe share a toolbox of possible mechanisms for the neoliberalization of their individual city (Roy 2011b). Second, this development signals a major re-arrangement of the ‘geographies of theory’ – that is, a challenge to the ‘canonical tradition where theory is produced in the crucible of a few “great” cities: Chicago, New York, Paris, and Los Angeles – cities inevitably located in EuroAmerica’ (Roy 2009: 820). Neoliberalism in a world of inter-referencing cannot any more be viewed as the distribution of certain (western) models across the globe but a multi-headed affair with a wide range of variations. We have, therefore, seen multiple forms of emergent, endogenous and ‘experimental’ neoliberalization in cities across Eastern Europe (Bodnár 2001; Hirt 2012), throughout parts of Africa (McDonald 2008), China (He and Wu 2009) and Asia more generally (Park et al. 2012; Roy and Ong 2011). In Istanbul, for example, the local AKP party has built the model for a particular brand of neoliberalism that works through the ‘the combination of shopping malls and mosques’ (Harvey 2014). Urban neoliberalization in Latin America has been seen as a fertile ground for the development of new political constellations and citizenship claims between municipal neoliberalism and municipal socialism (Centner 2012; Goldfrank and Schrank 2009).

The ideological origins of urban neoliberalization

The rise of neoliberalism has been depicted as a freak development of fringe thinkers who have gained control of the global public discourse not least due to a set of accidental sub-plots and historical circumstances. As Harvey (2005) noted, the core beliefs of neoliberal have to be taken seriously as they are based on hard-to-refute appellations to ‘freedom’ both individual and systemic. The tremendously successful career of marginal ideologues in capturing the imaginations of the powerful – and the powerless – through talk of opportunity and order, liberty and low taxes – was pushed not least by right-wing think tanks and institutions such as the American Reason Foundation and the Manhattan Institute. Of the latter, we know, for example, that it was instrumental in ‘turning intellect into influence’ from the fiscal crisis of the New York local state in the 1970s to the types of public policy demolitions that came into full relief in the wake of 2005’s Hurricane Katrina’s devastation in New Orleans (Peck 2010: 134–91). The tendency for urban neoliberalization to ride high on ‘disaster capitalist’ machinations has been
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pervasive from the transitional Eastern European cities of the 1990s to the post-war urban centres of Iraq after militarization and privatization of space became the ordering principles there (Klein 2007).

The moment of crisis

Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 confirmed the worst fears people had expressed about the consequences of neoliberal urban policies on communities everywhere: the de-coring of social welfare programmes, the intensification of socio-economic differences and the hardening of socio-spatial divisions had led to a weakening of state capacity; in turn, the events triggered by the deadly winds and floods encouraged yet another wave of neoliberal experimentation that made things even worse on the ground (Peck 2010). Not that disaster was alien to the spread of neoliberalism. In fact, Naomi Klein (2007) attributes a central role to what she calls ‘disaster capitalism’ to the spread of neoliberalism under American hegemony. As early as in the 1980s, Thatcher’s reforms in Britain’s water sector had left many without affordable safe access to the piped resource. In Ontario, the neoliberal disembowelling of the public sector and compromise of municipal powers by Mike Harris’s ‘common sense revolutionaries’ (Keil 2002) contributed to the province’s worst public health crises during an E.coli outbreak in the rural community of Walkerton in 2000 (Ali 2004; Prudham 2007); and to the SARS crisis in Toronto in 2003 when an infectious disease punctured the eroded public health system and killed 44 patients across that global city’s suburban expanse (Ali and Keil 2008). But the worst was yet to come for the neoliberal city during the 2008 financial crisis, as much as the meltdown originated in and unfurled its furore over the world’s urban landscapes: both suburban expanses littered with foreclosure signs and central city financial economies that saw the failure of some of the erstwhile most important flagship enterprises of the financial industry (and the miraculous salvation of others) and the loss of tens of thousands of jobs in the ostensible growth sectors of the deregulated neoliberal urban economy (Aalbers 2012; Harvey 2012).

It is indeed not accidental that urban neoliberalism thrives and dies with the perennial urban crisis it has unleashed. The (virtuous) cycle of ‘crisis-induced restructuring’ of the late Fordist city has now been turned into the (vicious) ‘restructuring-induced crisis’ that has gripped the entrepreneurial city everywhere. While many observers assumed that after the financial crisis of 2008/9 – in which the contradictions of the neoliberal model became apparent, especially in urban contexts – would lead to a weakening of its destructive power, we saw instead an unleashing of ‘the power of neoliberal subjectivity and knowledge production that has enabled the local political elites to frame the greatest crisis of capitalism since the 1970s predominantly within a neoliberal rationality’ (Schipper 2014: 237).

This persistence of the neoliberal model as the leading philosophy of capitalist praxis can at least partly be credited to the power of the system to internalize its contradictions in new and innovative ways. As noted above, Peck and Tickell first identified two – sometimes simultaneous, sometime consecutive – moments of neoliberalization, roll-back and roll-out neoliberalism (2002: 388–9). In addition to this separation, we have also seen a progression from the erstwhile ‘common sense revolutionaries’ of the 1990s – a term coined to (self)identify Ontario’s radical neoliberal reformer Mike Harris – to a new crop of softer, gentler neoliberals, third-way social democrats and creative economy gurus. Particularly, Richard Florida’s 2002 book about the creative class set off a decade of enthusiasm for ‘urbanist’ programmes of economic development that were urban to the core but often rubbed the ‘familiar neoliberal snake-oil’ into the dried-out and needy economies of restructuring-ravaged urban areas around the world (Peck 2010: 192–230).
More recently, as urban neoliberalism has meandered on through a variety of crises, two possible scenarios have been considered: roll-with-it neoliberalization and post-neoliberalism. Both have immediate utility in the urban context. ‘Roll-with-it’ neoliberalization entails:

the normalization of neoliberal practices and mindsets, the (frequently contested) acceptance of the ‘conduct of conduct’ of neoliberalism…. Roll-with-it neoliberalization refers straight to ‘ecological dominance’ as a ‘natural’ and often unquestioned condition of life under capitalism today…. To ‘roll-with’ neoliberalization means that political and economic actors have increasingly lost a sense of externality, of alternatives (good or bad) and have mostly accepted the ‘governmentality’ of the neoliberal formation as the basis for their action.

(Keil 2009: 232)

Roll-with-it neoliberalization provides a conduit for understanding the intricate ways in which neoliberalism has now colonized the very political processes that had long opposed its ascent and establishment. The ecological dominance of neoliberalism in the contradictory landscape of the capitalist city has effected a certain defeatism among its critics. Even those who would be structurally opposed and negatively affected by the ravages of the neoliberal onslaught have sometimes succumbed to the pressures and promises of responsibilization, individualization and entrepreneurialism that have characterized the neoliberal creed. In some progressive urbanist circles, the call for urban revitalization and resilience has a less than uneasy rapport with urban neoliberalism’s agenda of pacification of unruly and potentially delinquent working-class districts and poor neighbourhoods. In this respect, roll-with-it neoliberalization points to some of the same phenomena that are subject to a postpolitical critique of urban contestations (Swyngedouw 2009; Leitner et al. 2007).

Post-neoliberalism (see Brand in this volume) has been seen as a useful framework to denote ‘a perspective on social, political and/or economic transformations, on shifting terrains of social struggles and compromises, taking place on different scales, in various contexts and by different actors’ (Brand and Sekler 2009: 6). No argument is made here that neoliberalism as a set of ideas and practices is simply going to vanish. The focus of the post-neoliberal proposition is on charting possible ways of thinking differently about ways in which political action (and policy) can shift the overall structural conditions of neoliberalized states and economies. In the urban context, we can think here about local and regional climate change mitigation and adaptation policies that explode the common ecological modernization frameworks that have heretofore been identified with neoliberal policies (in the sustainability and resilience domains) but also in the invention of new forms of collective consumption, housing and urban infrastructure services (Keil 2009). The ‘Right to the City’ movement has built some momentum around the world for concrete struggles that point towards post-neoliberal conversations and possibilities (Brenner et al. 2012); whether they can coalesce into an ‘urban revolution’ in the ‘rebel city’ will have to be seen (Harvey 2012).

The materiality of urban neoliberalization

In the meantime, urban neoliberalism is still the most important game in town, whether it rules through classical ‘hard’ forms of economic liberalization and penal and revanchist state action (as happened in many cities during the last two decades) (Boudreau et al. 2009), or in its more ‘third-way’ form that includes ‘softer’ modes of neoliberal regulation (Keil 2000).
A major factor in the imbrication of neoliberalization and urbanization has been the introduction of new and changing infrastructures. Since the beginning of the new millennium, we have begun to speak about a ‘splintering urbanism’ of sharply segregated, class-divided, privatized and access-controlled infrastructures in cities and suburbs (Graham and Marvin 2001). In fact, the explosion of infrastructures in water, transportation, communications and other urban services has since remade urban landscapes in an unrecognizable fashion. Those landscapes have built out new grids and networks of hard wires, pipes and transmission towers, but also a fundamentally altered set of modes of production and consumption of urban networked infrastructure services. The latter are particularly striking in the internet-based smart phone revolution that has introduced new forms of urban interaction as much as new modes of often privatized and splintered delivery of such services. Often summarized under the heading of ‘smart cities’, the digital aspect of urbanization has been a tremendous success story in neoliberal urbanism. Not only did it demonstrate a particular techno-economic strategy which laid the groundwork for novel constellations of firms and workers in ‘creative economies’, it also prompted heretofore unseen techno-social and techno-spatial constellations, often associated with the generation of the so-called ‘millennials’, whose reliance on tech labour markets and (fast-moving, yet often precarious) turbo-consumerism has fed a deregulated explosion of inner city urbanism, sometimes coupled with processes of displacement and gentrification in former inner city working-class neighbourhoods. The mobilization of real estate capital, mobility innovation (such as the widely unregulated private transportation service Uber, which poses fundamental questions to the delivery and regulation of urban services and their administration (Sadowski and Gregory 2015)) and corporate investment for the production of this new infrastructure-based landscape of urban creativity comes with a governmentality of self-rule, differentiation and individual autonomy which is often seen as strongly divergent from the Keynesian infrastructural ideal.

The continuing tendency towards ‘splintering urbanism’ (Graham and Marvin 2001) makes mobility, water, health and other critical infrastructures more accessible to urban dwellers with resources and power and harder to access for poor and marginalized communities. As we know now, these differentials are not temporary but rather here to stay as social mobility more generally appears to be more difficult and more differentiated in the neoliberal city, just as the policies that harden the divides have become more mobile (McCann and Ward 2011; Watt and Smets 2014). New forms of segregation appear as the poor are driven from the gentrified centres of the neoliberal city and reassemble in the ‘in-between’ spaces of inner and outer suburbs. Age differentiation (‘the millennials’) recombines with emergent class formations and novel ethnic constellations in the neoliberal city.

A particular role in the materiality of the neoliberal city plays the further differentiation of imploding and exploding spaces in the metropolitan region (Brenner 2014). Suburbanization was a major part of the urbanization process in the twentieth century overall but it has, arguably, taken on a new role with a global reach during the most recent period of neoliberalized explosive urban growth that created landscapes of often gated and enveloped ‘freedom’ and homeownership with a particularly ‘vulgar’ appearance and social structure (monster homes and conspicuous consumption of space and resources) (Keil 2013; Peck 2015; Knox 2008). Its lifestyle and resource use has been inscribed as central tenets of American empire (Keil 2007). Focusing on (sub)urban condensations, we can safely say that the entire model of suburbanization has been on overdrive since market liberalization and financialization have become mainstays of urban development under neoliberal regimes. Globally, the infrastructure–neoliberal–real estate nexus is a chief contributor to the phenomena of ‘home-grown neoliberalism’ and ‘inter-referencing’, both terms popularized in critical interventions by Ananya Roy (2011a, 2011b) as...
neoliberalized developmental states strive towards realizing ambitious projects of ‘smart’ cities or university compounds that appear as liberated islands of splendour on a ‘planet of slums’ (Davis 2006).

Conclusion

In the winter of 2015, a former Ontario attorney general, Michael Bryant, urged the government in which he once served to repeal the province’s Safe Streets Act, which was introduced by the pioneer neoliberal government of Conservative Mike Harris in the late 1990s and used extensively by police since 2000 to deal with panhandlers, ‘squeegee kids’ and homeless people. Understood at the time by both its authors and its critics as an aggressive neoliberal intervention into urban affairs, an attempt to clean up the city for better business and to penalize the poor at the same time, it was now time, in the words of Bryant, to ‘right a wrong’ as it has become apparent that the law served to ‘arrest the poor for being poor’. The initiative, supported widely in the expert community of poverty and homelessness advocates and carried by popular appeal during a time when poverty policies were redirected into a less revanchist direction, also serves as a reminder of the maturation of urban policy in an age of roll-with-it neoliberalization. In this period, the terms of reference are thoroughly set by the foundational values of neoliberalism itself. One of the chief arguments put forth by opponents of the law is a fiscal one and speaks to a core governmentality of neoliberalization: accountability and efficiency. Branded as a “waste” of the justice system’s resources, the law was estimated to have ‘cost Toronto police almost $1 million in time to hand out $4 million in tickets between 2000 and 2010 – 99 percent of which are never paid because homeless people cannot afford the fines that range between $60 and $500’ (Benzie 2014: n.p.). The Toronto Star daily newspaper quotes one expert: ‘That is a waste of time and a waste of services’! Does this mean that urban neoliberalism is now a closed system of no options for resistance and social change? Of course not, but while, during the early periods of roll-back and roll-out neoliberalization, activists were able to decry the ‘fabulations’ of the urban revolutionaries as phantasmagoria, the pathways of critical engagement must now – largely – accept the factuality of the disciplining and defining realities of the neoliberal city in order to play in the system. This does not mean there is no alternative to urban neoliberalism but the players in those cities where its governmentality reigns ignore the weight of its ecological dominance at their peril. Solutions to the contradictions of urban neoliberalism will ultimately have to be sought outside its boundaries.

A word of warning at the end: urban neoliberalism is now a fact of life, as neoliberalization has both built on and furthered the hollowing out of urban societies for the sole purpose of capital accumulation and profit maximization; the financialization of everything has, indeed, been most visible at the level of everyday life in cities, the policies of local states have often been most revanchist in the pursuit of gentrified homogeneity and pacified creative city cores. Yet, this generalization of the neoliberal also must give us pause in at least four respects. First, when everything is ‘neoliberal’, the term loses its bite, its explanatory power. Not everything in the city can be assumed to be or credited to neoliberalization and neoliberalism. Second, we must beware of presupposing the neoliberal condition as a defining characteristic of our age and see everything in its light. We might deceive ourselves and miss out on the continued diversity and variegation of the capitalism that shapes our cities. This leads, third, to the admonition that, while we need robust theoretical frameworks to understand the city and while we can count the debate on urban neoliberalization among its sharpest tools, we must continue to look closely at the real existing urban processes at hand in order to understand the prevailing mechanics of
difference in today’s urban regions. With that, finally, comes the recognition of struggle and resistance at the core of the neoliberal city. As the immanent contradictions of roll-with-it neoliberalization mount, and as we see strands of post-neoliberalization emerge in the ‘rebel cities’ (Harvey 2012) of today, we might be surprised how quickly urban neoliberalism, still solid today, melts into air.

Notes

1 More up-to-date analyses of Frankfurt’s neoliberalization will show that it has taken almost a generation for the city’s decision-makers and citizens to fully ‘internalize’ the demands and claims of the neoliberal city (Keil 2011; Schipper 2013).


References


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