

RESTRUCTURING SOCIAL AND SPATIAL JUSTICE IN DIALECTICAL TIME

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PAST

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Contemporary cities provide ample examples of spatialized injustice and uneven development. At the same time injustice is explicitly spatial, it is also realized implicitly in social and economic relations, through modes of production and social discrimination. Both the physical and lived experiences of injustice command the attention of urbanists and planners, as promoting justice is embedded in their words and their work. Yet often the relationship between temporal and spatial frames of advocacy and change are not explicitly articulated. Certain forms of comprehensive and master planning are rooted in a vision of the future and attempt to pave the way toward more inclusive, more equitable outcomes. Yet, immediate injustices experienced across both developed and developing countries require urgent attention, often at the expense of long-term shifts in the production of injustice. The conflict for planners and urbanists, which arises in both theory and practice, is how to attend to immediate injustice while promoting (visionary) shifts toward social and environmental justice and sustainability.

This paper explores the temporality of current urban lexicon. It draws on a range of urban and social theory, including theories of social and spatial justice, urban sociology, and planning theory. In looking across these disciplines, explicit and implicit concepts of temporality are sought and the production of injustice in the spaces and relationships of the city are problematized. I first consider theories of urban sociology relative to temporality. I then consider theories of social justice as they attend to a normative framework for delineating the line between justice and injustice and then finally, to planning theory. Throughout, I consider the temporal action of the theories posited.

Before proceeding, I would like to comment on the inspiration for this research. For the past year, I have focused my research on rebuilding efforts in post-Katrina New Orleans. While documenting planning and activism across the city, the issue of the urban and environmental footprint has continued to be under-addressed in planning efforts. Rebuilding New Orleans and the Gulf Coast is in many ways mired in the contradictions of land and environmental development central to Harvey's (1992) argument that the development of nature creates a demand for what then becomes an unnatural resource. The interventions in this case are Mississippi River levees and the support of the oil industry, both of which have decimated the wetlands and barrier islands that protect Louisiana and New Orleans, from hurricanes. Of course, the disinvestment in maintaining the levees, flood walls, wetlands, and barrier islands is also complicit in the degradation. Yet, sustaining intervention in nature requires the "creation and maintenance of centralized state powers and certain class relations...Created ecosystems tend to both instantiate and reflect, therefore, the social systems that gave rise to them" (Harvey, 1992, 185).

The contradiction is this: if you create or cultivate the land in such a way that it is seriously threatened in the future, how do you attend to justice in the lives that now depend on this “unnatural” landscape and its “unnatural” production? In short, how do you attend to justice now and in the future? Although a legal framework for exercising power over property rights exists, it can’t be ignored that there is a contentious history in the use of eminent domain. The recent decision by the Supreme Court (*Kelo v. City of New London* 545 U.S. 469 2005) in favor of economic development only confirms this worry for many citizens who have suffered injustice at the hands of inequitable urban policies in the past. Therefore, eminent domain can not be the only tool with which these issues are addressed, as it fails to attend to a history of mistrust and disproportionate inequitable effects on minorities and the poor.

The contradictions were immediately apparent after Katrina as the circumstances were made public after the city flooded. But here, I want to point not just to the contradictions, but to the temporality of disaster. Many urbanists and planners view Katrina as an opportunity for change and have cast this disaster as an opportunity to re-think the city; to better attend to justice. Yet these ideas have not thoroughly conceived of the production and reproduction of power in the city, nor have they considered how justice might be actualized within the social and spatial relationships of the city. For me, Katrina raises immediate issues for justice, ones that cannot be solved solely through long-term visioning; ones that raise the tension between short-term versus long-term attention to creating a more just or equitable city (Fainstein, 2006). It is a complicated contradiction. The right to the city or the right to return is itself a claim of justice and certainly, what Young (2000) might call a reasonable claim for justice. Conversely, shifting the environmental footprint of the city and outlying parishes requires long-term adjustments that supersede the right to return. For those who live in low-lying neighborhoods and outlying parishes south of the city, an emotional and historical claim and narrative of justice is necessary to challenge hegemonic exclusion. Combine the fear of no return with the historically inequitable perceptions of government intervention in large land use shifts (i.e. Urban Renewal) and the claim that a large shift in the footprint of the city for environmental protection ignores the many complications that temporality and history bring to urbanism.

The real question lies in whether short-term injustice can lead to long-term justice. Marxist theory would suggest that these are not necessarily related concepts and that the production of injustice, as it is inscribed in space and time, is continuously reproduced unless the mode of capitalist production itself is fundamentally challenged or transformed. The object then is to understand the space of time or the dialectical possibilities of the past and present in producing a new urban condition. Still, it must be stressed that the future must overcome the past and present if it is to be truly transformative or revolutionary.

MARXIST TIME

Marxist notions of time are embedded in the future. For Marx, Engels, Lefebvre and others, a new urbanism can only be realized by moving forward in time, rather than backward¹. While the present holds the potential for the future, the future must also overcome present conditions. “The prescription is: there cannot be a going back (towards the traditional city), nor a headlong flight, towards a colossal and shapeless agglomeration...The past, the present, the possible cannot be separated” (Lefebvre, 1995, 148).

As much as Marxism looks toward the future for the revolution, revolutionary potential is rooted in the past and present production and reproduction of the city and its social and spatial dynamics. For Engels, the libratory power of mechanization and the growth and concentration of the working class in cities produced urban revolutionary potential; the urban dialectic where the production of uneven development and injustice is simultaneously the site of potential justice. For Marx and Engels, whose dialectical understanding of the city is rooted in Hegel, the city incorporated the contradictions and paradoxes of development (Merrifield, 2002, 14). Marx himself proposes conditions of the equitable city, including the abolition of private property; progressive income tax; abolition of right of inheritance; state centralized credit; state centralized communication and transportation; state ownership of the means of production; free education; and equitable distribution of population over town and country (Merrifield, 2002, 24). Marx’s proposals for an equitable city are rooted in the future tense, providing a vision for how the revolution will transform urban economic, social, and spatial relationships. As we will see later, many urban theories of justice and utopian visions of the future are similarly rooted the imminent rhetoric of the post-revolution city. Still, “Marx believes the root of change resided in contradiction” (Merrifield, 2002, 25). The process of change is the capacity and reality of modern society. This again is a dialectical notion of time, as the city simultaneously produces and reproduces the capitalist system, while producing and reproducing its own inevitable destruction (Merrifield, 2002, 25).

Each element of this contradiction reproduces, relies, and strengthens itself. An example of this is the Hausmannization of Paris. In Haussmann’s recreation and conquering of urban space for the bourgeois, it was thought that solidifying state power and the dominance of class in the built environment would disempower the working class spatially, politically, and ideologically. Yet, the proletariat was inspired to re-conquer the wider boulevards of Paris in the Commune. In fact, the growth and concentration of the proletariat in the banlieus contributed to the rise of power in the streets. The contradiction rises out of the bourgeois’ exertion of power over the working class, which simultaneously gives power to the working class. “The barricade is resurrected in the Commune. It is stronger and better secured than ever”

(Benjamin, 1999, 12). Benjamin understands that the intensified reconstitution of power and powerlessness can perhaps inform narrative and social movement scholarship in its potential for liberating action rooted in the temporal concentration of power and inequity.

But we need Castells to further our understanding of this dialectic. In *The Urban Question*, Castells (1977) roots the urban problematic in the social problematic. The relationship is dialectical, but for Castells, the directionality of the relationship is clear: economic, social, and ideological structures produce social practices, which then produce urban space (Merrifield, 2002, 117). In his directional notion of this relationship, Castells gives us the empirical potential for challenging the production of injustice in the city and extends the concept of collective consumption in the contradiction of the production and reproduction of space. “Collective consumption mollified labor and acted strategically in the interests of capital; but it equally incited labor, too, politicizing hitherto unpoliticized aspects of social life” (Merrifield, 2002, 121). Castells’ study of the restructuring of urban space notes that at its heart is a disempowered electorate and a spatially separated working class. “A bourgeois Paris is a Paris cut off from possible confrontational expression” (Castells, as quoted in Merrifield, 2002, 122). Yet

the scattering of working class and left-wing populations around Paris’ periphery actually succeeded in broadening, not diluting, social struggle and conflict. Ironically, state regulation and management of contradictions in social reproduction actually accentuated these contradictions. It directly connected workers to state power in ways they weren’t connected before, prompting unprecedented urban struggles around consumption and reproduction (Merrifield, 2002, 122).

The time of this contradiction is somewhat ambiguous, but worth examining. Castells’ epistemological sense of time is rooted in present space and a positivist investigation of the urban social; he shifts agency and action, “the script of the play,” to the actors of the working class (Merrifield, 2002, 129). Time is once again tied to the reaction against exploitation, alienation, and oppression and is transformational if it transforms urban meaning. In *The Urban Question* space is rooted in the time of social organization (1977, 113). Thus, “space is a material product” that expresses the “historical ensemble in which a society is specified” (1977, 113). In his analysis of the production of urban space, it is the temporality and history of the social that first produces space, which suggests that an understanding of present social structure would constitute action for the present and future. Space is determined by: economic, political, and ideological elements in varying combinations; the persistence of earlier socio-spatial forms; and the differential action of individuals and social groups (127). Action and time are therefore inherently related to the social production of space and to embedded relationships of power.

If this at first appears that action can be easily constituted through this understanding of the social production of space, it is the notion of embedded and even invisible power that make action in the present and future more complex and contradictory. For, if there is a historicity in the possibility of action, then there is also a similar concern for the production and reproduction of power. If action is linked to time and to space, it is also linked to changing the outcomes of power, or power's reconstitution in space and time. "Perceptions of authority and power; including assessments of legitimacy and injustice, are necessary to act in any social system; they generate conformity to social expectations at the same time as they permit and sometimes encourage resistance to norms, authority, and power" (Ewick and Silbey, 2003, 1332-1333). Yet, power is both asymmetrical and invisible in the reproduction of social-spatial relationships. In its invisibility, it renders normative claims on acceptable and unacceptable actions and claims.

Interestingly, Lefebvre and Castells have a similar sense of spontaneous time. For Lefebvre, as with Marx and Engels, revolution is imminent in the future, but is rooted in the present production of space. While for Lefebvre, timing is rooted in spontaneity and irrational action, he incorporates the notion of sustainability in his critique of the May Days of 1968, noting that spontaneity must encompass a sustainable and rational program for action and challenge the hierarchies and centers of power (Merrifield, 2002, 86-87). Yet, Lefebvre's focus on spontaneity seems somewhat contradictory.

Spontaneity always expresses itself in the street, the authentic arena of Lefebvre's Marxist politics, where it can spawn within and even transform everyday life. The street is the arena of society not occupied by institutions. The latter fear the street, try to cordon the street off, quelling the apparent disorder, seeking to reaffirm order, in the name of the law. From street level – from below – contestation can spread to institutional areas, above; spontaneous contestation can unveil power, bring it out in the open, out of its mirrored-glass offices, black car motorcades, private country clubs, and air-conditioned conference rooms. Streets now become explicitly politicized, filling the void left by institutional politics. Therein lies the strength of spontaneous street contestation; therein lies the weakness...So spontaneity required at the same time a serious delineation of spontaneity. But this had to be done in the name of a theory 'which pure spontaneity tends to ignore. (Merrifield, 2002, 87-88)

But what is the time of spontaneous action if not a strategic narrative rooted in the present conditions on inequity? Narrative scholarship tells us that "as socially organized phenomena, narratives are implicated in both the production of social meanings and the power relations expressed by and sustaining those meanings" (Ewick and Silbey, 1995, 200). The directionality of narratives is not inevitable, nor do they necessarily unhinge power relations or reconstitute power for those who are powerless. In much the same way that activism engages in critical opposition to promote greater justice (Young 2001, 671), narratives

are potentially counter-hegemonic. “Retelling stories...is a way to triumph over the particularities of historical time” (Ewick and Silbey, 1995, 218).

Despite their allusiveness (Polletta, 2006, 88) and spontaneity, narratives invite social participation, meaning, and organization and define the roles of interaction and social practice (Ewick and Silbey, 1995, 208-211), potentially overcoming divisiveness in communities and politics (Merrifield, 1996). As Ewick and Silbey (1995) stress, narratives can either reproduce or challenge the existing hegemony. “Subversive stories” are generated by conditions of marginalization, concealed agendas, and circumstance (1995, 220-221). Narratives of resilience are also strategic both in content, form, and action. Not only are they invitations for public support and continued action, they themselves are ambiguous, personal, historical, and both individual and collective (Polletta, 2006). Narratives and narrative action can re-inscribe the city with personal meaning and collective action. As Benjamin (1999) illuminates through his own narrative of action, action, space, and time are inextricably intertwined.

If spontaneity and sustainability are rooted in the transformation of present urbanism, then the contradictions between these ideas is underscored. While Lefebvre does not detail how the contradictions of spatial production and reproduction can be transformed, he also fails to consider thoroughly issues of power and inequality. His urban strategy problematizes the local production of power and the daily relations of existing society (1999, 154); it moves between local and larger forces, between day to day reproduction of space and relations to the larger political and social forces reinforcing his dialectical understanding of the city (154). While his work is certainly provocative and provides a lens through which to construct an ideology of transformed urbanism, it does not thoroughly confront or construct the moment of revolution.

For Lefebvre, the city, as an object of inquiry, in constantly falling apart and the creation of a social urban text becomes a museum or an exhibition of a time already passed (1995, 148). The science of the city is therefore constructed on a historical set of prescriptions, but the social city has already moved away from this time (148) and is continuously being reconstructed. The necessary prescription is toward the future; away from the “reconstitution of the old city” (148) and toward a new intellectual understanding of the city. But Lefebvre also roots his sense of the future within the social realm, within social forces that can change social space (156). Thus the agents of this utopian transformation are the people themselves. Through claiming a right to the city, the working class realizes the new urban life and overcomes the commodification of nature (158). It is also the working class who must re-inscribe space with realistic utopianism (157). For Lefebvre, the importance is in seeing the past, present, and future as united – as a

virtual object being created as it is studied. It is in this that Lefebvre calls for a new approach to studying the production of space. He is interested in a complex understanding of a transformative space (1999, 149) that incorporates the structure, function, and space and notes that it is the reciprocal relationships of the elements that must be understood (152).

The notion of time is implicit in a rigorous notion of dialectical space. Dialectical urban space, the urbanization of injustice that simultaneously creates and concentrates the counter-hegemonic potential of working class power, is therefore the site of injustice and the site of revolution. Injustice, rooted in the production of space and time, produces the revolutionary potential of justice in the future.

THE TIME OF JUSTICE

We have arrived at a paradoxical historical moment when nearly everyone favors democracy, but apparently few believe that democratic governance can do anything. (Young, 2000, 4)

While theories of justice do not necessarily situate themselves directly within the spaces or time of the city, they do create a framework for understanding the production of injustice and conversely, the production of justice. These theories problematize political and social practices and forms of governance, noting the inclusive and exclusive outcomes, the exchange between governance and citizenship. Rooted in present and past time, these theories conceive of and idealize qualities that might characterize a more just society, if the production of injustice is challenged or eroded.

Discussions of justice often originate with consideration John Rawls' (1971) theories, whose "veil of ignorance" idealizes justice outside of the social, economic, racial, and other forms of self or group identity. Much criticized for ignoring the identity problematic, as it constitutes injustice, other social theorists have attempted to reconcile identity with justice. Whether approaching this issue from the idea of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000) or from recognition and inclusion of difference (Young, 2000), "these philosophers then offer a route for considering planning actions...They do provide criteria for evaluating policy" (Fainstein, 2006, 15). For if Marx and others who have followed offer the conception of dialectical time and action, these philosophers provide the road signs for when we will know we have gotten to that illusive future point. For Young (2000) specifically, it is the deepening of democratic practices that will constitute the deepening of justice. Yet she also notes that limitations of democratic practices do not deal with the structural production of inequity. She therefore notes that activism (or spontaneity) is fundamental to challenging hegemonic power structures (2001). As with Marxist temporality, theories of justice seek to unhinge the production of power and injustice. In delineating ideas

of difference within agency and action, these theories advance our understanding of how counter-hegemonic time might be constructed by addressing the complexities within the production of divisive inequity.

Whether claims of justice attend to the recognition or redistribution dilemma is one of the main preoccupations with social theories of justice. For Fraser “axes of injustice intersect one another in ways that affect everyone’s interests and identities,” (1997, 32) and domination and subordination can be combined in the same identity. The problem then, is to attend to multiple injustices, across multiple identities, across spaces and time. The temporality of Fraser’s argument is framed in the remedies she proposes for injustice; in understanding the quality of proposed policies within an affirmative or transformational and redistributive or recognition matrix (1997, 27). Accordingly, policies that transform the deeper social production of injustice and reconstruct the social relations of inequity are just, while policies with “surface reallocations of existing goods” and “surface reallocations of respect” affirm practices of injustice (1997, 27).

Much of social theories problematize exclusivity in the production of the city. This concept is necessarily rooted in the temporality of spatial and social production; participation and theories of inclusion (as they encounter different identities and spatial practices) theorize that more inclusion and less exclusion can enable a transformative urban condition. The route to this condition will be problematic, even in the best concepts of inclusion and difference (which are certainly critical to our understanding social and spatial relations), if it fails to confront the reproduction of power. Power is relational; it is “not something one has; rather, power is something that one exercises in interaction with others” (Silbey, 1995). At the heart of this dilemma is the “endless cycle of production, representation, reception, and re/production” (Silbey, 1998, 274) of power relationships and the visibility or invisibility of this dynamic. Therefore, it is the amalgamation of these theories, as with Marxist conceptions of space, action, and time, which allow us to approach the problem of temporal action and justice.

TEMPORALITY OF THE CITY

In the utopian urban visions of Ebenezer Howard, LeCorbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright, it is the future vision of tomorrow that preoccupies their thinking. To varying degrees, these utopian visions are physically deterministic of social relationship (perhaps reversing Castells original directionality, though certainly with their own dialectical relations). However, despite the eloquence of their projections, these visionary thinkers do little to pave the way between the present and the future. For LeCorbusier, it is

quite literally leveling and rebuilding the city that will constitute the contemporary, modern city; that will control for the unwanted congestion (physical and social) of the late 19th and early 20th century city. He, like Howard, was responding to the social and spatial ills of his time and proposing a new vision of how the city could function. LeCorbusier's ideology of the city of tomorrow was constituted by futurism and technology; was made possible only by embracing the capacity of the industrialized city to reform space and social relations. Although Howard embraces the merge between city and country less abstractly than LeCorbusier, he still offers a visionary future of societal relations in space. And in a similar vein, Wright proposes an anti-urban scheme for alleviating the ills of the city of his time.

The development and professionalization of the field of city planning has witnessed competing views about the breadth of time planning should encompass. Whether planning is proactive or reactive constitutes its temporality. Comprehensive planning initiatives, which guide future development for 10-20 years, are now seen as severely limited in their ability to adapt to changing social, spatial, political, and economic dynamics. Conversely, "muddling through" (Lindblom, 1959) planning practices have their own critics condemning the reconstitution of inequity and piecemeal decision-making lacking a vision of the future. On the one hand critics like Jane Jacobs (1961) condemn the obliteration and undervaluation of day to day community life; on the other, urban theorists, such as Mike Davis (1999) disparage the locally reconstituted inequities left unchallenged by piecemeal decision-making that fail to challenge the status quo in the production of space. Sociologists such as Harvey (1992) and Smith (2002) unveil the reconstitution of power within macro and micro forces, thus incorporating scale into our understanding of the temporality of the production of the city.

Planning, in an era of increasing polarization in inequity in developed and developing countries, faces enormous challenges in understanding the relationship between short-term and long-term planning. Central to the contradictions that planning faces is "the contradiction between the social character of land and its private ownership and control... Thus, if urban planning is necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist system on the one hand, it threatens and is retrained by the capitalist system on the other; and it is in terms of this Janus-faced reality that the development of urban planning is to be understood" (Foglesong, 1986, 104).

JUSTICE NOW - JUSTICE LATER

The idea of temporality, as it is rooted in the potential transformation of urban conditions, seems to be seriously under-considered within much theory and practice. While urban sociology and utopian visions

construct the future revolution (whether described in the rhetoric of society or space) and theories of justice confront the production of injustice, the connection between temporality and action remains problematic.

Earlier, I noted that the real question lies in whether there is a relationship between the past and present production of injustice and the potential of a future just society. What is perhaps most problematic in Marxist theories is the concept of an imminent revolution; when history, theory, and practice suggest more that the future will be continuously reconstituted by a series of revolutions. But even guided by a clear sense of history (if we are, in fact, able to unveil the production of power) and knowledge of the present, history has shown that spontaneous action (presently rooted) and the concentration of inequity (the dialectic of space and time) do not necessarily enable or accomplish a revolution that will better to attend to justice.

In returning to an earlier point about the contradictions of land use and environmental development, it seems that at best we can take from these theories an understanding of the city's history and of the mechanisms that produce and reproduce inequity. Surely this knowledge can help us construct the moment of revolution (s), but we are still unsure of the link between present and future justice and injustice. Does justice now necessarily lead to the reproduction of justice in the future? Can this be guaranteed for those who have suffered injustices?

What we need is a more coherent understanding of the link between the present (as rooted in the past) and the future and an insight into how action can somehow constitute a new production of urban space. We can take from Marxists the directionality toward the future and from urban and social theories the signs that might describe our arrival. But how to get there remains unclear. Perhaps we need a more dynamic understanding of time that can attend to different scales of the production of injustice. Perhaps thinking about this dialectic, we can think of the daily struggles for justice and try to attend to them over time and space. We can think about the relationship between injustice and justice in what Poulantzas calls "progressive actions and struggles in and around the state apparatus" (in Merrifield, 2002, 127). Perhaps the contradictions can unravel through contesting both the apparatus of power (the production of power) and the day to day injustices within real and progressive time. Somehow, we need to mark the time of revolutions within our present interactions and hold them accountable throughout the journey.

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¹ Interestingly, New Urbanists today look backward, rather than forward for an *urban strategy* (Lefebvre, 1995).