

## **MetroMarxism: Andy Merrifield. Routledge 2002**

Bolshevism's anti-urban bias: to convert cities into giant factories – fodder for 5yr plans. Castro: 'The City is a cemetery of revolutionaries and resources.'

Marx recognised everything as pregnant with its contrary.

MARX: 1818 -83

1818 Trier. Law at Bonn, Philosophy at Berlin.

Hegel held as more ideas than reality. Even Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* 1841 leaves his materialism strangely idealist. For Marx there is never an abstract solution, Truth is forever concrete.

City/Rural antagonism: City as apotheosis of capital production.

Gramsci notes its subtlety. Chicago School saw it as place of breakdown, fostering alienation, Louis Mumford – 'necropolis'.

The Division of Labour is seen most obviously here

Mercantile capital grows into industrial capital which is inevitably global - universal competition.

This is the urban dialectic: Proletariat cheapen as commodities the more commodities they make. But its strength and self awareness grows.

Marx: contradiction within that requires change – flux as Heraclitus says.

It is all process – urbanisation, money, class are all process, to be understood holistically (all in relation). To bring transparency (conscientisation) is the aim. Money processes itself into more money (capital) and the 'cell form' of capital is commodity that can produce more than its own value. This is commodity fetishism.

### **Frederick Engels:**

Condition of the Working Class in England 1845 linked laws of motion of industrialisation with urbanisation – capital accumulation and class dynamics. The birthplace of labour movements.

'The Housing Question' pamphlet saw home ownership as enslavement to mortgage payment so that employer could demand anything, to socialise all housing would result in distribution. Revolution or death by credit – no half-way measures!

### **Walter Benjamin:**

German, studied philosophy during WW1 at Munich. Tugged from Marxism to Jewish mysticism. Then prompted by Bloch as critique.

Georg Simmel showed how social forces denuded urban of individuality – no eye-contact with aloof others. Relationships only through money transaction. Yet modernity's city opens up horizons.

**Georg Lukács:** This is **commodity fetishism**: In capitalism the world of things takes on hallowed status (is reified) so that even human beings begin to relate as things (they are reified)

The split within the worker's labour power and their own personalities marks their metamorphosis into a *thing*, into an *object for sale, that produces another object for sale*. And this permeates all social life – flourishing in politics and culture, reinforced through media and ideology – both subtle and enforced.

**Walter Benjamin** found this all too strict, for society is more porous of meanings, and full of small factual detail. The **Shopping Arcade** however said it all – “they are the hollow mould from which the image of modernity is cast.” He saw the charm of fashion but wanted to “make the charming fruitful.” The grubby world of production, toil and exploitation appears in the form of lovely things and circulates via money and is mystified in the market place, adorns enticing labels, undergoes huge advertising campaigns and is made sexy. The city is profane illumination.

### **Henri Lefebvre:**

**1901-1991** existentialist dialectical Marxism of a vibrant urbanism – 1939 *Dialectical Materialism* global capitalism is nothing without many everyday lives – why change the world if it doesn’t release everyday life? Many saw class struggle abstractly.

*Introduction to Modernity*: L recognized 1960s capitalists gave up on colonies and made colonies from new markets – suburbs, countryside, new urbanism – all now fair game for rational exploitation. New Towns compartmentalise life (Cartesian), planners being the new Grand Inquisitors, promising bread as long as they control everyone’s freedom. But human beings need to create spontaneously! Street Festivals to contradict and encounter! But w/c decanted from centres to marginal estates (anti-urban planners) Capitalism controls and integrates all contradictions, so we must contest with spontaneity! But this is only local street action – famous for 15 mins –

*The Production of Space 1974*: We must demystify urban space. Surplus value now generated no longer through manufacturing but through real estate investment – the new ‘production’ flow. Urbanism as a whole way of life is exploitable. Fetishism of space commodity.

### **Manuel Castells:**

Attacks urban studies initially for being framed too ideologically - within sociological and anthropological terms – city causes personality breakdown, growth, crime, corruption, etc. (it has given city and anti-urban gloss) Lefebvre had strayed, with Wirth, into “Urbanism as a way of life”, where density and concentration is paramount, and so away from Marx’s notion that it is class struggle and not urban struggle which is the motor of history. Urban relations are an expression of social relations rather than the source, and social relations are part of a complex class structure determined by economic relations.

The spatial problematic is rooted in the social problematic  
City now a site of ‘collective consumption’ – which is those commodities which maintain the workforce but are a drain on surplus value so not assured by capital (affordable housing, mass transit, schools, sewage etc) structuring urban space. The state has to pick up the tab and organises things according to the logic of the dominant class through urban planning. This politicises the urban problematic and working-class (non-dominant power) areas are uprooted, reshaped and replaced by upscale office and monumentality, in the interests of capital.

The urban problematic is rooted in industrial problematic.

And now monopoly capital signals huge productive and finance wealth in fewer hands who centralise their power whilst decentralising geographically.

Status used to focus on how one produced: - profession, private wealth and market position, but now status has gravitated to how one consumes.

Marx prophesied that rise of middle classes would herald diminution of w/c, but nowhere is wage labour abolished: workers in suits not in boots.

1979: moves to California.

*The City and the Grassroots (1983)* Argues now that social movements revolve around ethnic identity, gender, self-affirmation as much as economic redistributive justice. The pressures become so great in today's urban press that most opt for bread and circuses and opt out. But others become active and impose conditions on multinationals in one way or another. The actors script the play! Marxism no longer provides answers.

1989 *The Informational City* – he's mesmerised by technology!

### **David Harvey:**

Wants geography to sense its own laws – not just descriptive.

*Social Justice and the City 1973* brings Marxism to bear on space.

Piaget had already sensed that it was how things hang together that matters.

Urban society is constantly being transformed

Land used to be valued on its productive possibility but now rents over the value can be created so capital chases and speculates on land. Windfall gains.

Space can be monopolised through controlling finance, insurance and real estate – ghettos of privilege dominate the city. Urban space is not only locus of class struggle but now locus of capital accumulation. Power and legitimacy.

Inter-urban head to head competition.

Read a city and see the skyline tell you of its financial aristocracy.

Market imperatives now determine planning (this is postmodernism)

How to regain the ground?

- Move the capitalist fragmentation/identity politics (jihad) into the categories of Class, Monetary power, capital accumulation.
- Cultural practices now matter – they are a battle ground
- Dialectics is critique not a corpus

*Spaces of Hope:* we must imagine the utopia together if we are to work for it.

### **Marshall Berman:**

Only the revolutionary group are free – just as Athenian intellectuals took stand in public spaces. Marx understood the paradox of modernity that it has achieved more than any prior epoch and yet at the expense of so much. The modern sees the city as an obstruction to traffic from which Americans should flee to the suburb – 'urbicide'.

So we must educate and conscientise in the streets – the public space.

'Having is the only sense that matters to the modern capitalist,' said Marx