

CITIES FOR PEOPLE NOT FOR PROFIT: CRITICAL URBAN THEORY AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY, edited by Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer. London: Routledge, 2011.

It is obviously inevitable for the widespread urban social protest movements that emerged in many of the world cities in reaction to the global economic recession to have raised a series of questions for scholars studying sociopolitical urban processes. The main question is a reflexive one: What kind of relationship is there between critical urban theory and the 2000's economic and political upheaval? It is this fundamental question which provokes the series of questions addressed by this book: What is the epistemological position of urban space as an explanatory object which can contribute to our understanding of the destructive force of neoliberal order, on the one hand, and of protest movement practices on the other? What is the position of the city and urbanization as an arena and process mediating socioeconomic processes? What (if any) is the potential emancipatory horizon proposed by critical urban theory and radical urban practice? Those are important theoretical questions and although some of them do not have a straightforward answer, this important book provides a well thought-out, solid knowledge base that can shed some light on the links between critical urban theory and radical urban practice.

As we may expect from the book's title, the theoretical approach of most of its contributors is neo-Marxist, with Henri Lefebvre's *Right to the City* serving as a guiding concept. From this perspective, urbanization is a material carrier and generator of capitalist ideology, as well as a major empirical site disclosing uneven capital flow that exacerbates socio-spatial inequality and results in gentrification and displacement, erosion of public spaces, privatization of municipal services, and empowerment of privileged classes. However, Lefebvre's moral-political concept, which is discussed broadly in most chapters, also holds the possibility of liberating everyday urban life from its captivity by neoliberal practices and transforming it into a more equitable process in which an entire set of rights will ensure decent urban life. Here the book fulfills its promise to explore the relationship between theory and practice by critically analyzing theory and confronting it in some chapters with questions arising from the social and urban realm. One such question, posed by Peter Marcuse in Chapter 3 and looming large along the entire volume, is whose right to the city is it?, reminding us of the complexity and difficulty of establishing a common ground of interests and knowledge with which to promote joint action among urban movements with differential class positions and interests. Another is Margit Mayer's question regarding the scale of the demand of the right to the city. Should we interpret it in term of a particular set of rights which seek to reform neoliberal order and practices ("neoliberalism with a human touch"), as in the case of demands by some privileged urban communities, or, in a more radical context, as a call for total urban revolution which will overturn the essentially repressive nature of neoliberal urban regime. Such questions generate broad, productive progressive

discussions which may offer or inspire a rational platform and horizon for a more effectively radical urban social consciousness and action in the cities of the global North.

It is here that one of the great challenges to critical urban theory emerges, to the extent that it is presented as total theory, a challenged referred to and emphasized throughout this volume: the great and still incompletely articulated differences between the urban and socio-political realities of the global North and South. Mayer, for example, points out that Northern critical urban theory has been rejected by some Southern urban movements. While structural explanations and clear evidence regarding the expansion of global capitalist crimes are well-understood in the Northern metropolises urban protest movements, it seems that the precise effect of that economic order on Southern metropolises is still not fully theoretically integrated into the structural perspective of critical urban theory.

It might be useful to refer here to the basic urban - political concepts used by Western neo-Marxist urban theories such as gentrification and displacement, urban commodification or the critique of the "creative city" approach which empowers capitalist urban processes. Those concepts may lack explanatory coherence for the empirical Southern sociopolitical realities characterized by the (neo- or post-) colonial realm, rapid industrialization and urbanization exacerbated by rural migration, resulting in diverse urban and social informal and semiformal formations (see for example Yiftachel in Ch.10). It is perhaps difficult to see how these formations can fully represent the same phase of global neoliberal order as perceived in empirical and theoretical formulations grounded in the global North. For example, while in the North the role of the state has been taken for granted by critical urban theorists and is mostly absent from critical urban discourse, or at most conceived as a secondary player in global economic process and institutions, in Southern and some Middle Eastern cities national governments are still the key targets of urban and social unrest.

But still, since this important book is published during what seems to be one of the great urban protests in recent decades, it also serves as an illustration of the potential role of an unintrovverted academic knowledge which can offer a more activist form of intellectual practice as a counter-response to sophisticated, greedy capitalism. Following Marcuse's call to link theory to action, this book is an uncompromising reminder of the work that still needs to be done.

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