

The Dialectics of Post-Modern Urbanism: Allegory, History, Memory, and Flexible Accumulation

Post-Modern Kent Fikrinin Diyalektiği: Alegori, Tarih, Hafıza ve Esnek Birikim

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Abstract

This essay examines theoretical and rhetorical appurtenances exposed by the rupture inherent in the historico/geographical phenomenon known as postmodernism. Traversing the barrier between academic writings and discursive meanderings of a wide variety of the proponents, as well as critiques of postmodern urbanism, I intend to locate the place of postmodern problematic in a dialectical impasse. The essay forays into the allegorical nature of postmodern urbanism and extends a critical gaze to the earlier debates surrounding postmodernism. In this paper, it is argued that two sets of questions need to be dealt with before coming up with a successful refutation of postmodernism. The first set is related to the reproduction of knowledge and power, and the second set foregrounds the break within the dialectical paradigm that defined the experience of modernity, i.e. memory.

Keywords: Postmodernism, urbanism, urban theory

Öz

Bu makale postmodernizm adıyla tanınan tarihsel/coğrafi fenomenler bütününe esasında ürünü olduğu kırılmanın ve inkıtanın kuramsal ve retorik tartışmalarını inceler. Akademik tartışmalar ve postmodern kent düşüncesinin diskursif kurucu metinlerinde belirlenen safları ve muarızları takip ederek mahut bir sınır fikrini aşmayı hedefleyen bu yazıda, zıt kutupların doğduğu ve hepsinin kökenini teşkil eden mekân fikri ele alınmaktadır. Postmodern kent fikrinin alegorik doğasına ve postmodernizmin neşet ettiği bu doğanın erken tartışmalarına dair eleştirel bir bakışa dayanan yazı, öncelikle bilgi ve iktidar sorununun bir problematik kümesi olarak ele alır. Bunun üzerinden ise, modernlik tecrübesini sınavan mekânsal bir ürün olan hafızanın inşasını bir diğer sorunsal kümesi olarak tasvir eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Postmodernizm, kent çalışmaları, kentsel kuramlar

My home, my ancestral home, my old and inveterate...home!

(Borges, 1973, p. 10)

Postmodernism, more than any other defining feature that besets its epistemological disposition is best represented amidst a plethora of matrices of ploy (Boyer, 1994). In this paper, among the cornucopia of introduction(s) to postmodernism we have set our task to usher into an analysis through the opening provided by Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (Soja, 1989). As an attempt to situate and elaborate the central premises of urbanism under late capitalism, Edward Soja's book presents two invaluable pivotal points. Firstly, Soja enabled us to see postmodernism through the lens of a socio-spatial dialectics which neither denied the intricate processes of epistemic and ideological transformations, nor adhere closely to the academic orthodoxies. Hence, his analysis both temporally and spatially goes beyond the sterile critique of modernism, especially achieving the critical synthesis of spatiality and history in regard to the lucid contextualization of spatial thought from Kant to De la Blache,

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and from Marx to Foucault.² Second is his intentional use of a crucial allegory to describe postmodern geographies. Perhaps of all the allegories, metaphors, metonymies, allusions, and neologisms concerning postmodernism the most illustrative was suggested by Soja's appropriation of the Aleph as a fantastic imaginary device poised by Jorge Luis Borges (Soja, 1996, pp. 54–5).

After a brief introduction to the allegorical nature of postmodern urbanism, this paper extends a critical gaze to the theoretical underpinnings of postmodernism. There, two sets of questions emerge: first is related to the reproduction of knowledge and power, and second focuses on the break/brake within the dialectical paradigm that defined the experience of modernity. On the one hand we reckon the blurring of the lines between the hitherto accepted (dialectical) categories, on the other hand the withering boundaries and the rapid pace of hybridization as suggested by Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Homi Bhabha heralds a revival of a deeper struggle between the subject and object (Bhabha, 2004; Nederveen Pieterse, 1995).

The first set, a reinvigorated search for the ruptures and weak linkages prevalent in the power-knowledge nexus, is perhaps much more implicit in a wide array of epistemological discussions than the latter one and can hardly be foregrounded at the fleetingly disguised layers of reproduction of knowledge. While it is true that, turns of different sorts –linguistic, geographic, ontological, cultural, trans-sectional, interdisciplinary, and so it goes- make the fissures within reproduction of knowledge apparent, we can dimly sense the crisis in the epistemological and ontological dispositions of urbanism.

Albeit the referents of the crisis are buried in the ruptured transformation of the discursive space, we can still draw from the lucid hermeneutics of Walter Benjamin. Embodied in Benjamin's discussion of the transitory –and almost Oedipal- relationship between the allegorist and the collector a whole new series of questions embedded in the discontents of modernism arises. The city as the primary object of analysis, hence, attracts long forsaken interests in novel extrapolations of dialectical binaries like voluntary memory/involuntary recollection, history/memory, space/time and power/knowledge (W. Benjamin, 1999). Here appears the creative destruction of modernism as studied by Marshall Berman and David Harvey, neo-rationalist architectural theories of Aldo Rossi and Manfredo Tafuri, and Christine Boyer's *city of collective memory* (Berman, 1988; Boyer, 1994; Harvey, 1989, 2000b; Rossi & Eisenman, 1982; Tafuri, 1976).

The second one is directly concerned with the epistemological fissures of a latter-day fin-de-siècle in terms of the implosion of dialectical ensembles like base/superstructure, production/consumption, politics/ideology, and last but not the least form/function. This problematic is where we can locate the works of Mike Davis, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, Michael Dear and Steven Flusty (Davis, 1990; Dear, 2000; Dear & Flusty, 1998; Harvey, 1989, 2003; F. Jameson, 1998).

On the Allegorical Nature of Post-Modernism: The Dialectics of History and Memory

Postmodernism is distinctively understood through an instrumentality of representation. Thereupon emerges the critical question of allegory. Among these allegories, within the framework of postmodernism as allegory, one can count Disneyland as the most enduring. From Sharon Zukin's *Landscapes of Power*, to Ada Louise Huxtable's *The Unreal America*, and to Michael Sorkin's *Variations on a Theme Park* the image of Disney became an uncanny spatial metonymy for postmodern architecture and urban planning (Huxtable, 1997; Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1991). Similarly, Jameson's visual play on Van Gogh's "A Pair of Boots" and Walker Evans's "Floyd Burroughs' Work Shoes" itself came to represent the cultural referent alongside Andy Warhol or "Blade Runner" (Fredric Jameson, 1991). Michael Dear and Steven Flusty come to the same point through verbal ploys suggestive of a capitalism which is similar to a board-game: keno capitalism (Dear & Flusty, 1998). Another resounding image is David Harvey's juxtaposition of Jonathan Raban's *Soft City* as the cultural logic of a new regime of

² Though this does not altogether mean that his study is free from the other-izing and Orientalizing bias –heavily, indebted to Perry Anderson's dissection of Marxist theory into two: Western Marxism and the rest- yet, this should not preclude any fecund theoretizations of the matter (Anderson, 1976).

capitalist accumulation (Harvey, 1989). For a growing number of architects postmodernism delineates the liberating transition from Le Corbusier to Las Vegas. Also, from another perspective, Foucault's panopticon-aptly put, his extrapolated account of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon- the abstract machine of disciplinary societies according to Gilles Deleuze, stands as the suggestive metaphor for both John Bender and Christine Boyer (Bender, 1987; Boyer, 1983; Markus & Mulholland, 1982). Further yet, Giovanni Battista Piranesi's (1720-1778) fantastical scenographic perspectives had laid the imaginative grounds for an opening to a novel space of representation, attracting responses by divergent figures from Aldo Rossi and the Italian neo-rationalist school of architecture to Thomas Markus's elucidations on the history of carceral form in the Enlightenment Scotland to Boyer's excavations in the epistemic precedents of the city of collective memory (Boyer, 1994; Ellin, 1996).

We should be cautious though, in appropriating allegories, since they are not mere innocent explicatory tropes. As Walter Benjamin suggested "[t]he figure of the "modern" and that of "allegory" must be brought into relation with each other" (1999, p. 239). For him this juxtaposition was best represented by Baudelaire's oeuvre. Since Baudelaire was the embodiment of a perfect allegorist where he said:

Woe unto him who seeks in antiquity anything other than pure art, logic, and general method! By plunging too deeply into the past, ... he renounces the...privileges provided by circumstances; for almost all our originality comes from the stamp that *time* imprints upon our feelings<sensations> (1999, p. 239)

Elsewhere Benjamin points to this indelible attribute of the poet: "Baudelaire's genius, which is fed on melancholy, is an allegorical genius" (1986, p. 159). Thence we can employ allegory not only as a categorical instrument to define and delineate an epistemic object, but also as a binding element between the seemingly irremediable rupture modernism and postmodernism. The illustrative explanation comes in the form of a dialectical unity between the allegorist and collector

Perhaps the most deeply hidden motive of the person who collects can be described in this way: he takes up the struggle against dispersion...The *allegorist* is, as it were, the polar opposite of the collector. He has given up the attempt to elucidate things through research into their properties and relations. He dislodges things from their context and, from the outset, relies on his profundity to illuminate their meaning. The collector, by contrast, brings together what belongs together; by keeping in mind their affinities and their succession in time, he can eventually furnish information about his objects. Nevertheless-and this is more important than all the differences that may exist between them- in every *collector* hides an allegorist, and in every *allegorist* a collector. (1999, p. 211)

In Benjamin's complex allegories, an allegorist -like Baudelaire, stands for modernism-one who systematically accumulates keywords in order to give sense to the greater world. On the other hand, he projects his subjectivity through the idea of the collector, who collects for the sake of collection with a burning desire to fulfill the call of the *memoire involontaire* as against the *memoire volontaire*. Therefore, we can argue that Benjamin presciently recognized the turn to postmodernism, modernism's inherent yearning for a spatialized form of historicism (1999, p. 211).

Christine Boyer situates the clash of the allegorist and collector, embodied in the relationship between voluntary memory and involuntary recollection, at the level of negation of totalities. History, thus, serves to organize, accumulate and regulate memory. In other words,

History fixes the past in a uniform manner; drawing upon its difference from the present, it then reorganizes and resuscitates collective memories and popular imagery, freezing them in stereotypical forms...Collective memory...is a current of continuous thought still moving in the present (1994, p. 3).

As a corollary to this observation, Boyer's work focuses on the interplay between history and memory, objective thought and subjective testimonies that are mediated through a spatialized form of power. Drawing from Foucault's hermeneutics of power/knowledge, she conceives a historicized urbanism that progresses from 'the city as a work of art' to 'the city as panorama' and finally arriving at 'the city of spectacle'. However, Boyer refrains from totalizing allegories:

In our current negation of totalities, we no longer dare, as Sartre once said, to draw even a partial summing up of the historical and social situation to guide our future actions, to judge our collective project, or to prescribe necessary social transformations. Adrift in a sea of fragments and open horizons, our postmodern position is ambiguous (p. 3).

Amidst this theoretical ambiguity surrounding postmodernist iconoclasm the decisive intervention came from the architectural practice. Beginning from the 1960s the resuscitated spatiality was sparked by architectural theory. Especially the neo-rationalists of Italy, influenced by a strange combination of modernist thinkers –Quatramere de Quincy and Marx- have succeeded in engendering a new language in the urban practice. Contrary to Harvey, Davis, or even Jameson's conceptualizations where the temporality of capital circulation forced a transformation in spatiality; Manfredo Tafuri, Aldo Rossi and Leon Krier pushed for a revolutionary architecture engrained in memory.

Leon Krier, for instance, asked for an architectural practice in which the relationship between history and memory is reconfigured and raised the banner of architecture in his combat call: "Forward comrades, we must go back" (Ellin, 1996, p. 16). At around the same time, Aldo Rossi questioned the primacy of the "spectacle" in Le Corbusier and sought for an architectural sensitivity to the place. For Rossi "places are stronger than people, the fixed scene stronger than the transitory succession of events" (Ellin, 1996, p. 12). In Rossi's architectonic language memory is conveyed through symbols in direct confrontation to the official history of the ruling classes, thus "cities need monumentalism in order to possess the dignity and tension necessary to express greater social ambitions" (Ellin, 1996, p. 13).

The Spatiality of Late Capitalism Overcoming the Historico-Spatial Dialectic

At this point Soja's problematization of the relationship between history and space becomes meaningful because of his will to go beyond the infinitesimal particularities. He describes a dialectics of power, from whence historical and temporal categories are elevated to the hegemonic positions in the Western thought. The epistemological precedent of spatiality's relegation to a necessary but irrelevant and immobile condition is therein situated. The corroborating precedence is drawn from Kant's comprehension of space and time. Kant's epistemological interest in space becomes doubly pertinent considering that he served for decades as a professor of geography while developing a synthetical system of thought which would be one of the determinants of Western philosophy (Harvey, 2000a).

Kant defined five properties of space. Firstly, space is not empirical but a necessary and *a priori* representation. Therefore, secondly, is the ground of all outer institutions. Thirdly, inductively space carries a comparative universality; i.e. as a rule space is three dimensional. Fourth, space is a pure intuition. And finally, space is represented through a given infinite magnitude. In the light of these essential attributes Kant concludes that:

Space represents no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other...Space is nothing other than merely the form of all appearance of outer sense...[and] [t]hrough space alone is it possible for things to be outer objects for us (1998, p. 157).

Thence Kant constructs a dialectics of inside/outside in which "time is nothing other than the form of inner sense." Thus, while "space...is limited as an *a priori* condition merely to outer institutions" time belongs to the inner state (Kant, 1998, p. 157).³ In other words, as Michel Foucault put: "[s]pace was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (Foucault & Gordon, 1980; Soja, 1989, p. 10).

According to Soja, the postmodern condition creates the possibilities to overcome the ontological docility of space (1989). The postmodern geographies capture what Berger remarkably emphasized as "prophesy" that "involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not

³ This partly explains, according to Boyer, why Bergson's quasi-metaphysical sense of time is shattered by the introduction of industrial production of clocks and their wide availability as outer disciplinary institutions; instead of residing at the inner-subjective-state of being (Boyer, 1994).

time that hides consequences from us." And therefore, "[a]ny contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of [spatial] dimension is incomplete and acquires the oversimplified character of a fable" (1989, p. 22).

However, this brings us to a dilemmatic point, a crossroads where further questions emerge irretrievably. Which comes first: is postmodernism a condition instigated by outside determinations which permit the reformulation of the historico-spatial/socio-spatial dialectic? Or are the tensions existing between the historical/temporal and spatial/geographical reached a point of no return where the structures that determine the modernist paradigm came to a breaking point? In other words, is it the necessary causes that ignited postmodernism or is it through mere contingency of existential factor that led to the withering of modernism and the structural proponents of modern urbanism?

The first and foremost problem of postmodernism surfaces at the conjuncture of structural determination and contingency: i.e. the Aleph. The first set of problematic and the fissure entailed in the epistemological presuppositions of the questions reappears here. The crucial moment arrives at the breaking up of the relationship of base and superstructure. Postmodern urbanism claimed that either the causal relationship between the two has never really existed or has severely been transformed by the tremendous changes in the forces of production-or, as it is vulgarized by many, at the level of technology. Hence, postindustrial society dissolved the unilinear relationship between economy and representation-conveyed through the signifier/signified connection- and succeeded in emancipating the signifier from the signified.

Michael Dear and Steven Flusty defined this process at the level of urbanism:

just as the central tenets of modernist thought have been undermined, its core evacuated and replaced by a rush of competing epistemologies, so too have the traditional logics of earlier urbanisms evaporated, and in the absence of a single new imperative, multiple urban (ir)rationalities are competing to fill the void. (1998, p. 50)

Yet, a blunt and elaborate exposition of the changing matrices of relationality appears in Michael Dear's critique of David Harvey's *Conditions of Postmodernity* and Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*. These two books were published around the same time, early 1990s, as extensive account of postmodern urbanism. According to Dear, Soja's project is deeply flawed. First, Soja's intention of writing postmodern *geographies* failed and faltered, since the book is but a singular narrative of a certain type of Marxist postmodern *geography*. Second, as a consequence of the former, his ontological Marxism is insulated from his Marxist epistemology. This inherent quality leaves the space/time/being triad hanging in the ontological air of postmodernism. In other words, Dear argues that "postmodernists are fence-sitters by definition. Soja has jumped down from the fence. From what perspective will he now teach difference?...And how are his ontological excursions blinkered by Marxism?" (Dear, 2000, p. 77).⁴ Third, the greatest damage is inflicted at the level of epistemology. By adopting "a fairly conventional historical materialism that privileges the economic over the politics and socio-cultural spheres" Soja "has written a peculiarly Modern account of postmodern geography." (2000, p. 77) And finally, by failing to recognize the possibilities opened by the postmodern (ir)rationalities and merely emphasizing the rational Soja imbued his work in the task of taming the postmodern through naming it (2000, p. 77).

A similar argument, the end of "sphere of production" as the legitimate object of study, was raised by Jacques Derrida:

I am more concerned with language than with "economic reality" itself when I speak of the *proper[oikos]*-which is nonetheless economical through and through...I am not directly concerned with what one may call "economic reality" in the strict and scientific sense (if that exists, independently and objectively) (Sprinker, 1993, p. 222).

However, not all the postmodern voices are so much critical of the Marxist or Enlightenment

⁴ See also, (Dear, 1991). As a side note, it is imperative to underline that Derrida would definitely object to such a statement, and the use of his name in the next paragraph, since it would mean an absolute foreclosure of the text to haphazardly use terms like "by-definition."

project as Michael Dear -ironically including Dear himself. In his earliest essay on postmodern urban planning -accepted by Nan Ellin as one of the cornerstones of postmodern urbanism (Ellin, 1996)- Dear argued that postmodernism can only be grasped in the light of deeper analysis of capitalist transformations in accumulation and further put:

I have to reject the notion of 'postmodern planning'. It has admirably served its function as a personal hermeneutic device. Yet to partition off an object called 'postmodern planning' seems confusing as it is in postmodern architecture and postmodern literature. Postmodernism should remain an ideal category...or an ideal type, in the Weberian sense (1986, p. 383).

Moreover, he saw that "academic conservatism and postmodernism are not unrelated" (1986, p. 367).

On the other end of the debate on the withering dialectics of historical materialism Fredric Jameson, Mike Davis, and David Harvey stand. Even though their diagnoses deeply differ they share the common ground that postmodernism-at the last instance- is a signifier of the seismic shift at the level of relations of production and circulation of capital.

Fredric Jameson, who arguably opened up a whole new terrain of criticism by his essay *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* -originally published in the New Left Review in 1984, and later became the central chapter of Jameson's influential book (Fredric Jameson, 1984, 1991)- based his analysis on a reading of Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (Mandel, 1999). He developed a three-leveled model of historical capitalism. At the beginning, the classical capitalism, we see Marx and the first volume of Capital enmeshed in a mire of primitive accumulation and imperialism. Second, is the monopoly capitalism and its cultural forms high modernism and the "International" style. Finally, we see the coming of late capitalism triggered by the clotted circulation of capital in the 1960s. The clot in the circulation of capital was to be resolved through a transformation in the Fordist regime of accumulation. A deep cutting set of transitions in the regime of accumulation, primarily a movement towards flexibility, resonated in the sphere of cultural logic and found its aesthetic equivalent in postmodernism and its Siamese twin commodity and consumer culture. Thus, late capitalism begets a new dominant cultural logic -a hegemonic norm- that is characterized by depthlessness, schizophrenic structures, decenteredness, or in general phenomena called by Jameson as "intensities." Under the cultural logic of late capitalism the classical humanist concepts "such as anxiety and alienation...are no longer appropriate" (Fredric Jameson, 1991, p. 14).

These postmodern intensities, marked by "the end of this or that," represent a clear-cut break instigated by a divergent array of political, social, and cultural layers: the end of ideology, art, or social class; the crisis of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state. However, Jameson underlines the matter of the fact that even if these layers of rupture might turn out artificial or epiphenomenal "all the constitutive features of postmodernism were identical with and continuous to those of an older modernism...the two phenomena would still remain utterly distinct in their meaning and social function, owing to the very different positioning of postmodernism in the economic system of late capital and, beyond that, to the transformation of the very sphere of culture in contemporary society" (1991, p. 5).

Although the starting point of Jameson's analysis depends upon Mandel's Marxism, in the last instance he indicates a groundbreaking transformation of the dialectics of base-superstructure. Therefore, he warns that;

The conception of postmodernism outlined here is a historical rather than a merely stylistic one. I cannot stress too greatly the radical distinction between a view for which the postmodern is one (optional) style among many others available and one which seeks to grasp it as the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism: the two approaches in fact generate two very different ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon as a whole: on the one hand, moral judgments....,and, on the other, a genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present of time in History (Fredric Jameson, 1991, p. 46).

The new mode of dialectical historicism opened the floodgates of subjectivity, though merely to contribute to the disappearance of that very subject and to the waning of distance. The possible exit

strategy from this zone of zero mediation emerges once the horizons of temporality is extended to the spatiality. We can argue that the spatial logic, in Jameson as well as in Kant, solely represents the necessary cause, perhaps as a metonymical return to the homely place/space, but is still far from determining or becoming as a final cause. Spatiality is rather invoked due to a crisis in history and historicism:

The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality, and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic (1991, p. 26).

However, Mike Davis, in a critical essay published in the NLR in 1985 presented a few bulwarks against Jameson's vision regarding the "virtually 'unmediated' relationship between postmodern experience and the structures of late capitalism" (1985, p. 106). First, Jameson's appropriation of Mandel's model on *Late Capitalism* does not quite fit the original structure of the concept. In *Late Capitalism*, Mandel argued that the real break and the definitive end of the long postwar wave of rapid growth came in 1974-5, not, as Jameson argued, in the 1960s (1999). The question turns into a crucial problem of historical and conceptual accuracy according to Davis, since Mandel conceived late capitalism's beginnings after 1945. Davis asks: "[a]re the Sixties the opening of a new epoch, or merely the superheated summit of the postwar boom (1985, pp. 107-8)." His disagreement with Jameson is not limited to the historicity, but also extends to the internal structural processes. Davis sees an incorrect conflation of Mandel and Wallerstein in Jameson, which contributes to the myopic response given to the third world. Instead of Jameson's homogenized account of world capitalism, Davis argues that the capitalism of postmodernism employs "the most primitive form of urban exploitation (1985, p. 110)."

Davis conceptualized postmodernism along two spheres: "first, the rise of new international rentier circuits in the current phase of capitalism; secondly, the definitive abandonment of the ideal of urban reform as part of the new class polarization taking place in the United States (1985, p. 108)." The former fuelled by "oil rents, third-world debts, military outlays, and the global flight of capital to the safe harbour of Reagan's America," and the latter represented the end of Miesian functionalism by means of Philip Johnson's ATT building and the Trump Castle, skyscraper fortress enclaves, and Bonaventura (1985, p. 109).

Following Davis, we can grasp the trajectory of primitive accumulation realized *qua* space under postmodernism. From his brilliant work on Los Angeles, *The City of Quartz*, to *Magical Urbanism* and to his most recent work *Planet of Slums*, we can attest to the far reaching effects of the claim that urban restructuring relays and ideologically configured return of primitive accumulation (Davis, 1990, 1998, 2000, 2006). Hence, in my view, Davis' contribution to contemporary urbanism is invaluable.

And, interestingly enough, even though he has not explicitly quoted or alluded to Michel Foucault in his works, there exists a common methodological position, again, in my view. They both started from the peripheral regions of collective consciousness, Foucault embarked upon a project of deciphering the discursive spatiality of modernity overdetermined by madness, incarceration, illness, quarantine, and criminality, while Davis imbued his analysis with the fecund space where riots, earthquakes, diseases, epidemics, squalor, brutal police violence, fleeting images of fear, fortress architecture, and forlorn socialist colonies reigned.

Also, Davis as an allegorist brings forward an unusual image. It is not the Aleph, but the California *noir* that defines the kernel of capitalist spatiality. Urban space that flows through Davis' texts is a space where catastrophe is imminent –and, even unapologetically welcome. Reworking the Faustian idea of creative destruction he derives a vision of postmodernism not quite distinct from the one ensconced in the *Blade Runner*.

In that movie, a film noir set in a dystopian city not so far from the present, the leading character is encapsulated by the dystopia where the urban space is once more reflected as insidiously dark, scarred by delving neonlights, nightmarishly pressing and immanently fixated-and the megalopolis is

run by a single controlling monopoly capitalist corporation—perhaps an uncanny reference to the modernist factory towns. We find the parallel in the *Zeitgeist* of postmodernism, described by Davis as a "profoundly anti-urban impulse, inspired by unfettered financial forces and a Hausmannian logic of social control" wedded to architecture's obedient service to Reaganism through a "decadent trope of a massified modernism" (Davis, 1985, p. 113).

Against the subordination imposed by capital, Davis proposes a war of positions "across a diversity of terrains, from UCLA to the streets of Compton" which antithetically pitches Gramsci against the dystopian spatiality of the *Blade Runner* (Davis, 1990, p. 83). The LA School perhaps fleetingly represented such resistance. As a Neo-Marxist group of urban researchers based in UCLA, the group sought to foreground the relationships between urban restructuring and a new regime of flexible capitalist accumulation.

Michael Dear mentioned an important meeting at Lake Arrowhead, attended by Dear himself, Dana Cuff, Mike Davis, Allen Scott, Edward Soja, Michael Storper and Jennifer Wolch, as a significant founding moment of the LA School. According to Dear, that meeting ended inconclusively as a brilliant representation of "the School's explosive fragmentation [as] a precise microcosm of everyday political life in LA" (Dear, 2000, p. 19).

Edward Soja, perhaps as the chief propagandist of the school, proclaimed that it all comes together in LA:

one might call the sprawling urban region defined by a sixty-mile circle around the centre of the City of Los Angeles a *protopos*, a paradigmatic place; or, pushing inventiveness still further, a *mesocosm*, an ordered world in which the micro and macro, the idiographic and the nomothetic, the concrete and the abstract, can be seen simultaneously in an articulated and interactive combination (1989, p. 191).

Yet, on the other hand, Davis poised—and, actually, rhetorically exhorted for a swift and honest exposition—a fundamentally epistemic question to be resolved by LA School: "its members remain undecided whether they should model themselves after the 'Chicago School' (named principally after its *object* of research), or the 'Frankfurt School' (a philosophical current named after its *base*)." He recognizes that the LA School is "a little bit of both" (1990, pp. 83–4). Marco Cenzatti affirms this view and claimed that LA School is a synthesis of both the Chicago School and Frankfurt School. The school dwells upon Los Angeles "not just as a blueprint or a finished paradigm of the new dynamics, but as a laboratory which is itself an integral component of the production of new modes of analysis of the urban" (Dear, 2000, p. 21). Therefore, the main task of the LA School lingered around the issue of whether to forge a brand new Aleph in the material conditions represented by the epicenter of their analyses, namely, the postmodern Los Angeles.

David Harvey, in his essay *Flexible Accumulation through Urbanization* opens another front in this allegorical war of positions. Responding to Charles Jencks' suggestion that the postmodern era began by the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe housing complex⁵ (1989, p. 39) he raised his objection "to the way in which a whole world of thought and cultural practice, of economy and institutions, of politics and way of relating, began to crumble as we watched the dust exploded upwards and the walls of Pruitt-Igoe come crashing down" (1987a, p. 263). The dynamiting of Pruitt-Igoe did not only spell the end of CIAM ideals in naked force, the 'International' style—which was centered around megastructures that are technologically rational, efficient and standardized— but also heralded a shift in the regime of accumulation.

Again, as in Davis, creative destruction appears to be the connecting thread between time and space. While "all that exists deserves to perish," (Marx, 2005) capitalism rightly claims to be "the spirit that negates...for all that comes to be deserves to perish wretchedly"(Goethe von, 1976, p. 161). And this negation starkly encapsulated the transformative and speculative logic of capital in all likelihood

⁵ Which was "a prize winning version of Le Corbusier's machine for modern living" (Harvey, 1989, p. 39).

resembling

the laws of fluid dynamics [that] are invariant in every river in the world, so the laws of capital circulation are consistent from one supermarket to another, from one labour market to another, from one commodity system to another, from one country to another and from one household to another. Yet New York and London are as different from each other as the Hudson is from the Thames (Harvey, 1989, pp. 343–4).⁶

Thus, it befell on the self-critical critical theory to overcome the tendency to treat "places, communities, cities, regions, or even nations as 'things-in-themselves' at a time when the global flexibility of capital is greater than ever"(Harvey, 1987a, p. 281).

This statement brings us to another point of discussion intrinsically related to the questions we raised at the beginning. Does postmodernism represent a break? At the conjunctural level of distanciation between base and superstructure is it possible to argue that the cultural logic of capitalism has been transformed? Or is the cultural/poststructural/postmodern turn a mere "rascal concept" (Smith, 1987) that engenders an imaginary relationship with reality?

Harvey attempted to solve the dilemma through a maneuver ensconced in French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's oeuvre. Bourdieu described an epistemologically revolutionary standpoint similar to the Einsteinian revolution in physics. While "a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" can be put to practice in order to "achieve infinitely diversified tasks," that are concurrently determined "in the last instance" by the "objective structures (Harvey, 1987a, p. 267).

Mike Davis, on the other hand, suggested a rather unique methodological approach, what we may call as an immanently spatial historicism, or as Harvey would describe as historico-geographical materialism. Especially in *The City of Quartz* he employed a complicated historiography of the present in which the temporal actively engages in a fertile dialectical relationship with the spatial. His profoundly spatial historiography, contrary to the critical orthodoxy that see the spatial as reactionary, fuses geography with a multi-dimensional history where past and present join together at a specific place.

Yet, a much deeper reaction to the problematic of base-superstructure ensemble and the break/brake inherent to that conjuncture came from Michael Dear. He defined two key arguments that defined the postmodern challenge-concretely expressed in his criticism of Soja and Harvey. Firstly, according to Dear the postmodern challenge is related to the otherness: i.e. "the meaning and significance of alternative human subjectivities and experience." Second is the Derridean notion of difference which permits the reconsideration of non-Marxian social theory. The difference primarily pertains to the recognition that language is a prison house of the thought, and can be explained through textualities. In other words, textuality is reflecting more than the message conveys, and this entails an intricate series of discursive analysis-enhanced by Derridean appurtenances, i.e. erasure, double-coding, and most importantly, *différance*. Thereby Dear denounces Marxism's inimical stance to differences, and asks: "Why should we sacrifice our hard-won openness to thick description in favor of some new/old disclosure? Why pillory those who reject totalizing discourse?"(Dear, 2000, p. 268)

Conclusion

The theoretical landscape described in this paper represents a rupture within rupture where the discontents of modernism can no longer be repressed under the dual framework of modernization-modernism (Berman, 1988; Harvey, 1989; Soja, 1989). The postmodernist attempt to reveal the incongruence between the cultural logic and the economic reality corresponds to another -a deeper and perplexingly complicated- level of problematic. It is the relationship between the allegorist and the collector, the antithetical positioning ensconced in "all that is solid, melts into air," and most importantly, the fissure between history and memory. Here, postmodernism comes to play the role of liberator from the totalizing grand narratives of history. The grand narrative, as Dear argued, is to be replaced by

⁶ This is actually a reiteration of his arguments on the postmodern urbanism debate that erupted in 1987 on the pages of *Society and Space*: see, (Harvey, 1987b).

endless fragments-fractals of difference where the historically determined relationship between the whole and its parts is shattered.

However conflicting by way of (re)collections and allegories it is imperative to dwell upon the inherent complexities and what we came to see as the dialectics of postmodernism. It begins at the moment of introduction: the first and foremost problem-as it is with the quintessential aspect of describing the Aleph- is defining the postmodern. The first fissure surfaces at the point of a preliminary definition.⁷

Instead of a clear-cut definition we can grasp the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of postmodernism through a series of dualities. The most striking one is the breaking up of the relationship between what orthodox Marxism called as superstructure and infrastructure. A central claim of postmodern urbanism is that the causal relationship between the two has either never existed or been severed by the tremendous changes in the forces of production. As a corollary, a new set of problems –long submerged under the Godot-like waiting for the revolution- surfaced: the role of economy as against culture, which was claimed as mediated through the Engels’s famous “last instance” or its reappropriation by Louis Althusser (Althusser, 1977, 1984). Extending the problematic requires a thorough rethinking of the urban structure: is it merely the element of collective consumption or the last tier of the capitalist accumulation or are there any other inherent qualities of the city? (Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1982)⁸ The gist of the question boils down to qualitatively-and in a Kantian sense as a thing-in-itself- define urban structure as the centralizing centrality, as it was conceived by Henri Lefebvre (1991, 2003). These questions still reflect the contested terrain of spatiality waiting to beget new answers through novel forms of spatial practices.

Two concluding remarks are in order. Firstly, allegory, as indicated by Walter Benjamin’s critical evaluations of Baudelaire, still remains a crucial hermeneutic apparatus of critical reasoning. That, on the other hand, implies a significant common ground between postmodernism and modernism. In a sense, we can argue that postmodernism appropriated the instrumentality of its predecessor thoroughly in order to fully repudiate its genealogical lineage. Thus we can argue, in the first place, a historical dialectics of postmodernism is the reigning, but suppressed, vein of the ideological spatiality of late capitalism.

Second remark is at the heart of this paper. We have seen that the allegory between the Aleph and postmodernism prevails and is reproduced through and through. However, the question that still lingers regards the concrete spatiality of the Aleph. Jorge L. Borges, as Edward Soja would tell, is not an unmethodical writer who would haphazardly place his symbols in his short story. Indeed, Borges can be recognized as one of the most cryptic story writer, where every image, word, and even phoneme, would gain a standing among the intricately knitted plethora of allusions. So when Borges, out of all the locations in the world, or even in Buenos Aires, placed the Aleph in a bourgeois house’s cellar on Garay Street-which is mentioned five times in the short story- we face the ultimate question of the spatiality of the Aleph. In a sense, the story tell an upper-middle class men’s desire to hold on to his Garay Street home, and indeed it might altogether be a mere ploy to convey the sense of place-boundedness of bourgeoisie. Hence, it is not postmodern spatiality but the spatiality of the postmodern that the Aleph signifies; and maybe Soja found his Aleph in LA. Nevertheless, I share Borges’s conclusion in his postscript to the story: “Incredible as it may seem, I believe that the Aleph of Garay Street was a false Aleph” (Borges, 1973, pp. 15–17).

⁷ For instance, Jacques Derrida, one of the most important philosophers of postmodernism through his reworking of Heidegger, describes the task of deconstruction as “Deconstruction is not “possible” if “possible” means to work as a technical instrument functions or obeys a program. Deconstruction is an explanation with, an experience of the impossible.” (Sprinker, 1993, pp. 225–6)

⁸ The dated, but still important, debate between Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells in regard to the categorical and epistemological status of the urban can be located here.

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