**Art as resistance**

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# La città è bella[1]



Graffiti artist Ola Kalnins. Photo courtesy Alexis Rodrigues Cancino

Artistic activism is the practice of "counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character". (Chantal Mouffe, 2007)

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[1] The city is beautiful

**Introduction**

In analogy with the tale of the emperor with beautiful clothes, the successful contemporary city is frantically engaged with building and showing off yet another super star building, a modern cultural venue or innovative science park, competing for funds, fame and international visibility. Once in a while, each city must come up with either a new or renovated museum, concert hall, mall or Olympic stadium, business centre, or at least dozens of new cafes, restaurants, shopping centres, fancy venues for the successful creative and financial classes. Meanwhile, the middle class – the service providing citizens - sees itself more and more deprived of rights to affordable rentals and social housing, healthcare services, cut off from a too expensive cultural industry which might have attracted them at some point to the city, as a place for emancipation and self-realisation. Deskilling keeps plaguing western labour market, with exception for the design, information technology (IT), sales and finance sectors where highly specialised knowledge and skills still promises comfortable revenues and access to a good quality of daily life. The smart city – which is at its core an IT *business solution*, having as main finality a financially profitable and highly performant information system, in which the citizen is merely a user and provider of data – is being widely advocated and implemented by major tech corporations as *the* solution to all urban problems, including societal. From smoothing traffic flows to enhancing safety, providing citizens with global shopping, education and personal communication at the finger tips, 24 hours /day, seven days a week, the IT claims to bring solutions to everything. Like the magnificent cloth of the emperor, the most refined layer of this infrastructure is its *wireless* network, elegant like a spider web, organised in literally invisible clouds. A little less invisible, yet hidden for everyone's eyes, are villages built for the mega servers that store the big data, the satellites used for collection and transmission of data and the immense web of submarine cables on the floors or the world's oceans. What is seductively visible and what makes the illusion work, are the *gadgets* that we, the users who feed the machine are employing: our mobile phones, tablets, laptops and desktops – all designed to fit our human need for activity, communication, belonging and acceptance. In other words, unlike the magic cloth of the emperor, the smart layer made of IT technology dressing up the contemporary city is not entirely invisible. Our gadgets are designed to look almost like jewelleries, making sure we not only accept but even desire them. In most public transportation means, signals point at available free Wi-Fi services, next to signs informing about the surveillance cameras. The smart city gives its dwellers free access to internet, in exchange for data and privacy.

**Research questions**

The question from which this study emerged is: to what extent, the all-pervading smart technology is effectively benefitting city dwellers, and to what extend does the magic web act like a fetishized straitjacket, an assemblage of tools and algorithms that guide citizens to behave in obedient, unquestioning, normalized modes, as data providers and consumers. Consequently, we reflect upon how can the smart city affect individual's will to question, to create and to express personal narratives, when these might differ from the mainstream narratives.

A parallel question is whether art can function as a resistance buffer, a locus for critical intervention, in-between the top-down normative planning narratives and the individuals' need for personal interaction with their surroundings, for formulating and addressing relevant questions and potential solutions - as a means of freeing themselves from a position of subaltern (servant) in which the system places them. The mentioned questions will be pursued rather than answered, eventually explicating what are the

limitations in formulating concluding answers.

**Approach**

A reflection upon how smart technology impacts daily life and how this in turn empowers or prevents human self-realisation understood as fulfilling the individual's cultural and professional potential will lead the writing of the essay. The increase use of smart technologies as solutions to societal problems and their impact on everyday life will be discussed, in the light of how data as a commodity is being accessed, distributed and negotiated within complex local and global neoliberal economic constructions. The conscience of the city, the sense (Sennett) and scent (Han) of time and how this conscience is affected by the increasing presence of smart technologies becoming part of the urban built environment will be looked at. Scientific and academic narratives will be addressed in comparison with vernacular forms of narratives that are less visible.

Smart technology architecture, its physical (hardware) and operational (software) dimensions will be described, as well as the role that citizens play as users and consumers of these IT services. Participation in the making of increasingly imposed smart technologies as well as in the policies that surround these technologies will be addressed. A distinction will be made between policies aiming at normalisation versus policies advancing authenticity and emancipation in the actual neoliberal regime. A series of art works and interventions will be named as sources of knowledge and as support for reflection upon the narratives of established authorities versus the narratives of individuals who resist, who do not conform to the actual - digital and wireless zeitgeist.

Between the lines, the essay builds on a series of tensions aiming to reflect on the textuality of everyday life defined by - on one side its material structures and transactions, and on the other side by the transfers of energies and emotions, that together make up for what we call everyday life. The pairs of contrasting perspectives that underpin the approach are: (1) scientific arguments – artistic reflections and (2) planners ambitions – dwellers needs. The building bricks will be fragments from and comments on urban theory publications, interwoven with personal reflections and images collected from mass media, as a means to lightly contaminate the essay with practices specific to artistic research. Self-reflexive thoughts are used as an invitation to a layered reading of the text. Sections from newspapers articles are used when they provide information on events that have not (yet) been debated in academic publications. Overall, I will be using the word *critical* in the same sense as Marcuse (2010) – namely, an attitude of "questioning rather that accepting of reality as it is".

The conclusion will be drawn based on the mentioned approach and it might generate new research questions, setting the starting point for employing research methods such as urban ethnography, discourse analysis, travel journals and photography.

**The Technology perspective, zooming in**

If around the end of the second World War Churchill affirmation warned that "we shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us", as Adam Greenfield reminds us in his recent book *Radical technologies, The Design of Everyday Life*, today, in far more subtle manners, our everyday life is shaped by the networks and gadgets we build, as much as buildings ever used to do (Greenfield, 2017).

In the following images we see examples of network configuration of satellites that provide IT communication and a fragment of the cable infrastructure for fibre communication – the foundational layers that next to mega servers make Smart cities and other IT business possible.



Fig 4[2]                                                              Fig 6[3]

The planet is surrounded by satellites with cryptic names, the ocean floors are embroidered with highways of fibre cables and in key political locations the big data is being stored in warehouses that employ more security staff than engineers.

For companies such as DELL, this means Big Data, Big Intelligence and Bug Business – and in order to collect, store, secure and manipulate it, as well as to protect it from extremely destructive attacks by hackers - the traditional Data Centre needs to be replaced by the Intelligent Mega Cloud[4], that will allow management and processing of multi-cloud data stemming from billions of devices.

To me, through a woman's eye, it looks more like a war game setting, than like an infrastructure meant to support an everyday life organised around human needs and aspirations. By means of imagination, subtract all the living organisms from the context and imagine what is left: a huge apparatus constructed of interlinked, inanimate hardware, algorithmically animated by an even more intricate and invisible software web, all produced and controlled by a limited constellation of highly specialised professionals. These are the foundational stones and veins that make today's world connected and divided the way it is. Whether a user is on the side of feeding this giant assemblage or on the side of designing and profiting from it, depends on the level of sophistication of their IT knowledge, combined with the type of market and financial networks they want and manage to be part of. In terms of sustainability, these types of technical infrastructure are part of city infrastructure just as much as the network of water supply, road traffic, electricity. Considering the complexity and opacity of international business that provides this particular type of IT – hardware and software infrastructures – does urban theory possess scientific methods to assess all the aspects that such businesses build on?

Considering the current rate at which intelligence of the machine is competing with human intelligence, by means of recent exponential developments in the IT sector, if 2018 is the year of Big Intelligence[5],

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[2] http://submarine-cable-map-2017.telegeography.com
[3] http://www.metlink.org/secondary/key-stage-4/satellites
[4] https://blog.dellemc.com/en-us/from-big-data-to-big-intelligence-six-key-trends-shaping-it-for-2018/
[5] Idem

2030 might be the year of Big Wisdom. One can speculate that unless a clear distinction between human thinking and machine thinking will be safeguarded, the future of philosophy risks to soon belong to IT and later on, even the affective layer of everyday life.

While social science is traditionally a science that prefers text to images (as contrasted to technical sciences that need schemas and drawings as integral parts of communicating about concepts, systems and processes), the use of the following image (Huang, 2015) is an explicit choice, justified by the fact that a semantic description of the proposed design would perhaps fail to convey the scale and the place reserved for the citizen in this specific blueprint of a smart city: a tiny element with an even smaller artefact in their hand, the smartphone, the citizen is planned to be a disciplined provider and consumer of data for the larger – mainly invisible – system consisting of far-away servers, submarine cables and satellites, big data clouds and an intricate constellation of corresponding business providers and technology suppliers that negotiate and decide its functionalities – brought to our fingertips by even more invisible WiFi networks ready to collect our private data and provide us with new, processed information, at every single touch of the screen. The main and perhaps the only way we as users are empowered to negotiate how our data flows in this circuit is by accepting or rejecting user agreements and cookies employed by the applications and websites we access.
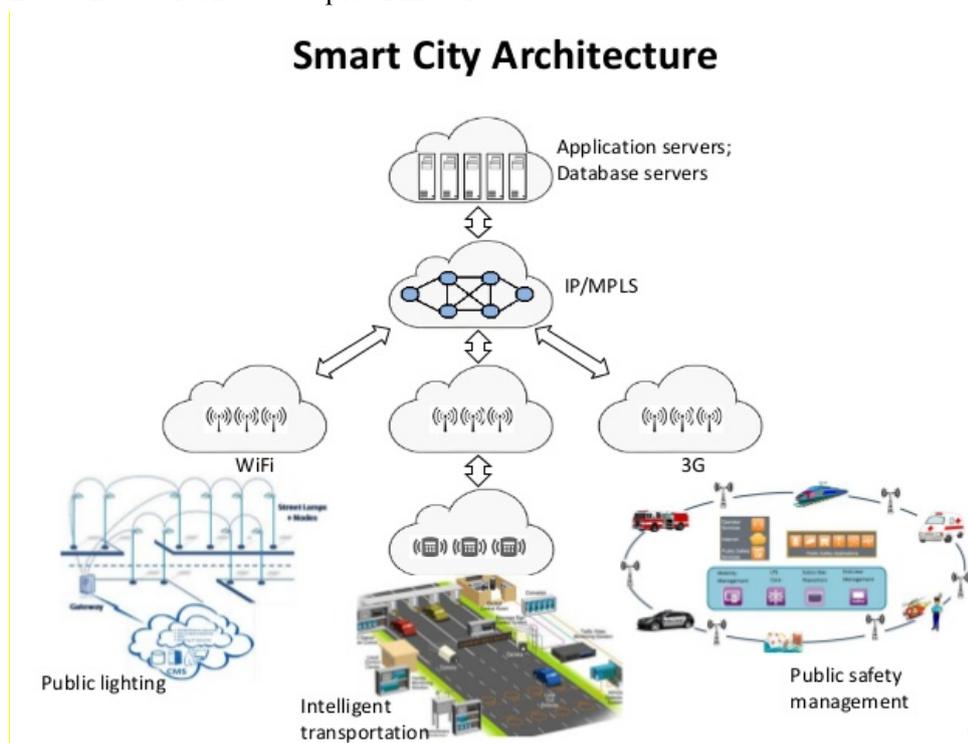
Let us have a look at a couple of models:



Fig 1[6]. Big Data : Risks and Opportunities by Kenny Huang Ph.D.

Within the architecture of the smart city as designed and constructed by corporate IT enterprises, the role of citizen is on one side essential, as provider and consumer of data, while on another side, as power to influence the logic of the system, it is marginal.

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[6] https://www.slideshare.net/huangksh/big-data-opportunities

On the other side of the spectrum are the IT specialists like Nakamura from the Graduate School of System Informatics, Kobe University who is developing smart home systems that makes use of multi-vendor household applications as Web services. TV, air-conditioner, light, curtain, and fan as well as all kind of sensors (temperature, humidity, sound volume, etc.) can be operated via web. According to Namakura[7], IT can also bring solutions to the aging society: "A smart system is also expected by elderly or disabled people. In this super-aging society, the ICT is one of most promising technologies for safe and quality living. This engineering-based approach towards the aging society is called gerontechnology"[8].

On an individual level, there is no doubt that the applications we use on our electronic devices are increasingly influencing our everyday life – the way we navigate the city, the way we purchase goods, public transportation, the way we access and share professional and personal information. At the level of the city, the increasing implementation of smart city technologies affects urban planning in ways that are yet to be investigated, if we want to have an understanding on how they impact the use and functioning of the city, not only as infrastructure but as social organism – as a consequence of altering infrastructure. When professionals from different disciplines work together in conceiving a future business/service/product, various professionals bring in and negotiate the features of the system. Ideally, in designing the smart city, urbanists, architects, traffic specialists, sociologists, health professionals, architects, cultural actors, philosophers, as well as city dwellers - should contribute to propositions and decisions regarding what the smart city becomes. How realistic is the realisation of such participatory planning and design in the actual neoliberal system driven by maximizing capital? And if left out of the design process, how can citizens deal with the smart city when they become faced with imposed participation – by making use of electronic devices continuously connected, which makes them – whether in the private or the public space - objects of ongoing surveillance and control by smart systems?

Smart technologies collect data via various sensors and systems implemented within the city, catching the current state of the city, and performing actions for improving or controlling this state. Integrating smart homes with digital city infrastructures such as road, trains, shops is a proposed strategy for solving problems in the city – such as "energy consumption, traffic jam, air pollution, safety, security, vacant stores in shuttered streets", aiming to bring the city to an ideal state.

Can social sciences investigate the ways in which such technological developments are permeating through all fields of life, without possessing specialised knowledge of complex IT software and hardware systems – with regard to the architecture and the way they operate? Could smart city infrastructures, from instrumental and facilitating become normative and formatting of life, influencing the city not only at its architecture level, and transfer of material assets, but eventually also its fabric of emotions, tacit and intuitive knowledge - everything we call humane? How can urban planning deal with such possible scenarios?

**The Internet of Things and privacy issues**

At the Internet of Things Conference in Milan 2015, Ricardo Neisse and a group of scientists argued that "(t)here is the need to define more sophisticated models of Informed Consent for IoT, which address

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[7] http://www27.cs.kobe-u.ac.jp/~masa-n/research-e.html
[8] http://www27.cs.kobe-u.ac.jp/~masa-n/index-e.html

the specific features of IoT, improve on the EULA approach, and protect the flow of personal data from the IoT sensors. In this paper, we propose an agent-based design for Informed Consent in IoT, where access to personal data is regulated through usage control policies, which can be tailored for the specific features        of        the        user        and        the        context":
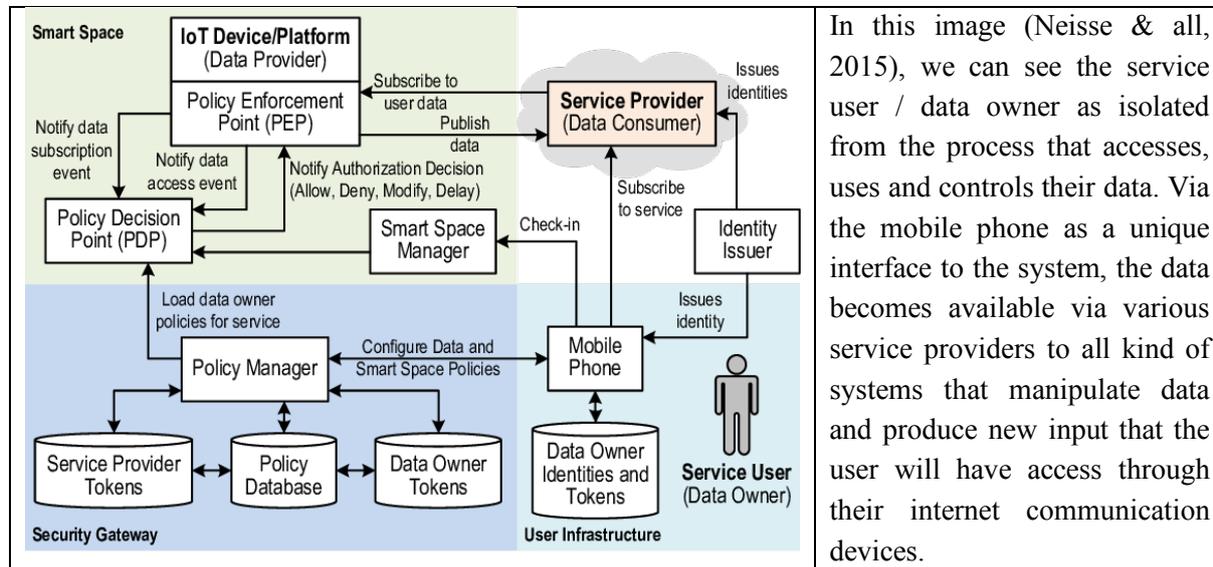


In this image (Neisse & all, 2015), we can see the service user / data owner as isolated from the process that accesses, uses and controls their data. Via the mobile phone as a unique interface to the system, the data becomes available via various service providers to all kind of systems that manipulate data and produce new input that the user will have access through their internet communication devices.

Fig. 2 SMART CITY SCENARIO [9]

A question that emerges after a simple gaze at the image above is: what degree of IT knowledge (data collection, manipulation and data security) does the city dweller needs to possess, considering that he / she is participating in this process, as any time their smart phone is switched on and connected to one network or another  - while using public transportation or the free internet connections available in public squares, libraries etc. – and on the other side, what degree of IT specialised knowledge do urban planes need to possess in order to insure that IT infrastructures they allow and facilitate as part of the 'built' infrastructure do not impair the citizen's right to the city, to privacy, access to significant information, etc.

As users, by making use of applications that demand our physical location for proper functioning, we keep trading our personal data in exchange for wireless connection to our service providers and their unknown third-party customers, to be used for specific, undisclosed, business interests. As Adam Greenfield concludes, we are "straightforwardly trading our privacy for convenience"[10]. Another impact of smartphone technologies is differentiating the capabilities of those who uses then versus those who don't, by offering the connected citizens information that otherwise is not available on the street.

New qualities of everyday life that come with these technologies are porosity and overlapping, in the sense that "work invades our personal time, private leaks into public, the intimate is trivially shared and the concerns for a wider world seep into what ought be a space for recuperation and recovery" (Greenfield, 2017). This circuit of interaction and enmeshment is based on our need for acceptance and connectivity, temporarily supplied with a raise of dopamine by likes and comments on the social media platforms, until our neurons will demand a fresh new dose. These new modes of interaction are

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[9] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303471338_An_Agent-based_Framework_for_Informed_Consent_in_the_Internet_of_Things
[10] https://longreads.com/2017/06/13/a-sociology-of-the-smartphone/

challenging everyday life by the fact that they have a strong impact on the distribution of affection, of resources and the way we share stories and time with fellow citizens, whether neighbours or on the other side of the globe.

**The Smartphone**

Let's us have a closer look at the smartphone, one of the most used tool for data collection and makes connection between individuals and community, this artefact that has gradually replaced a dozen other tools that we used in performing various everyday activities about ten years ago. Smartphones took over mediating an increasing number of interactions between us and the city, from navigating maps, to getting a bus or a train ticket, making phone and video calls, sending birthday wishes, to paying a cup of coffee, monthly rent, ordering books, organising our daily schedule, connecting with friends, co-workers, class mates, reading the news etc, impacting the texture of everyday life. It has done so by replacing a number of materiality we used to employ for the mentioned actions: the phone boot, the paper map, the bus ticket, the metro card, the bank card, postcards, calendars, notebooks, watches, money itself, transforming everything into invisible waves of zeros and ones. Passports and driver's licences have somehow survived in their physical form, it remains yet to be seen for how long (Greenfield, 2017). Newly created apps are recently announced that have as function to mediate sexual contracts, by allowing users to digitally record their consent, that "will help people comply with Sweden's proposed legislation to require explicit contracts for sex"[11]. The smartphone will be the mediator for this kind of agreements as well, recording our most intimate interactions and preferences desires, in unknown databases out of our reach and control.

Greenfield calls our attention to a number of consequences that most users are not aware of, or rarely thing about: by accepting to use the smartphone for such mundane activities, we participate in networks of business and manufacture, national and supranational sets of regulation, trade and financial agreements; the reliability of the services depends on the stability of the network connection, of the software application it accesses and the state of corporate alignments; every new release of new version of an operating system and applications oblige us to keep pace and adjust to the technological adjustments; a strong normalization of activities very different from one another – such as ordering a book, writing an email or paying for a train ticket all happen on the same limited small screen of the smartphone. These make our everyday life be strongly influenced by the subtle design of the smartphone. In the production and the collaboration between the screen the internal digital processors and the various types of networks that makes collection and transfer of data possible, an intricate and obscured corporate – consisting of technical, legal, financial and operational arrangements - ecosystem is at play. This makes us actors in a chain of labour arrangements and flow of capital we rarely thing of. From the drastic living and working conditions of Chinese assemblers with low wages and high suicide rates, to the mining of cobalt in Congo often by children, in illegal conditions, to extraction of tin in Bangka (Indonesia) that caused destruction of 70% of the coral reef – are ways in which the mobile phone is changing everyday life at far-away sites of the world, an environmental footprint we rarely see.

As a result of these relatively new structures in which we, as users, became embedded, our way to navigate daily life is affected. "Smartphone notifications have turned us all into Pavlov's dogs," says David Greenfield, specialized in sexual medicine and internet addiction. At every signal – beep,

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[11] https://abovethelaw.com/2018/01/blockchain-sex-contracts-will-be-weaponized-against-women/

vibration or other signs – emitted by our smartphone, our brain generates dopamine as it associates the signal with some sort of reward – an email, a text, a call – a sign that someone if thinking of us. "every time you look at your phone, you don't know what you're going to find — how relevant or desirable a message is going to be, so you keep checking it over and over again because every once in a while, there's something good there", says Dr Grienfield. Dr Anna Lembke, a psychiatrist at Stanford University who studies addiction, calls the problem "a spectrum disorder,". In the same manner as alcohol, while a moderate use of smartphone is not damaging, and it can benefit some people, there are symptoms that show pathological use of these devices. While spending more than five hours a day on devices is related to feelings of unhappiness and low self-esteem, a total digital cut off is equally unhealthy – causing for feelings of isolation and shut out; using social media devices an average of one to two hours a day is related to a healthy life style, fostering people to connect with new people and ideas, studies show[12].

Although we mapped only a limited number of aspects defining the smart city, the complexity, the dilemmas and the many layers of urban life impacted by recent fast technological developments are obvious.

**The political and economic dimensions**

Over the last months of 2017, mass media abounded in pessimistic articles about the fate of the US economy, the UK after Brexit, EU instability, scandalous increase of wealth of the top 1% paralleled with significant deterioration of living conditions for the middle class and poor populations, consisting in a rising precariat of labour and housing conditions and shrinking public health services. Worrying opinions are being reported by both scientists and journalists from countries known as highly developed, as well as from the Global South and the conflict affected Middle-East. With urbanisation taking central stage, almost replacing globalisation as trendy subject, these challenges are often approached by theories revolving around urban studies. The narratives that consider capitalism as the driving and responsible force behind a predictable new global crisis to reach humanity by 2020 are in competition with theories and policies that propose urbanisation - and more-over, the smart city - as the solution for a sustainable future, in the version of a highly technologized, smart and at the same time green, city.

"Urbanisation will continue in India and China and that is a good thing – there is no future in rural poverty. But it would be a lot better for the planet if their urbanised population lives in dense cities built around the elevator rather than in sprawling area built around the car", writes economist Edward Glaeser, in his bestseller "Triumph of the city" (Glaeser, 2011). With 54% of the population living in cities (which implies the rest, almost half of the global population, living in rural areas) and an increase up to 66% by 2050 (UN, 2014) Glaeser apparently sees no need to argue why rural life needs to be seen as equal to poverty and deserving to simply vanish. The wide range of economic, industrial and trade mechanisms that traditionally extract resources from rural areas in order to feed the need for food, energy and consumption of the big city are entirely omitted by mainstream narratives about the supremacy of the city, usually written by urban economists. It is by ignoring the continuity, connectivity and interdependence of urban and rural spaces that this obscuring is created, parallel with a tendency to focus on technological progress and financial welfare as driving forces for the growth of the city (and

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[12] https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/02/12/584389201/smartphone-detox-how-to-power-down-in-a-wired-world

presumably, advancement of society), taking the entire array of resources provide by rural areas for granted. A regular inhabitant of the city has perhaps no idea of the hinterland and the ecological footprint of his/her life, as these aspects are neatly kept out of our sight by all kind of highly professional logistic networks that are in charge of the chain of food import and distribution. A nicely packed iPhone in an Apple shop, a Nestle chocolate or a bottle of Cola in the supermarket don't tell the story of the minerals, the palm oil plantation and water resources that the respective digital / food companies access. We don't see the farmers working the fields, the Chinese workers producing our gadgets, the dislocated rural population caused by foreign direct investment in cheap farmland in the so called emerging economies.

From a financial perspective, we don't seem to have many choices: the banks and pension funds of whom we all are costumers, are not consulting us about the investment choices they make, yet we are obliged to be clients of one bank or another and to monthly contribute to national pension funds. By these means, we are all co-opted as participants in myriads of transnational economic and trade aggregates of which we have very limited knowledge and understanding. This passive participation makes any attempt to question the justice of the actual system, our main financial institutions as potential hypocrisy. In parallel, the attention of the masses is directed via mass media to various crisis caused by migration and stories of corruption of faraway governments. The tacit message is that we, citizens of the West should not complain; there are other societies that have real corruption problems to sort out, we are the lucky ones.

The unquestioned superiority of city above village, as well as the impossibility to imagine rural setting as a locus for prosperity is a narrative that benefits the sectors of urban real estate, banking, public transport, food providers, various health, education, logistics and infrastructure business that will see the number of their clients and hence, profits increase. Next to attracting more business on its territory, the city accesses increasingly large funds for developing new science villages and other features that a proper future city needs to offer its progress-thirsty inhabitants. The world has no other ways to develop but by stepping in the footsteps of the west, that is, becoming increasingly urban. The village, that used to be self-sufficient for centuries, is seen as a dead place, or at most, as dormitory for near-by, developed cities. What is entirely left out of the narrative is whether industrialisation and urbanisation are in fact destroying rural live by pervasively co-opting it into its capitalist mode of production and consumption, whether this can be seen as a gradual cultural genocide of rural life, by means of increasingly replacing the local, community-based, rural modes of production and exchange – and the social fabric that rested on these models - with the global, urban economic model built initially around factories and supermarkets and recently around science, big data business and financial decision centres. These aspects are being mentioned in order to underline the tendency that Urban theories have to neglect analysing the rural space as being part of their scope, while rural areas and workers provide the city with vital resources. The metaphor I will employ in order to question this attitude is that of the conservative narrative of the white male western business man busy developing his successful business, ignoring the woman at home, the one that takes care of his food, clothes, and the bringing up of children. However simplified this comparison seems and however distant the two sets of narratives might be, I argue that they represent mere instances of visibility and invisibility of generic main and secondary narratives, reflecting the status of power asymmetry between urban and rural live, respectively between male and female and the way superiority is constructed.

In a recently published article about neoliberal planning, Guy Baeten shows a global trend of governments to partly dismantle their planning infrastructures and transfer them to private companies

(Baeten, 2017). According to Florida and Jonas, the author notes, the increase of urban poverty was no accidental by-product of austerity measures but an explicit goal. The 1990s saw the introduction of 'roll-out neoliberalism' – the 'Third Way' of Blair and Clinton – that reinvigorated the interference of the state in social and penal matters, specifically dealing with the disciplining and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neo-liberalization of the 1980s. In Chile, the state on the one hand withdrew from the overregulation of capital and labour, and on the other hand assumed a proactive role in the management, suppression and punishment of the poor. The shift from managerialism (local provision of services, facilities and benefits to the urban population) to entrepreneurialism is achieved by (1) exploiting and promoting production advantages, attracting creative-class, (2) increased consumption through the promotion of tourism, shopping centres, mega events, spectacular architecture and removal of unpleasant sights and bodies, (3) attraction of command and control functions in finance and information industries – the so called information city and (4) large government contracts in the military industries and other research-intensive industries. "The general norm that governs actual proper functioning of subject has become competition", argues Baeten. Quoting Crouch, Baeten warns that "political and economic elites will do everything that they can to maintain neoliberalism in general and the finance-driven form of it in particular" as they have largely benefited "from the inequalities of wealth and power that the system has produced". Gunder´s question quoted by Baeten - "What has happened to planning's traditional concerns about fairness, equity, and social justice?" seems to be of distinct importance. If we can regain "belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost", the author claims. The building of a free society should become once again "an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage".

In a study about managerial approaches of housing in a marginalized neighbourhood of Malmö, Parker & Madureira introduce Shuman's definition of legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions". The distribution of resources is managed by the construction of narratives that succeed in claiming what parties have the right to negotiate, to win, and which parties and individuals are excluded from the negotiation (Parker & Madureira, 2015). The authors argue that gaining an image of legitimacy and credibility brings freedom from questioning, creates room to maneuver and ultimately to gain access to potentially available resources. The study shows that management legitimacy and credibility increase opportunities for attracting cumulative public and private investment, next to influencing strategies for urban regeneration and control.

In the case of urban infrastructure megaprojects, planning and budgeting is not always optimal. In a research titled "Megaproject Policy and Planning: Problems, Causes, Cures", Flyvbjerg, (2007) identifies as main problem in megaproject development "pervasive misinformation about the costs, benefits, and risks involved", arguing that planners and promoters "deliberately misrepresent costs, benefits, and risks in order to increase the likelihood that their projects, gain approval and funding". This is obviously a worrying conclusion and it strongly resonates with Baeten's suggestion (2017) that competition needs to be replaced with traditional concerns about fairness, equity, and social justice.

Analysing the relation between dissemination through mass media and planning research, Flyvbjerg (2012) revisits the meaning of phronesis in Aristotle's words, "reason capable of action". Phronetic research results ("reason") are results only to the extent they have an impact on practice ("action"). In public affairs, reason is made capable of action by effectively having reason enter the public sphere and public deliberation. The author suggests that scholars should "take responsibility for gaining impact

with their research in public deliberation and practice by engaging with mass media". Pointing at cases in which project promoters, including the Danish government, repeatedly made the same kind of errors over various megaprojects, underestimating costs by billions of dollars and thereby placing large sums of citizens' money at risk, the author suggests that "an error made three times straight was perhaps not a random error" but might be incompetence or lying. Flyvbjerg's research was criticised by the Minister of Transportation and undermined by megaproject promoters. Describing the ongoing conflict with PR staff of megaproject developers, the author underlines the importance of the practice of micro-politics, a work that researchers need to do in order "to protect the power of knowledge and to make debate transparent" for the sake of knowledge and public deliberation. The author rightly argues for the need of research to shifts from 'knowledge sitting in academic planning publications to knowledge that impacts practice'. Dissemination of research can be a powerful means to 'strengthen truth and democracy in the societies where we live'. Since academic research is mostly made possible by public funds, study results that can contribute at impeaching waste of public funds by in 'business as usual' by megaproject developers need to be made public.

Although the above studies investigate aspects of urban housing and construction megaprojects, this kind of planning mechanisms are at play in the larger urban context when it comes to choosing one technology or business strategy or vendor over another. In the case of the smart city, solutions will perhaps be brought to us by the most credible service providers that will know to present their solutions as most credible. Like in the cases of budgeting neighborhood renovation or complex infrastructure projects, potential risks of distributing funds in the advantage of some parties at the cost of other raises questions of justice (above legitimacy), questions of equalitarian and ethical nature with regard to the modes of construction and negotiation of legitimacy, with the political and economic advantages and the marginalization that derive from the process.

From the perspective of the labour market - how does the evolution of digital science and neo-liberal modes of production of the IT sector affect the young programmers looking for ways to bring significant contributions to society and to start a successful career? A recent study based on ethnographic observations and interviews held at hackathons in New York shows that the format and the narratives of recent hacking events narrate "unpaid and precarious work as an extraordinary opportunity, a ritual of ecstatic labour, (…) a powerful strategy for manufacturing workers' consent in the *new* economy", strongly promoting the cultural appeal of Silicon Valley. (Zukin & Papadantonakis, 2017). By contrast, hacking initially emerged within groups of nerds that mastered computer languages in the early years of university-based computer programming. It later on became a set of cultural practices, consisting in graduate students working "through the night to solve programming problems, waiting for turnaround time to see if their program was successful" - out of love for programming and excellence[13]. Yet another collective practice co-opted by IT giants? Considering the myriads of economic and politic stakeholders, financial entities, urban planners and design professionals that collaboratively or competitively aim to shape and control the course of urbanisation, what is the role that city dwellers can play in shaping of their own everyday life and can the multitude of nuances of these ongoing negotiations be captured?

Answers to such questions should address aspects related to the increasing shift of economic power towards giant smart technology providers and the (naturally) unequal distribution of specialised

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[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_culture

knowledge among citizens, knowledge needed for an effective participation as co-creators of the smart technologies that play an increasing role in shaping our everyday life.

While there is vast academic knowledge about the damages that capitalism and in particular recent forms of neo-liberalization are causing to the fabric and texture of society, the actual initiatives for change (such as transition network, circular economy, urban permaculture etc.) are less studied in academic contexts. This fact raises the question whether these alternatives modes of organisation are scarce themselves in terms of populations they involve and the success they achieve in positively impacting urban life, or are they seen as not sufficiently interesting for the academia to be considered as research areas, due to the fact that there is not yet sufficient academic literature available on these approaches.

Capitalism, with its inherent internal contradictions has always been in crisis (Marcuse, 2010). Its more recent manifestation as various types of neoliberalism have been pointed out as the cause of increasing inequality, poverty and marginalisation for the masses since the early writings of Marx, Engels to more recently Harvey, Lefebre, Sennett. Marcuse pushes the critical narrative further, by urging us to have the courage and name the common goal and the common enemy. What kind of risk does it imply to speak up and what are the urban spaces that afford such forms of critical expression and even hope and trust - that can generate change?

**Conscience and contemplation in the city**

Sennett has nostalgically written about evolution and devolution of conscience in the city, shaped by its architecture and shaping it in return, in his visionary work "The Conscience of the Eye". For the Greeks, the eye was an organ of conscience; the word *theoria*, root of theory, means to look at, seeing. One would say conceiving a theory is close to having a vision about something. In Christian tradition, the quest sent the man rather on an inward journey which would bring, at the end of the journey, a sense of gracefulness and balance, a centeredness. He later on contrasts the architecture of the church with the space of secular authority:

> "*Sacred interiors were spaces of the Word, of confession and prayer, of submission to God (...). Precision and charity, definition and refuge were indissoluble. Today, the secular space of authority is empty (...). The visual forms of legibility in urban design or space no longer suggest much about subjective life or heal the wounds of those in need. The sanctuary of the Christian city has been reduced to a sense of comfort in well-designed places where others do not intrude (...). Authority is divorced from community*" (Sennett, 1990) - he writes, having the Rockefeller Center of New York in mind.

In his provocative book "The scent of time", Byung-Chul Han recalls the three forms of activity known by the free man, in his reading of Aristotle: striving for pleasure (*hedone*), producing noble deeds in the polis (*politikos*) and contemplation on beauty and truth (*theoria*), according to the author (Han, 2017). In the same manner that Sennett sees the result of Christian contemplation as an inner sense of balancing and centering, Han sees lingering as aiming to collect oneself and gathering of the senses. Han calls a life dedicated to the contemplation of truth *vita contemplativa*, contrasting it to *vita activa* – which should be secondary and serving the aim of contemplative activity. One of the crisis of our contemporary society is, in Han's vision, the lack of time for thinking, which causes avoidance of divergent views. One can say this is a superficial form of

consensus without consensus, in the sense that divergent views by not being opposed and negotiated, by in fact being entirely ignored, generate an illusion of harmony in which dissent is ignored all together.

Let us consider the impact that various kinds of entertainment activities and commodities, designed to seduce us, have on our capacity to think: the smartphone for example - when used without discernment, can occupy our attention and time for hours in a row, shifting our focus from one tweet to another in ways similar to zipping through TV channels, numbing the mind of its critical and introspection capacities. In Han's words, "active life without any contemplative dimension (…) finds expression in accelerated production and destruction".  From this perspective, refusing the hyperactivity that the actual models of economy, education and entertainment promote, and intentionally directing our attention to contemplation of beauty and truth – can be seen as an act of resistance. For Han, the revitalization of *vita contemplativa* is a necessity, as it is opening up space for breath and for spirit (*pneuma*), without which, human being suffocates. In our mainly secular world, where sacred spaces have been replaced by places of authority, like Sennett has noted, the question that raises is where are the places and what are the disciplines other than religion that can host such modes of *vita contemplativa* – as an explicit act of positioning oneself in relation to the mainstream advocated lifestyles of continuous production activity?

**Critical art as activism**

In an article about artistic activism and agonistic spaces, Chantal Mouffe questions whether artistic practices can play a critical role in the actual society, as the difference between art and advertising has almost vanished and artists and cultural professionals have become an integral, co-opted class of mainstream capitalist system. According to her, the demands for autonomy of earlier activist movements have gradually been incorporated in the post-Fordist networked economy. Today, "artistic and cultural production play a central role in the process of capital valorization" (Mouffe, 2007).

At the moment I write these lines, the exhibition *Reflective Roaming – Design, ubiquitous fantasy, everyday reality* is opening in Bremen, Norway, at the faculty of Fine Arts, Music and Design[14]. In the words of research fellow Albert Cheng Syun Tang,

> "We are living in an unprecedented time in which nearly everything about the material and the immaterial, ranging from refrigerators to thoughts, are being informatized, captured, interconnected and exchanged. What is the costs of being fully engaged with the visions presented by tech corporate institutions?"

Tang's work addresses the question of everyday at the intersection of information technology and market, and "what does it mean to be human in the eyes of machines?"

By the fact that it is a practice-based research, his critical inquiry into contemporary anxieties of living and being in the ever-expanding, networked fabrication of everyday landscapes – can generate types of experience more direct than academic texts written in the classic social science language, that can work as an invitation to intellectual reflection but can perhaps have less affective impact in the way as a sensed

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[14] https://kmd.uib.no/en/Calendar/final-exhibition-by-research-fellow-tang

encounter with a work of art can produce. Attending an exhibition or watching a acritical performance, by its participative dimension, has a stronger impact than reading a text about a particular work of art, in the same way as joining street protests of *Los Indignados* movement in 2008 in Spain can trigger a stronger impact than attending a Power Point presentation about the manifestations, in a classroom setting. Moreover, the effect on the social fabric of the actual developments in the field of smart technologies will only be measured and studied by classic social science methodologies after will have been implemented and employed for a number of years, so that sufficient quantitate and qualitative data can be collected and analyzed.

As complementary modes of reflection and knowledge production, art projects employ fiction, imagine future situations, addressing potential effects of the technologies yet to become everyday reality. Such is the work presented at the Vienna Biennale in 2015 by the architects collective Stealth[15], for an imagined biennale in 2049: according to their scenario, Vienna's smart city operating system has collapsed, and the question is whether it should be restarted at all. According to the artists scenario titled *The Report*, "Three years ago – 15 September 2046 – every single networked process and product in Vienna, everything that made Vienna so smart, simply stopped" (Currion, Džokić, Gruber, & Neelen, 2015) - as a consequence of a hack.

Malmö Art Museum is preparing to host a group of international artists showing works that critically address issues of danger with regard to nuclear technology, building on archives of past nuclear disasters, imagining future scenario's and questions that future generation might address in a hundred years from now: "*Perpetual Uncertainty - art and radioactivity*". The questions addressed by the artists are "(H)ow nuclear technology has affected our perception of memory, knowledge and time? (…) How can we communicate to people where our radioactive waste is stored 100 000 years from now?"[16]



Ghent, 2015.  POETRY IS DEAD   LONG LIVE THE ECONOMY[17]
Photography courtesy Christiaan De Beukelaer

The above projects and images are briefly introduced in order to give a few examples of approaching relevant issues that cannot be fully addresses and answered by means of traditional social science disciplines dues to their complexity on one side, and to methodological limitations specific to each discipline on another side.

 "Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes: first, the production of a sensory form of *strangeness*; second, the development of

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[15] http://stealth.ultd.net/?p=1543
[16] http://malmo.se/Kultur--fritid/Kultur--noje/Konst--design/Malmo-Konstmuseum/Malmo-Art-Museum/Exhibitions.html
[17] https://www.facebook.com/groups/culturalpolicy/

an awareness of the reason for that strangeness and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness", claims Jacques Rancière, where the strangeness is caused by revealing the alienation and estranged relationships produced by the language of commodities (Rancière, 2010).

In an interview from 1972 (Régnier, 1972) Lefebre argues that it is not by technocracy and architecture that the problems of everyday life in the city can be solved; these problems have multiple causes and difficult to analyse. The perception of the space produced by human activity has become paralysed among the urban professionals, lost in the functionality of the city and it needs to be reinvented. Lefebre sees this transformation to be reachable by the work of poets and philosophers, naming Nietzsche, Heidegger and Bachelard as examples of thinkers that might suggest possible solutions. Urban life has a multi-functional dimension and it needs to be approached as such[18] - in other words, in wider and effectively multidisciplinary manners.

According to recent critical urban theory, (Short, 2014) a sense of reluctance to participate, anxiety and displacement mark life in contemporary city, especially for the people who feel less competent due to the fast technological changes; this anxiety comes from the contradictory need to trust technology combined with a distrust of it and, according to Short, it is not a crisis of lack of meaning but of too much meaning. Short pleads for a "resuscitation of flânerie", and of contamination of urban research, in the sense of combining the sacred and the profane, as used by Pier Paolo Pasolini, causing confusion over the dichotomy good-evil, sacred-profane. In the light of urban cleansing, we need to re-examine the ideologies, strategies and tactics that it involves. We need to produce new theories about the city as a locus of tension "between the authorial imposition of order and control, and the subaltern drive to disturb this order and contaminate the control" (Short, 2014), being aware as scientists that the narratives we create in the sacred space of the academia are contaminated by the profane everyday life of the city we inhabit.

**Conclusions**

If urban theory insists on conserving its tradition of a social science, yet on one side claiming multi-disciplinarily while on the other side marginalizing approaches from other disciplines, for reasons such as established standards with regard to use of language, methodologies and rhetoric, urban theory risks to miss significant tools for addressing social phenomena generated by a fast evolution of smart technologies (much faster than of social science), a change that co-opts citizens as participants in myriads of web applications and indirectly, trade, production and consumption mechanisms as visible as the wireless networks that most of us ubiquitously take for granted. While specialised information technology knowledge can never be entirely integrated in urban theories – just as specialised medical or financial knowledge cannot – the question that needs be addressed is: what kind of cross pollinations between disciplines and approaches can we imagine so that we can create tools that can serve urban planners, policy makers, artisans, and last but not least, city dwellers in creating a better everyday life?

More comprehensive and inclusive ways to read and to narrate the city are needed in order to reveal realities much more variegated than what can be contained by restrictive academic formats: juxtapositions of styles, of voices, of narratives, at times entirely comprehensible, at times strange, provoking, contradictory, exhilarating, sarcastic, poetic, ambivalent, provocations that can re-politicise

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[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kyLooKv6mU&t=2s

the actual discourse and welcome more actors in the negotiations. The questions "Why?", "Is it true?" and "Is it just?" need to be pushed forward on the agenda and lead the discussion, making sure that questions "Does it sell?" and "Does it work?" are addressed as secondary. Otherwise, we risk ignoring the root causes of contemporary problems, or labelling them as wicked, and seek for rather superficial solutions, allowing the market to *regulate itself* at the cost of increasing precariat for everyone except the elites, in a 'business as usual' spirit, an incapacity or unwillingness to imagine other modes of organisation, production and distribution.

In times when most academic disciplines and social initiatives for change are incrementally being adopted or co-opted by mainstream neoliberal economic narratives, through mechanisms of funding, profitable or unavoidable partnerships with corporate entities, as clients of banks and pension funds – unless we aim for a commitment to truth (Han, 2017), real change is hard if not impossible to imagine. I submit that urban theory needs to find modes of approaching problems in truly multidisciplinary manners and to invite philosophy and poetry to partake in its *theorizing*, otherwise significant aspects of the systems and phenomena we study risk being omitted and obscured under well-accepted veils of technological impositions, methodological limitations and knowledge production standards specific to one discipline or another.

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