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# The concept of metropolis

## Philosophy and urban form

**David Cunningham**

In what sense would a certain concept of the urban meet, as Henri Lefebvre asserted some thirty-five years ago, a ‘theoretical need’? What forms of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary ‘generality’ would be at stake here? And if this is indeed, as Lefebvre always insisted, a question of a necessary ‘elaboration, a search, a *conceptual* formulation’, what might a critical philosophy have to tell us, today, about what kind of concept ‘the urban’ is?<sup>1</sup>

Even as professional philosophy has never seemed so alienated from such questions, the unfolding social and spatial reality that provokes them appears, at the most basic level, more obvious and urgent than ever. For the first time, around 50 per cent of the world’s population now inhabit what is conventionally defined as urban space – more than the entire global population in 1950. Within the next few years, there are expected to be at least twenty mega-cities with populations exceeding 10 million, located in all areas of the globe. Since 1950, nearly two-thirds of the planet’s population growth has been absorbed by cities. By 2020 the total rural population will almost certainly begin to fall, meaning that *all* future population growth will, effectively, be an urban phenomenon. The pace of this process can hardly be overestimated, both in general and in particular terms. Lagos, for example, which had in 1950 a total population of 300,000, today has one of 10 million. At the same time, this staggeringly rapid development also entails new forms of urbanization, whether it be the so-called urban ‘corridors’ of the Pearl river and Yangtze river deltas, the proliferating slums of sub-Saharan Africa, or the eighty coastal miles of holiday homes and leisure resorts around Malaga, which, it has been suggested, may well be the foundation for a future megalopolis. To the extent that this indicates an emergent global society in which, as Lefebvre speculated, ‘the urban problematic becomes predominant’, such a condition involves, then, not only quantitative expansion, but also qualitative shifts – transformations within the relations between urban

and rural, as well as, with increasing importance, within and between *different* urban forms and processes of urbanization and the heterogenous forces which generate them. The potential generalization of social, cultural and technological productive logics at a planetary scale, and the ‘concrete’ networks of exchange and interaction that increasingly bind non-contiguous urban spaces together within the differential unity of a global economy, open up a historically new set of relations between universal and particular, concentration and dispersal, that clearly demand new conceptions of mediation.

If this does indeed suggest a certain ‘theoretical need’, then, in one sense, we are of course hardly short of ‘theories’ of the urban. ‘The beginning of the twenty-first century’ is, as the editors of one of an increasing number of urban studies ‘readers’ put it, ‘an exciting time for those wanting to understand the city.’<sup>2</sup> Certainly the sociological context of a dominant urbanist–technocratic positivism after World War II, into which Lefebvre made his initial intervention, seems increasingly distant, as much because its historical connection to state apparatuses themselves was rendered progressively marginal by emergent forms of capitalist development, as because it was discredited within the intellectual arena. While, under changed circumstances, the empirical sociological literature on cities continues to grow, it is now accompanied by a rather different vision of urban studies, formed out of a resurgent interest in the work of writers such as Benjamin and Kracauer, as well as the situationists and Lefebvre himself. Weighty academic studies of the city’s historical development fill the pages of publishers’ catalogues, alongside ‘biographies’, gothic ‘secret guides’ and picaresque cultural histories of major urban centres, such as Paris, London, New York, LA. At the same time, this contemporary predominance of the ‘urban problematic’ has helped, within the recent conflict of the faculties, to accord a new general theoretical significance, and political valency,

to specific bodies of knowledge, particularly geography – as subject to a disciplinary reconstruction by the writings of David Harvey, Neil Smith and others – as well as promoting a renewed interest in architecture, and architectural theory, as offering a privileged access to the distinctive features of our present era, from within the sphere of cultural production. Much of the work of Fredric Jameson since the early 1980s might, for instance, be thought as forming, and being formed by, such a theoretical conjuncture.

This has helped to foster a broader shift in a Marxist-inspired political culture. If the ‘urban’ scarcely appears as a specific thematic within the canonical works of Marx and Engels themselves, after the late 1840s at any rate, with the various twentieth-century movements of ‘actually existing socialism’ this vacuum tended to be filled by a series of profoundly *anti-urban* conceptions concerning the social and spatial conditions of political struggle. The city, Régis Debray quotes Castro as saying, is ‘a cemetery of revolutionaries and resources’ – a political judgement which runs throughout Maoist, Cuban and other Latin American models of social struggle and division.<sup>3</sup> Albeit in a more complex form, and despite the various urbanist and architectural experiments of the early metropolitan avant-gardes, this is arguably also true of the Soviet model, which maintained from the beginning an essential suspicion towards metropolitan development. In much Western Marxist theory, this judgement took a connected form in arguments about the primacy of industrialization and the factory – over any relatively autonomous processes of urbanization – within the ‘laws of motion’ of capitalist development, as well as in the composition of the proletariat as a force opposing it. Manuel Castells’s early Althusserian approach to the ‘Urban Question’ (in 1977) could be understood as a structuralist summation of this by-then-classical ‘orthodox’ position developed in explicit opposition to Lefebvre’s supposed ‘fetishization’ of urban revolution in the wake of 1968 and his reconsiderations of the revolutionary form of the Paris Commune.<sup>4</sup>

Castells has, of course, in his own distinctive way, come a long way since then – effectively passing back through Lefebvre and out the other side. But, more generally, the last couple of decades have accorded a new significance to the role of urbanization within contemporary forms of capital accumulation. This has brought to the fore a new series of socio-economic questions, concerning for example real-estate speculation, monopoly rent and finance capital, and their relation to an orthodox Marxist theory of value. As such, it has promoted a renewed focus on the role of the logics

of production, and of the social relations, specific to urbanization – as logics that are not reducible to the ‘industrial’ – and their connection to the contemporary spatial structuration of increasingly globalized flows of money, information and people. Once seemingly something of a minor stock option in the academic marketplace, the ‘urban’ appears today as a central concern across the entirety of the humanities and social sciences; even, perhaps, as one of the speculative horizons of their transdisciplinary convergence.

It is the broader theoretical and political questions raised by this convergence to which the following series of remarks are addressed. They seek to indicate a need for a wider critical reflection upon the specific trans-disciplinary terms of a developing ‘urban studies’; in particular, a reflection upon the conceptual character of the different ‘figures’ through which the socio-historical and spatial specificity of contemporary urban form has come to be articulated in and across the various fields in which it is engaged. For, as Lefebvre saw, if the urban phenomenon is indeed ‘universal’ – that is, ‘a global reality’ – the problem of the urban raises, in a particularly urgent way, the question of the forms of universality at stake in contemporary critical theory more generally, as well as its relations to more specialized knowledges and forms of cultural particularity.

While a thinking of these processes needs to direct its focus upon the systematic character of the contemporary planetary urban problematic, such a project could, I want to suggest, still find its compass in its theoretical beginnings, in a re-reading of two canonical thinkers of urban form: Lefebvre himself and Georg Simmel. For it is, relatively uniquely, if in markedly different ways, to Lefebvre and Simmel that we owe a largely undeveloped task of thinking together something like a *philosophical* concept of the urban with a *historical* account of its emergent spatial and social forms. An adequate elaboration of this task is beyond the scope of this article. However, I want instead to pursue a more modest prolegomenon to it: a brief, and necessarily schematic, interrogation of a particular historical concept of urban form – the metropolis – which has played a persistent role within certain cross-disciplinary discourses of modern social space and spatial experience. This risks the accusation of a certain anachronism, for much weight of current opinion would suggest, not without justification, that the metropolis is a form of the urban that is in the process of becoming historically surpassed in an age of the so-called network society. Nonetheless, whatever the truth of this – which is perhaps more complicated than

may be supposed – it is precisely the repeated claims that the concept of the metropolis has made, historically, to a certain (ontological and phenomenological) universal significance which, I will argue, renders it of philosophical interest. Such universality has, in turn, made it a key point of theoretical mediation between a range of different disciplines, as well as allowing for its construction as a kind of ‘privileged figure’ of capitalist modernity itself – for art, architectural or literary history as much as for social theory – which persists from Simmel, Sombart, Benjamin or Meidner through to the likes of Rem Koolhaas today.<sup>5</sup>

What follows, then, pursues a conceptual genealogy that seeks to bring out the historical logic of the concept of the metropolis. If this is an essentially ‘philosophical’ procedure, it also opens up onto some contemporary political questions, to which I will return. First, however, it is necessary to say something about the understanding of the ‘philosophical’ that is entailed by the ‘need’ for something like a philosophical concept of the urban. This will provide the context for my first claim: that the philosophical interest of the concept of metropolis lies in its presentation as a determinate negation of *the city* as a historically specific form of the urban.

### **Philosophy, the city, the metropolis**

Although one would scarcely know it from existing commentaries, Lefebvre is surprisingly explicit that, in order to ‘take up a radically critical analysis and to deepen the urban problematic’, it is philosophy that must be ‘the starting point’.<sup>6</sup> Yet if urban studies appears today as something like an emergent trans- or counter-disciplinary discipline in its own right, what contribution ‘philosophy’ – as opposed to social science or cultural theory, where, by and large, Lefebvre’s work, like that of Simmel, has been most readily received – might make to a knowledge of the urban is far from obvious. Far from obvious in one sense, that is. In another, of course, the basis for such a contribution is all too evident, and, as such, potentially misleading. For in its classical ‘origins’, philosophy itself is very precisely situated in the city (*polis*). Indeed, for Plato, if the ‘object of politics is the unity of the city’, then, as Jean-François Pradeau states, ‘the knowledge that is suited to that object is philosophy’. The city is the point at which Plato’s philosophy as a whole converges, and not only in the *Republic*. The ‘destiny of knowledge [of the truth] and that of communal [city] life’ are inextricably linked.<sup>7</sup> This means not only that it is philosophical thought that is entrusted with the foundation and government of a

being-in-common that would constitute ‘the unity of one and the same city’, but that there can be no thought *without* the *polis*. The myth of the ‘philosopher-king’ – not an expression to be found in Plato’s oeuvre as such – distracts from this more important point. Philosophy, in its classical Greek determination, is irreducibly urban. Thus, for Aristotle, similarly, man’s unique nature as a political animal [*politikon zoon*] – a conception taken up later by Marx, among others – translates as he ‘whose nature is to live in a *polis*’. While ‘the association that takes the form of a *polis*’ (*he koinonia politike*), as the condition of the ‘good life’, is determined teleologically – as ‘that for the sake of which’ (*to hou heneka*) man is designed by nature – it is philosophical reflection, as well as ‘observation’, that is required for the discovery of how this ‘good life’ is to be best attained.<sup>8</sup> Philosophy must therefore take as a central task the elaboration of a definition of ‘both the city and the knowledge that takes the city as its object’.<sup>9</sup>

These philosophical discourses of the city cast a long and diverse historical shadow, passing through medieval theology to Renaissance humanism to Enlightenment rationalism (where the idea of ‘urban planning’ as such begins)<sup>10</sup> and beyond. It is a history which, in various forms, modern philosophy has often sought to reclaim, even as it disturbs its modern disciplinary identity. Yet, as Lefebvre reminds us, such discourses emerge from, and acquire their validity only within, the historically specific urban form of the *polis* itself – that distinctive spatial and social form of relationality or ‘association’ established by what Edward Soja terms the Second Urban Revolution, beginning on the alluvial planes of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.<sup>11</sup> Soja maintains that until a Third Urban Revolution constituted by ‘urban-industrial capitalism’, the city-state form ‘was elaborated, diffused, and reinvented all over the world *with relatively little change in its fundamental spatial specificities*’. Whether or not one accepts this, if one accepts that these ‘spatial specificities’ are not those of modern urban form – and that the formation of ‘philosophy’ itself cannot be disentangled from the social relations and divisions of labour within which it is (re-)constituted – then clearly one *cannot* accept that this leaves unchanged either philosophy or its relation to a definition of ‘both the city and the knowledge that takes the city as its object’. It is a recognition of its distance from the urban form of the city that is the condition of any philosophically critical engagement with the modern urban problematic. It is in its capacity to mark such a recognition that the historically specific concept of metropolis – emergent at the beginning of

the nineteenth century, in a form which both draws upon its own classical meaning ('mother-city') and radically diverges from it<sup>12</sup> – assumes what I have posited as its potential philosophical interest.

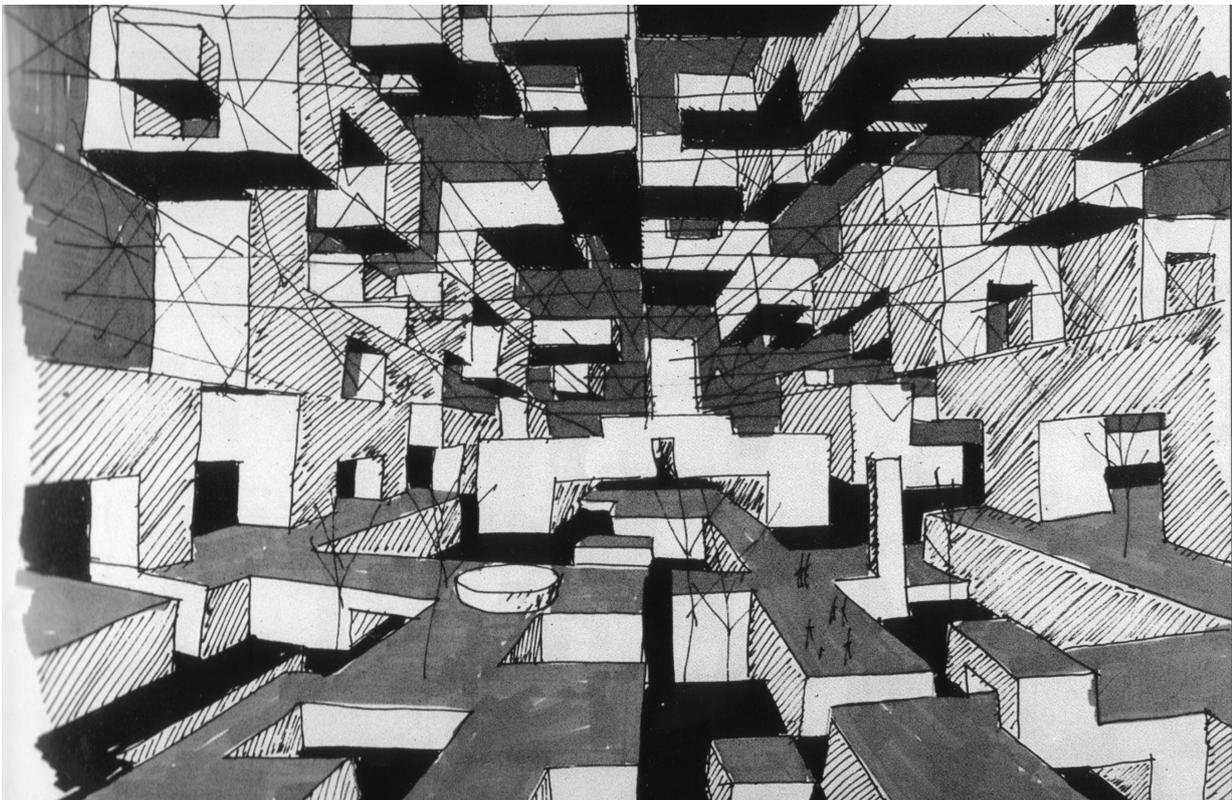
We can find a basis for this conceptual genealogy in the work of the Italian philosopher Massimo Cacciari, who, beginning with 'The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis' (1973) – and the remarkable readings of Simmel, Weber, Tonnies, Benjamin and others that it contains – has sought precisely to elaborate something like a theory of the metropolis, as something more than mere cultural history.<sup>13</sup> As Cacciari shows, while each of its great early-twentieth-century theorists may ultimately retreat from its most radically 'negative' implications, the 'image' of the metropolis nonetheless appears repeatedly in their writings in a remarkably consistent form:

an uprooting from the limits of the *urbs*, from the social circles dominant within it, from its *form* – an uprooting from the place (as a place of dwelling) connected to dwelling. The city 'departs' along the streets and axes that intersect with its structure. The exact opposite of Heidegger's *Holzwege*, they lead to no place.... The great urban sociologists of the early century perfectly understood the uprooting significance of the explosive radiating of the city.<sup>14</sup>

It is as a development of the conceptual form of such 'uprooting', of the form of the city, and of its phenomenological determination of 'place', that we arrive at the familiar construction of the metropolis

as allegory or privileged figure of capitalist modernity, the essential 'site' of modern experience from Baudelaire to Benjamin to Debord. Cacciari is no doubt right to locate Simmel's famous essay, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', as the pivotal (certainly the most influential) moment in this history. For it is a striking aspect of Simmel's essay that the metropolis is conceptually elaborated through a contrast not, as one might expect, to rural life, but rather to the life of the city in 'antiquity and in the Middle Ages'. This is the basis for a powerful phenomenological account of modern social life defined, negatively, in terms of its displacement of the 'restrictions' that such earlier urban forms imposed. If Simmel brings this out most clearly and succinctly, such a contrast was not unique among his contemporaries. Simmel's essay was written as a lecture prior to the 1903 German Metropolitan Exhibition in Dresden. Other lectures in the same series, such as that by the historian Karl Bücher, similarly stressed, as David Frisby has related, a historically specific idea of the metropolis as a 'new urban type ... with which no earlier form of city compares', inhabited by a 'new species'. If quantitative growth is important here, it is only to the extent that it issues in a *qualitative* difference. (Karl Scheffler wrote in 1910: 'What is absolutely decisive for the concept of the modern metropolis is not the number of its inhabitants but rather the *spirit* of the metropolis [*Grossstadt Geist*].'<sup>15</sup>)

Part of the rationale for the 1903 exhibition was as a counter to a strong *anti*-metropolitan tendency



in turn-of-the-century European culture, which was, significantly, not necessarily anti-urban per se. For every rural *Gemeinschaft*, often itself extrapolated into ideas of the garden city, we can find a contemporaneous vision of the city, as *polis* or *urbs*, set against the ‘new urban type’ of the metropolis. Overcoming ‘the negativity of the metropolis’, starting perhaps with Simmel himself, means always reducing it again to the regressive ‘utopia’ of the city.<sup>16</sup> (Patrizia Lombardo, for example, points to the exemplary *La Cité antique* of Fustel de Coulanges, as a utopian place ‘beyond modern contradictions’; both Cacciari and Manfredo Tafuri refer to the later, and apparently more progressive, *Deutsche Werkbund*, and to an intersection with what Lacoue-Labarthe describes as a dream of the city itself as ‘a work of art’; the *polis* as ‘belonging to the sphere of *techné*’.<sup>17</sup>) To this extent, the concept of metropolis can be shown to develop historically, not as a simple synonym for the city, and for the ancient lineage it designates, but, on the contrary, as the manifestation of a distinctively modern spatial-productive logic which opposes and unsettles it. As such it only ‘take[s] shape *conceptually* [at] the end of a process during which the old urban forms ... burst apart’.<sup>18</sup> It is in such historical and conceptual terms that Simmel’s essay must be understood. For unlike the later urban sociology and history of the Chicago School or Lewis Mumford, Simmel’s study is not devoted to a simple delineation or aggregation of examples of the urban. While his metropolis is, on some level, evidently Berlin (just as Lefebvre’s ‘urban society’ is, in some sense, Paris), the urban problematic sketched out is one precisely concerned with the possible articulation, in the cultural present, of effectively universal forms of social and spatial relationality, and the modes of experience produced by such constitutive relations – what Cacciari terms the ‘problem of the relation between modern existence and its forms’.<sup>19</sup> If, then, our reading carries us beyond the bounds of Simmel’s own presentation, nonetheless we find already there, in the 1903 essay, the metropolis as not only a ‘sociological’, but also an effectively historico-philosophical concept.

### Philosophy, abstraction, urban form

The impossibility of reconstituting an actual ‘philosophy of the city’ implies a need to think further about the relation between the historically new ‘conceptual shaping’ of urban form that, for complex reasons, the term metropolis came to mark, and the modern ‘fate’ of philosophy itself. It is instructive to consider, for example, the conceptual form of what Robert Ackermann delineates as Wittgenstein’s City

– a notion which he derives from a famous analogy in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

ask yourself whether our language is complete;  
– whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated into it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.<sup>20</sup>

Here, the heterogeneity of language games, without synthesis, that constitutes modern urban space, metaphorically and actually, must evidently be conceived in a quite different way from classical philosophy’s relation to the *polis*, which presumes a fundamental theoretical unity of knowledge(s) that would found and organize the city.<sup>21</sup> In one sense, Wittgenstein’s city may be read as a simple metaphor for the familiar story of modern philosophy’s progressive loss of ‘territory’ to the emergent ‘domains’ of the various independent sciences – the language games that include ‘the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus’, but also the ‘multitude of new boroughs’ that are the social sciences. At the same time, however, in so far as this entails, among other things, the *actual* question of ‘both the city and the knowledge that takes the city as its object’, it becomes more than just a metaphor.<sup>22</sup> For it raises, beyond Wittgenstein’s own conceptions of philosophy’s task to survey and order his metaphorical city, the philosophical question of the possibility, and possible nature, of the *interconnectedness* of knowledges that a theoretically adequate account of the urban would presuppose.

It is precisely this question that Lefebvre addresses both in *The Right to the City* (1967) and in one of the more theoretical sections of *The Urban Revolution*. It is worth looking quite closely at what he has to say here. Beginning with a characteristic Hegelian-Marxist assault on an urbanist positivism, and its production of a ‘fragmentary’ and uncritical knowledge, Lefebvre notes that such positivism ‘present[s] itself as a counterweight to classical philosophy’. Nonetheless, as soon as it ‘attempts to extend its properties’, it tends always (as with ‘linguistic models’) towards an unintended and unreflective move from the specializations of ‘science’ to the generalities of ‘philosophy’, by virtue of a necessary claim, ‘consciously or not’, upon totality:

As soon as we insist on ... totality, we extend classical philosophy by detaching its concepts (totality, synthesis) from the contexts and philosophical architectures in which they arose and took shape. The same is true for the concepts of system, order, disorder, reality and possibility (virtuality), object and subject, determinism and freedom, structure and function, form and content ... can these concepts be separated from their philosophical development?<sup>23</sup>

The issue here is the necessity and ineliminability of general concepts, as points of mediation between the different language games of specific knowledges.<sup>24</sup> The urban phenomenon, 'taken as a whole, cannot be grasped by any *specialised* science'.<sup>25</sup> Hence the 'theoretical need', if only as the basis for a speculative 'hypothesis' of the whole, for forms of broadly philosophical reflection. For it is philosophy, Lefebvre writes, which has, historically, 'always aimed at totality'.

This means two things. First, if philosophy remains necessary because of the 'theoretical need' for totality, nonetheless it cannot return, after the emergence of the specialized 'sciences', to its previous form as a given unity of theoretical knowledge(s). The demand for a conceptual elaboration cannot therefore be understood as an anachronistic reconstruction of classical philosophy's claim upon the city, but rather as the demand for a philosophically reflective form of *trans-disciplinarity* which would maintain a speculative horizon of totality in relation to a theoretical knowledge of modern urban form. (Philosophy is, in Lefebvre's terms, reconceived as a project of totality which, nonetheless, 'philosophy as such cannot accomplish'.) In Lefebvre's words, 'whenever philosophy has tried to achieve or realize totality using its own resources it has failed ... [even as it] supplies this scope and vision'.<sup>26</sup> Against the compartmentalizations of a 'fragmentary knowledge' (parcelled up between the social sciences and particularist cultural studies of the urban), the task becomes one of establishing a cross-disciplinary movement which would redeem the universalizing movement of philosophical knowledge. The second point is that this requires some justification for the forms of *abstraction* that such a project of totality entails – against the empiricist demand for an immediate turn to the 'concrete', embodied by a certain urban 'sociology'. This may well lie in the distinctive forms of *social* abstraction to which, in capitalist modernity, such a project itself relates.<sup>27</sup>

Let us continue to follow, for the moment, the development of Lefebvre's own argument. If the modern urban problematic requires conceptualization it is, Lefebvre claims, because it must itself,

*in this theoretically universal sense*, be considered, first of all, as essentially a question of 'pure form: a space of encounter, assembly, simultaneity'. As such, it has, Lefebvre continues, 'no *specific content*.... It is an abstraction, but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a *concrete abstraction*, associated with practice.'<sup>28</sup> This apparently paradoxical notion of a 'concrete abstraction' is one that Lefebvre takes, of course, from Marx; an 'inspiration' which, in relation to the broader concept of social space, is elaborated further in his best-known book, *The Production of Space* (1974).

In his work preparatory to *Capital*, Marx was able to develop such essential concepts as that of (social) labour. Labour has existed in all societies, as have representations of it ... but only in the eighteenth century did the concept itself emerge. Marx shows how and why this was so, and then ... he proceeds to the essential, which is neither a substance nor a 'reality', but rather a *form*. Initially, and centrally, Marx uncovers an (almost) pure form, that of the circulation of material goods, or *exchange*. This is a quasi-logical form similar to, and indeed bound up with, other 'pure' forms (identity and difference, equivalence, consistency, reciprocity, recurrence, and repetition).... As a *concrete abstraction*, it is developed by thought – just as it developed in time and space – until it reaches the level of social practice: via money, and via labour and its determinants.... This kind of development ... culminates in the notion of surplus value. The pivot, however, remains unchanged: by virtue of a dialectical paradox, that pivot is a quasi-void, a near-absence – namely the form of exchange, which governs social practice.<sup>29</sup>

Lefebvre is following the movement of Marx's famous methodological introduction to the *Grundrisse* – itself, as is well known, indebted to Hegel's *Science of Logic*. The articulation of urban form as a concrete abstraction is modelled here on that 'kind of development' of the concept which ('more fruitful than classical deduction, and suppler than induction or construction') leads from (abstract) thought, via increasing determinants, towards the 'rich *totality*' of relations and mediations that constitute (concrete) 'social practice'; 'whereby thought appropriates the concrete, to reproduce it as intellectually concrete'.<sup>30</sup> In this process, as one recent commentator puts it, 'In its development toward the concept, no longer immediate and empirical but conceptualized and determinate, the abstract nevertheless subsists as condition of its conceptualisation'.<sup>31</sup>

However, in Lefebvre's account, this epistemology of concrete abstraction runs into, or even up against (as indeed the *Grundrisse* itself does), a somewhat different problematic: that of *real* (or, ultimately, what

Peter Osborne calls *actual*) abstractions.<sup>32</sup> These are two different ‘forms’ of abstraction which Lefebvre tends to more or less conflate here. If each is derived, via Marx, from Hegel’s logic, they are nonetheless not identical, nor similarly radical, in their implications for a concept of urban form such as Lefebvre demands. This is particularly so once such a form is considered in relation to its historically specific manifestation within capitalist modernity, which I am taking to be named by the concept of metropolis. For what are termed here *real* abstractions – an abstraction ‘not merely as category but in reality’, as Marx begins to formulate it in the *Grundrisse* – would be neither simply one-sided intellectual generalizations, nor methodologically necessary aspects of an epistemology of concretization, but those which, in ‘*the specific set of circumstances of capitalist modernity*’, come to have an *actual* objective social existence, ‘a definite social form’, albeit one which ‘pivots’ around a ‘quasi-void’.

Lefebvre writes: as a ‘pure’ logical form, urban form ‘calls for a content and cannot be conceived as having no content; but, *thanks to abstraction*, it is in fact conceived of, precisely, as independent of any *specific content*’.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps a certain ambiguity in this phrase – ‘thanks to abstraction’ – can help us clarify something of the distinction between ‘concrete’ and ‘real’ abstraction. Its most obvious meaning is that ‘thanks’ to abstraction, as part of a methodological process, we can analyse urban space as a ‘pure form’, intellectually abstracted *from* its various, particular actual material ‘contents’, but conceptually developed in view of a ‘concrete’ whole. Yet, of course, one might also say, following *Capital*, that, in capitalist modernity, it is indeed ‘thanks’ to its actual form of abstraction that exchange, in its determinate negation of the ‘substance’ of use value, is without content, and does not ‘determine *what is exchanged*’. This just *is* the reality of the ‘pure form’ of commodity exchange, of the value form and of money, and thus, possibly, of its distinctive *spatial aspects also*. As the value-form theorist Christopher Arthur puts it:

There is a void at the heart of capitalism.... What is constituted when the heterogenous material features of commodities are declared absent from their identity as ‘values’ is a form of unity of commodities lacking pre-given content.... It can only be characterized as form as such, the pure form of exchangeability.... It is the form of exchange that is ... the primary determinant of the capitalist economy rather than the content regulated by it.<sup>34</sup>

This form of exchangeability – when it reaches the point of ‘self-valorizing value’ – has no ‘natural limit’

(as regards *what* can be exchanged). As such, its capacity to ‘take on’ any ‘specific content’ itself confirms its status, conceptually, as a pure form that *actually* ‘governs social practice’.

Lefebvre’s equation of urban form with Marx’s ‘uncovering’ of the pure form of exchange raises the following questions. Like exchange, specifically monetary exchange – which does not, formally, ‘determine *what is exchanged*’ – does the *modern* urban phenomenon have a very particular and very *real* historically determined ‘affinity with logical forms’?<sup>35</sup> If so, to what degree, and in what sense, might the ‘abstraction’ of the concept of metropolis be connected to the ‘abstractness’ of that form (of the urban) to which it is related?<sup>36</sup> Indeed, would recognition of such abstraction be a condition of any claim to grasp its general (‘concrete’) historical specificity?

Lefebvre himself ultimately steps back from the more radical implications of such questions. Indeed, he finally comes down on the side of what he takes to be the ‘different’ conceptual ‘development’ of the *Grundrisse* over that of *Capital*: the latter presented as ‘impoverishing’ because of its ‘strict formal structure’ – focused on ‘the quasi-“pure” form’ of value – by comparison with the former’s openness to ‘more concrete themes’ and ‘more practical conditions’.<sup>37</sup> Yet this clearly risks misunderstanding what is at stake in the logic of the ‘formal structure’ of *Capital*, to the extent that it turns around the *real* abstraction of the value form as that which defines the historical specificity of capitalism as such. It is not insignificant, then, that, apparently tracing the developmental structure of Marx’s own work, it is the ‘bad abstraction’ of abstract labour (time), rather than the value form, which Lefebvre takes as his starting point for the discussion of abstraction through which the key concept of ‘abstract space’ is elaborated in *The Production of Space*. Yet, as Arthur points out, it is ‘the form of exchange that establishes the necessary social synthesis in the first place’.<sup>38</sup> It is *capital* not labour that, analytically at least, takes ‘priority’ here. Eliding this, Lefebvre seems to try to hold on to a notion of abstract space as something like the merely social form of *appearance* of ‘concrete’, ‘lived’ spatial relations of production and experience.

Yet, is it not the case that ‘abstract space’ must *itself* be understood as the condition of that ‘real’ production of space – and spatial relations – which is formed, above all (if not exclusively), in terms of a production *for exchange*, part of a ‘real subsumption’ to the self-production of value? If so, a certain abstract form of relationality would, in this sense, *be* abstract space’s

real ‘content’ – the condition of a new spatial logic of social connectivity and ‘life’ – a ‘common content’ that is not ‘pre-given’ (a simple abstraction *out of* what is there), but rather itself a kind of ‘introjection’ of this abstract form.<sup>39</sup> This perhaps, above all, defines the conceptual problematic of the metropolis.

### City of money

Nowhere in Lefebvre’s account is Simmel mentioned, but there is an obvious point of proximity here to the concerns of the 1903 essay. The metropolis, Simmel famously writes, is ‘the seat of’, and is ‘dominated’ by, ‘the money economy’, defined by its ‘multiplicity and concentration of economic exchange’. It is money, ‘with all its colourlessness and indifference, [which] becomes the common denominator of all values [in the metropolis]; irreparably it hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability. All things float with equal specific gravity.’<sup>40</sup> The metropolis would thus be, for Simmel, the historically specific spatial formation of ‘those differences that, as the measure and calculation of value, integrate *every phenomenon* into the dialectic of *abstract value*’.<sup>41</sup> Yet, we should note, in its relation to the money economy, the metropolis appears in two significantly different ways in Simmel’s account: as both its ‘seat’ and as that which is itself ‘dominated’ by its form. In the first case, the metropolis is understood as something like the ‘material support’ of monetary exchange, the primary space ‘in’ which exchange happens (takes place). In the second, the metropolis designates the general processes by which *space itself* is formed or produced by exchange (in a way which *takes* ‘place’, ‘hollows out’ its ‘specific [use] values’ and ‘incomparability’). As Cacciari puts it, Simmel finds, in the Metropolis, ‘the *general form* assumed by the process of the rationalization [and *abstraction*] of social relations’.<sup>42</sup> While these two relations to the money economy are not separable, indeed are in some sense mutually conditional, it is the nature of this generality which needs to be interrogated.

Conceptually, then, the metropolis is ‘shaped’, in its ‘pure form’, as that which is both constituted by and representative of the distinctive (and immanently contradictory) forms of real abstraction which inhere in the social relations of capitalist modernity. Metropolis would be a name for the generalized spatial formation of a certain reality of pure forms – the spatial correlate, primarily, of monetary exchange’s general mediation and production of the social – which, negating the urban form of the *city*, set out on their own logic of development. If the metropolis is ‘a quasi-logical form’,

then, it is so as a form which unites a differential whole in which every particular ‘place’ is rendered ‘*equi-valent*’ in a universal circulation and exchange. It is this that constitutes its affinity with philosophical knowledge, as a ‘form’ ‘similar to, and indeed bound up with’, as Lefebvre puts it, ‘other “pure” forms (identity and difference, equivalence, consistency, reciprocity, recurrence, and repetition)’. (Remember, it was the logical forms of ‘identity and difference’ that already constituted the ‘philosophical’ terrain of Plato and Aristotle’s classical dispute over the *polis*.<sup>43</sup>) Nonetheless, any concept of urban form will always be in danger of being reified as a mere empty and static formalism without its reciprocal mediation by an account of the evolving spatial and socio-historical processes through which such form is reproduced. Hence, the necessity of a *transdisciplinarity* in the formation of a ‘project of totality’, which philosophy itself cannot accomplish, reliant on the *collaborative* intersection of a range of forms of knowledge, which would seek to trace the intersectional relations of the metropolis itself.<sup>44</sup>

If therefore the metropolis presents itself as a form of (real) abstraction, and is only ‘unified’ as such, it still only attains ‘real existence’, and thus both specific and *variable* ‘form’ and ‘content’ – as, in principle, does any social space – by virtue of the spatial production of its open and dispersed totality of specific material assemblages, its particular ‘bunches or clusters of relationships’, its own multiple transactions and contacts, which are in themselves highly differentiated, if always related to its general form.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, without these it has no *concrete* form or determinate ‘meaning’ at all. But, by contrast to the earlier forms of what Lefebvre terms ‘absolute’ and ‘historical’ space – in which, as in the *polis*, the ‘incomparability’ of the intrinsic qualities of certain sites remains essential – ‘specific values’ are no longer, in themselves, definitive of the urban as such, but are constitutively mediated by a pure form of exchangeability. *Phenomenologically*, if the metropolis has a universal ‘content’ it is what Cacciari calls ‘non-dwelling’, the ‘content’ of a structure of historical experience in which ‘dwelling’ – that great Heideggerian thematic – appears only as ‘absent form’ a nostalgic projection of irrecoverable ‘value’ and belonging. A sober and lucid analysis of the ‘problem of the relation between modern existence and its forms’, could only be constructed at the level of a ‘universal’ mediation of the irreducible *phenomenological actuality of abstraction* in the metropolis, and thus of its historical formation of social-spatial life and subjectivity.<sup>46</sup>

In its standard appropriation by cultural, literary and art theory, the tendency has been to mine Simmel's essay for a kind of impressionistic historicist typology of urban phenomena: the blasé type, urbane intellectualism, and so on. Yet, in the systematic network of relations that constitute the essay itself, these precisely make sense as multifarious, and often conflictual, aspects of a logic of abstraction which they cannot exhaust. As with, say, Benjamin's account of the *flâneur*, elaborated in relation to nineteenth-century Paris, there is thus something inherently problematic about an attempt to locate such types, in isolation, as definitive of the metropolis as such. (This is even more obviously the case once we address the issue of the heterogeneity of emergent non-Western forms of metropolitan urbanization, and their relation to European or North American forms. The urban has never, of course, been an exclusively – or even dominantly – Western form.) As concept, the metropolis is articulable only as a dynamic technical system of relations or references, of connectivity, and of production. It is this that is approached through the different, precisely formal, cross-disciplinary *figures* of metropolitan organization and social-spatial relations; common figures that we find in Lefebvre and Simmel, as in Benjamin, and others: assemblage, ensemble, collage, constellation, web, network, and so on. It goes without saying that the currency of such figures must now be thought in relation to the changing nature of the social and spatial relations within which the tendencies of contemporary global urbanization unfolds. One would need to think here, for example, of the extent to which the current hegemonic figure of the network – 'today we see networks everywhere', write Hardt and Negri<sup>47</sup> – and its own claim to the conceptual mediation of an emergent social totality, may or may not be understood to mark the effective *extension* of a metropolitan productive logic, as Cacciari suggests: the simultaneous joining up of 'juxtaposed and distant points' that – no longer held (however porously) within the continuous spatial totality of more or less discrete metropolises – now forms an emergent, immanently differentiated, *total* process of urbanization on a planetary scale.<sup>48</sup>

I leave this as an open question here. Certainly, in so far as the social space of exchange would now seem to encompass (if unevenly) the entire planet – a global dimension to the abstractness of the value-form which takes further (spatially and phenomenologically) the determinate negation of the 'specific value' and 'incomparability' of place – it can appear, as acknowledged at the beginning of this article, that the metropolis is in the process of being itself negated as the

contemporary form of the urban, displaced by some new logic of spatial production. Hence the profusion of new concepts in urban studies which seek to grasp this shift; starting, no doubt, with Soja's 'Postmetropolis' – the figure, so he claims, of a *Fourth* Urban Revolution. Yet, in so far as the concept of metropolis, as *pure* form, *already* presents itself in relation to a projected horizon of *absolute* (spatial) equi-valence, it does not yet seem redundant as regards an adequate knowledge of contemporary urban form. If so, it may, however, now come to appear in two different (but interrelated) ways: on the one hand, as the dispersed 'elements' of a global interconnected network – a network which is constitutive of the particular form and 'experience' of any particular metropolis<sup>49</sup> – and, on the other, as the basic, generalized form of that network itself, which is thus conceptually shaped as a historically new kind of, universally 'radiated', 'virtual metropolis' (to borrow a phrase from Koolhaas).<sup>50</sup> Perhaps it is the reciprocal play between these different levels, and their 'quasi-logical' forms, that could be said to define, conceptually, the contemporary global urban problematic. At the very least, it seems possible to argue that, as such, the metropolis may still productively present itself as a kind of shifting 'hegemonic figure' – an ongoing point of mediation with the most general forms of social experience and practice – conceptually homologous to the overall tendencies of global urban capitalist development.

### Value, abstraction and difference

Historically, metropolis names a certain quasi-universal structure. If my argument is accepted, it designates, more specifically, a 'real' spatial form of abstraction which is constitutive of particular formations of historical experience. Yet, precisely as such, this provokes a question concerning the exact relationship between the metropolis and the value-form (as apparently *the* structuring abstraction of capitalist modernity). Is it the case, as much of our analysis would seem to suggest, that the metropolis is, conceptually and practically, necessarily rendered subordinate in such a relation – internal to its field, its conditions of possibility, nothing more than a 'specific' (if especially significant) determination of its pure form of exchangeability? Or is there some more complex and variant structure of determination at stake here?<sup>51</sup>

There can be little question that it is the socio-economic processes of capitalist relations of production and exchange, dominated by the value-form, that have historically constituted, and continue to constitute, the metropolis. There is no metropolis *without* the

hegemony of capital. Yet such hegemony is not *total* or complete. For capitalism itself is not reducible to the logics of accumulation of capital nor to the *specific* abstraction of the value-form. It is – and the same is no less true for modern urban forms – always articulated with other, ‘non-capitalist’ social forms and relations; indeed it cannot reproduce itself without them, even if it must, in turn, reconstitute them in new ways. In fact, ‘nowhere’ is this clearer than in the contemporary re-formation of the metropolis, which is subject to a generalization that would no longer restrict its ‘terrain’ to the classical ‘sites’ of Simmel’s Berlin, Benjamin’s Paris or Musil’s Vienna, but which would ‘incorporate’ the likes of Lagos, Mumbai, São Paulo or Kuala Lumpur. One might even suggest, as Koolhaas’s collaborator Nanne de Ru does, that while ‘Europe was once the birthplace of the Metropolis’, its future is ‘being defined in the developing world’.<sup>52</sup> Of course, politically, if this is understood as allowing a recourse *only* to the residual oppositionality of so-called *pre*-capitalist cultural and social forms, it will do little more than offer what Tafuri calls a ‘rearguard’ action, the pretext for a reactive pathos of enclave theory, place-creation or the *genius loci*, and thus a failure to confront the ‘truth’ of the metropolis, to understand the road historically travelled. Yet if the metropolis does indeed present itself as ‘pure form’, empty of any specific content (including specific political or cultural content), the practical productive possibilities of the metropolitan system of connectivity are not exhausted, in advance, by their abstract structuring by the conditions of capital accumulation. (Nor are they only ‘opposed’ by what supposedly remains of the ‘outmoded’, more ‘concrete’, forms which ‘precede’ them.) The forms of relationality determined by exchangeability are, at the very least, always themselves subject (in however minor a way) to a kind of potential *détournement*, as the histories of urban conflicts, from the Paris Commune onwards, suggest. (A church can, in the formal structure of universal equivalence, become a café, an art gallery, a set of apartments, a recording studio, or whatever.)

It is a telling sign of the ongoing resonance of the problematics associated with any particular concept that they should find themselves absorbed into Hardt and Negri’s continuing struggle to give substance to the idea of the multitude. It is worth noting, then, that as well as citing in *Multitude* ‘the urbanization of political struggle and armed conflict in the 1970s’, as one key element in ‘the construction of new circuits of communication [and] new forms of social collaboration’, Negri, in an essay published in 2002 entitled

‘The Multitude and the Metropolis’, explicitly toys with an idea of what he describes as the ‘internally antagonistic’ spatial configuration of the metropolis as that which might replace the privileged ‘place’ previously accorded to the factory (even as extended into Tronti’s ‘social factory’), as the crucial site of both social production and conflict.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, politically, as well as philosophically, the foregoing must suggest a certain set of *complications* regarding the nature of this antagonism, as well as its concomitant new social forms of collaboration, that Negri seeks to articulate; just as it does for Lefebvre’s influential account of abstraction and the urban. ‘New social relationships call for a new space’, Lefebvre famously wrote in *The Production of Space*. And, in a classically dialectical formulation, he gave this space an equally famous and influential name: *differential space*. Abstract space ‘relates negatively to something which it carries within itself and which seeks to emerge from it’: the utopian ‘seeds of a new space’ harboured by abstract space’s ‘specific contradictions’. ‘Formal and quantitative’, the ‘bad abstraction’ of abstract space is, like abstract labour time, that which ‘erases distinctions’. The metropolis is thus the ‘site’ of a necessary and irreducible conflict:

Today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space. Indeed, it is that struggle alone which prevents abstract space from taking over the whole planet and papering over all differences. Only the class struggle has the capacity to differentiate, to generate differences which are not intrinsic to economic growth *qua* strategy, ‘logic’ or ‘system’.<sup>54</sup>

Although Lefebvre’s dialectical formulations are far from being Negri’s, it is evidently such a conception of conflict to which Negri has turned in his recent work. It is the positivity of ‘living labour’, in the figure of the multitude, which generates, as ‘creative force’ of ‘autonomous power’, its oppositional differences and multiplicity in the metropolis’s ‘molecular’ antagonistic space. Taking up Rem Koolhaas’s (somewhat ambiguous) celebration of what he calls a *delirious* metropolis – but perhaps with an unacknowledged debt also to his former collaborator on the journal *Contropiano*, Cacciari – Negri finds there, like Lefebvre, the signs of a struggle against the imperial ‘bad abstraction’ of abstract space. A hybrid space, the metropolis produces new spaces of autonomy which sow the seeds of ‘new social relationships’, new modes of cooperation.

One would hardly wish to dispute such a possibility, nor the recognition of the fundamental forms of social division inscribed within contemporary urban space that such a vision articulates. Yet, from the

perspective of the discussion of abstraction outlined above, it provokes some difficult questions (not only for Negri and Lefebvre, it should be said, but for pervasive postmodern conceptions of a coming cosmopolis also). Both Negri and Lefebvre commend themselves here because they are relatively free of what has been a historically all too common leftist nostalgia for the social forms of village, town or city. Each knows that the logic of the metropolis cannot simply be evaded, only actively and productively engaged. Nonetheless, despite this, each also still seems tied to a futurally projected idea of difference that would somehow lie beyond abstraction per se. Differential space, Lefebvre writes,

accentuates differences ... [but it] also restore[s] unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice. It will put an end to those localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge. By contrast, it will distinguish what abstract space tends to identify.<sup>55</sup>

It is as such, for Lefebvre, that differential space relates to the *negativity* of abstraction. Yet, would not a certain abstract space be *itself* the condition, or indeed necessary *form*, of such a differential space?<sup>56</sup> Indeed, without certain structures and experiences of abstraction would any such space of a differential connectivity or social ‘unity’ be conceivable at all? This seems a particularly pertinent question in the context of contemporary urban form. It suggests that the received opposition between the ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ needs rethinking at this point. For abstract space is itself also a *positive* ‘site’ of the production of experience, constitutive of new ‘concrete’ forms of spatial relationality generative of social meaning. It is not simply, as is implied in much reception of Lefebvre’s work, a mere representational form of conceptual masking or misrecognition of some underlying and unchanging ‘content’ of a real, multiple and concrete ‘lived experience’.<sup>57</sup> In the metropolis, Simmel writes, what appears in spatial relations and experience ‘directly as dissociation is in reality only one of its elemental forms of socialization’.<sup>58</sup> Such is the specifically metropolitan negative dialectic of capitalist modernity, which, indeed, constitutes the urbane form of Simmel’s essay itself, and of its own definitively unreconcilable antinomies.

In this sense, politically, one might wonder whether it is, today, less a simple question of ‘difference’ versus ‘abstraction’ – the lineaments of an eminently deconstructable binary opposition – than one of

whether it is possible to conceive of an alternate relationship *between* difference and abstraction than that constituted by the value-form. If so, how then can we conceive today what the *World Charter of the Rights to the City*, drawn up at the Social Forum of the Americas in 2004, posits as the potential of the urban? As the charter acknowledges, if the social divisions of the metropolis favour ‘the emergence of urban conflict’, its contemporary formations also mean that this is ‘usually fragmented and incapable of producing significant change in the current development models’.<sup>59</sup> As a recent UN–Habitat report on ‘human settlements’ shows, contemporary global urbanization is dominated by the spatial spread of what it defines as *slums*, in which nearly one billion people – approaching 32 per cent of the global urban population – now live. In sub-Saharan Africa the proportion is closer to 72 per cent. The overall figure may well double within thirty years. Worldwide, poverty is becoming urbanized.<sup>60</sup> Such development continues to be overdetermined by the distinctive and contradictory modes of abstraction of the value form, but according to spatial logics that are no longer those of the early twentieth century.

In 1848 Marx saw ‘enormous cities’ as one form of relationality in which the proletariat’s strength would grow and it could feel ‘that strength more’.<sup>61</sup> Yet, as Mike Davis notes in a recent article, the newly expanding urban population of the ‘developing world’, ‘massively concentrated in a shanty-town world’, lacks anything like the ‘strategic economic power of socialized labour’. Struggles here tend to be ‘episodic and discontinuous’, reflecting a reconfiguration of the ‘local’ itself as fugitive, transitory and migrant.<sup>62</sup> What possibilities of emancipation might emerge through such new metropolitan forms of relationality and interconnectedness remains opaque and unpredictable. Yet it is, finally, in an attempt to elaborate these that the concept of the metropolis must meet its real theoretical need.

## Notes

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1. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (1970), trans. Robert Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2003, p. 5, my emphasis.

2. John Eade and Christopher Mele, 'Introduction: Understanding the City', in *Understanding the City: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2002, p. 3.
3. See Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p. 3.
4. Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, Edward Arnold, London, 1977.
5. For a standard expression of the metropolis as allegory, or 'privileged figure', of the modern, see Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, pp. 55, 112.
6. Henri Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, in *Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed. Eleanore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell, Oxford and Malden MA, 1996, p. 86.
7. Jean-François Pradeau, *Plato and the City: A New Introduction to Plato's Political Thought*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Exeter University Press, Exeter, 2002, p. 5.
8. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair, rev. Trevor J. Saunders, Penguin, London, 1992, pp. 59 [I ii], 54 [I i].
9. Pradeau, *Plato and the City*, p. 43.
10. See Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia LaPenta, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1976, pp. 1–40.
11. Following, and considerably extending, the arguments of Jane Jacobs, as well as drawing on the archaeological research of Kathleen Kenyon and James Mellaart, Soja asserts the existence of a First Urban Revolution beginning in Southwest Asia over 10,000 years ago: the development of *pre-agricultural* urban settlements of hunters, gatherers and traders that he identifies with the urban forms to be found at Jericho in the Jordan Valley and Çatal Hüyük in southern Anatolia. See Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000, pp. 19–49.
12. In its nineteenth-century origins, the historical shift that is at stake here can be most clearly registered, in English, by the term's evolving figural uses, in medicine and natural history, as well as by a series of new coinages around the 1850s: 'metropolitaneously', 'metropolitanism', 'metropolitanize'. Most significantly, such new terms each relate to a relatively new sense of the word 'metropolitan' itself, as designating distinctive forms of 'ideas', 'spirit' or 'manners'. It is in this light, too, that we would have to think the German word *Grossstadt* (literally 'big city') – the term used in Simmel's famous essay – as entailing something more than the mere quantitative designation that it might appear to represent. For while it is true that, in Germany as elsewhere, the end of the nineteenth century saw an ongoing debate concerning the *statistical* definition of a metropolis (generally put at 100,000 occupants), this debate also consistently stresses, and elaborates upon, its crucially *qualitative* dimensions.
13. For further introduction to Cacciari and to the theory of the metropolis, see Gail Day, 'Strategies in the Metropolitan Merz', in this issue of *RP*; David Cunningham, 'The Phenomenology of Non-Dwelling: Massimo Cacciari, Modernism and the Philosophy of the Metropolis', *Crossings* 7, 2004; and Patrizia Lombardo, 'Introduction: The Philosophy of the City', in Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993. Lombardo's title is unfortunate given that, as she herself shows, Cacciari's work of the 1970s and early 1980s is precisely constituted as a philosophy of the *metropolis*.
14. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, pp. 199–200.
15. The citations from Bücher and Scheffler are both taken from David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 131–9, 266.
16. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, p. 23. If the canonical postwar expression of such a regressive utopia is to be found in the work of Lewis Mumford, its most recently influential articulation would be in the writings of Richard Sennett. See, in particular, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Faber & Faber, London and Boston, 1994. For Cacciari, even as Simmel gives us the tools to comprehend it, he ultimately retreats to his own 'ethico-sentimental' reconstruction of the city within the Metropolis.
17. Patrizia Lombardo, *Cities, Words and Images: From Poe to Scorsese*, Palgrave, London and New York, 2003, pp. 72–9; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, trans. Chris Turner, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p. 65.
18. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, p. 2.
19. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, p. 3 (my emphasis). Of course it is worth saying that, for Simmel himself, it seems clear that the key 'problem' of his philosophy appeared not primarily as that of the Metropolis, but as that of *money*. The significance of this will be apparent below.
20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Routledge, London, 1974, p. 18; Robert J. Ackermann, *Wittgenstein's City*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amhurst MA, 1988.
21. On this unity of knowledges, formed around a philosophy which, as a product of the *polis*'s division of labour, 'becomes a specialised activity ... [yet] does not become fragmentary', see Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, pp. 87–9. For a reading which emphasizes Wittgenstein's city as, on one level, a historically specific description of turn-of-the-century Vienna, see Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, pp. 182–8. See also Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1973.
22. It is in these terms that Cacciari relates the unsublatable heterogeneity of language games in the later Wittgenstein to the metropolitan architecture of his Viennese contemporary Adolf Loos.
23. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, pp. 63–4.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
27. This is an argument I develop, in part, from Peter Osborne's arguments for a 'cross-disciplinary philosophical practice'. See *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. 16–19. The apparently competing claims of 'abstract' and 'concrete' entailed by this repeat a standard problematic within a certain development of Marxist thought, which has often defined itself via a suspicion of the philosophical and 'conceptual'. For an exemplary recent discussion, which comes down very much on the side of the 'concrete', see Philip Wood, 'Historical Materialism', in Georgina Blakely and Valerie Bryson, eds, *Marx and Other Four-Letter Words*, Pluto, London, 2005, pp. 12–18. In countering such an argument, the ultimate point, however, would not be to defend the 'abstract' against the 'con-

- crete', but rather to suggest the necessity for 'social', as much as strictly philosophical, reasons complicating, or even *deconstructing*, the opposition between 'abstract' and 'concrete' itself.
28. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, p. 118–19; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 101.
  29. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 100.
  30. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicholas, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 100.
  31. Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times*, trans. Gregory Elliot, Verso, London and New York, 2002, p. 254.
  32. Peter Osborne, 'The Reproach of Abstraction', *Radical Philosophy* 127, September/October 2004, pp. 21–8. Osborne suggests here a distinction, derived from Hegel, between 'real' (*real*) and 'actual' (*wirklich*), reserving the latter term, as against the merely empirical 'reality' of the abstract universals of the understanding (e.g. abstract right), for 'aspects of self-actualizing abstraction', as in self-valorizing capital, which are 'constitutive of the unity of the totality as a self-developing whole' (p. 27).
  33. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 101, my emphasis.
  34. Christopher J. Arthur, 'The Spectral Ontology of Value', *Radical Philosophy* 107, May/June 2001, p. 32.
  35. If modern urban form, which I am seeking to approach through the concept of metropolis, *is* to be understood, analytically, as the formation of a real abstraction – as an effective form of unity of social space that 'does not rest on any pre-given common content' – Castells's early critique of Lefebvre as a mere 'metaphysician' of the urban could thus be said to miss the point that it would be, in this specific sense, no more 'metaphysical' than Marx's own concept of 'value'. See Manuel Castells, 'Citizen Movements, Information and Analysis: An Interview', *City* 7, 1997, pp. 146–7. On the 'metaphysics' of Marx's concept of value, see Arthur, 'Spectral Ontology', p. 33.
  36. See Osborne, 'Reproach of Abstraction', p. 28. This kind of formulation also raises a series of broader questions concerning the affinity between 'philosophical' abstraction and the abstractness of the value-form. It would be such affinity which, as Adorno saw, would continue to give Hegel's idealist categories a certain ongoing importance as homologous to the actual idealism of capitalist form. However, an adequate consideration of such questions – which would impact upon the issues of transdisciplinarity raised here – is beyond the scope of this article.
  37. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 102.
  38. Arthur, 'Spectral Ontology', p. 34.
  39. *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 35.
  40. Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', trans. Hans Gerth, in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks CA and Delhi, 1997, pp. 176, 178.
  41. Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, p. 9.
  42. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
  43. See the section on 'Extreme Unity in Plato's *Republic*' in Aristotle, *Politics*, pp. 103–12 [II ii – II v]: 'The polis consists not merely of a plurality of men, but of different kinds of men (104); 'excessive striving for unification is a bad thing in a polis' (105).
  44. Elsewhere I have sought to think through the significance of architecture as a form of critical knowledge of the urban in this respect, but one might also think, for example, of the importance of the novel, in the early twentieth century, in these terms. See David Cunningham, 'Architecture as Critical Knowledge' in Mark Dorian, Murray Fraser, Jonathan Hill and Jane Rendell, eds, *Critical Architecture*, Routledge, London and New York, forthcoming 2006.
  45. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 86.
  46. See Cunningham, 'The Phenomenology of Non-Dwelling'; Massimo Cacciari, 'Eupalinos or Architecture', trans. Stephen Sartarelli, *Oppositions* 21, 1980. It is worth noting, in this respect, the clearly Heideggerian lineage of the concept of 'habiting' to be found throughout *The Urban Revolution*.
  47. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 2004, p. 142. The figure of the network has itself a long history in urbanist discourse, from modernist grids through to utopian concepts of the 1960s, such as Archigram's Plug-In City.
  48. Cacciari, 'Eupalinos or Architecture', p. 114.
  49. I am indebted to Peter Osborne for this formulation.
  50. Koolhaas uses this particular phrase in his discussions of the Euralille project, a nodal point of connectivity which, almost by accident, becomes key to a 'virtual metropolis spread in an irregular manner', where 60 to 70 million people now live within ninety minutes of each other by train. More widely, this reflects a general fascination on Koolhaas's part with the 'dispersed' urban form that characterizes such disparate developments as the Pearl river delta in China and the so-called 'Hollocore' linking Brussels, Amsterdam and the Ruhr valley in Germany. The key point here is that, in principle, such 'dispersal' and 'virtuality' have no natural limit.
  51. My particular thanks to Stewart Martin for his assistance (and insistence) on formulating these questions.
  52. Nanna de Ru, 'Hollocore', in OMA/Rem Koolhaas, ed., *Content*, Taschen, Cologne, 2004, p. 336.
  53. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 81; Antonio Negri, 'La moltitudine e la metropolis', online at [www.mailarchive.com/rekombinant@autistici.org/msg00105.html](http://www.mailarchive.com/rekombinant@autistici.org/msg00105.html), accessed 1 March 2005. See also Alberto Toscano, 'Factory, Territory, Metropolis, Empire', *Angelaki*, vol. 9, no. 2, August 2004, pp. 197–216.
  54. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 59, 50, 52, 14, 49, 55.
  55. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
  56. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
  57. Lefebvre sometime seems to suggest that abstraction is simply *opposed* to 'lived' experience, in part because he always tends to approach the 'ontology' of abstract space via notions of representation, whether the diagrams of urban planning and modernist architecture or (Cartesian) philosophical and mathematical conceptions of space as an absolute, infinite *res extensa*, 'which may be grasped in a single act of intuition because of its homogenous (isotopic) character'. See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 14, 51.
  58. Simmel, 'Metropolis', p. 180.
  59. *World Charter of the Rights to the City*, online at [www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/2243.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/2243.html).
  60. *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*, UN-Habitat, London, 2003.
  61. Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967, pp. 84, 89.
  62. Mike Davis, 'Planet of Slums', *New Left Review* 26, March/April 2004, pp. 27, 29.