

Constructing Neoliberal Glasgow: The Privatisation Of Space

Friend of Zanetti

Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship. It will therefore not be surprising to find the extraordinary flowering of the new postmodern architecture is grounded in the patronage of multinational business, whose expansion and development is strictly contemporaneous with it.

Frederic Jameson¹

The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible ... is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

Walter Benjamin²

Introduction

This article attempts to describe the emergence and prosecution of neoliberalism in Glasgow as it impacts on the urban realm. Central to this is a critical attempt to define some of the key components of neoliberalism in the city. Drawing on urban and social theory to outline some of the contours of the debate, I suggest Glasgow conforms to a model of urban land revaluation whereby discourses of 'blight' and 'obsolescence' are mobilised to justify wholesale redevelopment and capitalist accumulation strategies based primarily on rent extraction. Finally, I employ a recent critical model of analysis for flagship urban development projects throughout Europe to provide the framework for a closer look at neoliberalism in Glasgow, concluding by questioning the possible extension of urban strategy in the city.

The Neoliberal City

We need to influence business to stimulate our economy.

River Clyde project director of Scottish Enterprise (The Scotsman, October 27, 2005)³

The new religion of neoliberalism combines a commitment to the extension of markets and logic of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian or collectivist strategies.

Peck and Tickell⁴

Peck and Tickell see neoliberalism articulated in the city through a combination of market ideologies and forces. For them, neoliberalism embodies a growth-first ideology, backed by a pervasive naturalisation of market discipline. Neoliberalism operates through and alongside active state partners, scanning the horizon for investment opportunities in an increasingly competitive urban environment. Neoliberalism locks-in public sector austerity and growth-oriented investment. A symbolic language of innovation—"dynamic", "pioneering", "daring", "entrepreneurial"—obfuscates a familiar cocktail of state subsidy, place promotion and local boosterism (talking up or promoting a locale), and suppresses the opportunity for genuinely local development. Neoliberal policy in the urban framework is characterised by uneven development, creating massive social polarisations in and between cities as highly mobile capital seeks profit unhindered by a regulatory framework. So we should be aware that the new urban developments in Glasgow do not take place in a vacuum and cannot escape history.

Space as Privileged Instrument of Neoliberalism

In business, few things say as much about you as your address: and few addresses in the world say as much

about your business as Pacific Quay. As the city's most ambitious development of the last decade of the 20th century, it is where Glasgow will welcome the world into the new millennium.

Pacific Quay business brochure, 1988⁵

Neoliberalism represents a strategy of political-economic restructuring that uses space as its "privileged instrument."⁶ Glasgow's large-scale urban development projects (UDPs), such as those at Pacific Quay, Glasgow Harbour, Tradeston, SECC and Clyde Gateway, reflect "...the material expression of a developmental logic that views mega-projects and place-marketing as a means for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital."⁷ Current attempts to symbolically position Glasgow in the neoliberal order mean a strict adherence to the rules of the game, "re-imagining and recreating urban space"⁸ primarily for the investor, the developer, the business person or cash-laden tourist. The uneven social trends of this 'competitive' urban environment have been consistently mapped out elsewhere, as other cities have sought to: "Align local dynamics with the imagined, assumed, or real requirements of a deregulated international economic system."⁹ A consequence of this activity has been to render a certain degree of uniformity to all cities.

There is already strong developer interest in the Clyde, but intervention is needed in order to create the conditions for success, including investment in transport, river engineering and the public realm.

Clyde Waterfront Working Group, June 2002

Neoliberalism and Geo-bribes

For the geographer Neil Smith, the neoliberal imperatives of private profit and place-marketing replace, "The demand for an urban life based upon grassroots participation and the satisfaction of social needs." A cogent example from New York in 1998 illustrates his thesis. Responding to threats that the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) might relocate to New Jersey, Mayor Giuliani announced a \$900 million taxpayer subsidy to keep the stock exchange in the city. City and state officials referred to the deal as a "partnership": Smith termed it a "geo-bribe". Smith contends that there was never any pretence that financial need was an issue, the question was one of whether the NYSE would stay in New York; or leave, taking its capital with it, potentially damaging the symbolic reputation and place-bound value of New York as an international finance centre.

For Smith this is a paradigmatic example of the public-private "partnership": "Rather than modulating the track taken by private investment, the local state simply fitted into the grooves already established by market logics, becoming, in effect, a junior if highly active partner in global capital."¹⁰ Giuliani's treatment of the poorer sector of the New York population three years prior revealed the ugly flip-side of state largesse. Giuliani announced major service and budget cuts, admitting at the time, and making transparent his real purpose, that he hoped to encourage the most dependent on social services (the city's poorest people) to move out of the city: "This would be a good thing" for the city, he said. "That's not an unspoken part of our strategy", he added, "that is our strategy."¹¹ (My italics.)

Gentrification

For Smith the role of gentrification is paramount to this strategy throughout the global economy, writ large as a central part of urban strategy and productive capital investment; "an unassailable



capital accumulation strategy for competing urban economies."¹² Gentrification underpins large scale UDPs as urban strategy weaves a phalanx of global finance players together, including real-estate developers, local merchants, property agents and brand name retailers, all lubricated by state subsidy. Official rhetoric presumes beneficial social outcomes will be derived from "trickle-down" benefits borne from development. However, this doesn't hold true and never has "... in a context characterised by an absence of regulatory standards or income redistribution systems at the national or EU level."¹³

Gentrification is now misleadingly called "urban regeneration" in a deliberate attempt to obscure its true meaning: "Precisely because the language of gentrification tells the truth about the class shift involved in regeneration of the city, it has become a dirty word to developers, politicians and financiers."¹⁴ This deception has helped increase immiseration for low-income groups, and benefited social elites: "The victory of this language in anaesthetising our critical understanding of gentrification in Europe represents a considerable ideological victory for neo-liberal visions of the city."¹⁵

The Return To The River

The effects of gentrification on marginalised groups can be seen in prime city centre locations like the "new" Gorbals where apartments and duplexes kick off at £125,000. Meanwhile, the adjacent riverside high-rise blocks of "old" Gorbals at Stirlingfauld and Norfolk Court, perfectly located for access to the amenities of the city centre, await demolition after years of disinvestment. Tenants anticipate news of their removal anxiously: "The area has million pound potential for redevelopment [...] So how long will I, and my neighbours, be allowed to live in Norfolk Court?"¹⁶ Another local critic was clear-minded in his appraisal of developer strategy: "Make no mistake. This is a land grab."¹⁷

This "land grab" should be seen in the context of Glasgow City Council attempting to improve their (Council) tax base — an explicit goal of all UDPs "via socio-spatial and economic reorganization of metropolitan space."¹⁸ After criticism regarding the price of apartments in the Glasgow Harbour development, former Council leader and current river project leader, Charles Gordon, said: "I don't care if they are yuppies or middle class professionals they will be most welcome in this city."¹⁹ This cordial invite, however, doesn't extend to the urban poor in any of the regeneration literature. The "return to the river" rhetoric employed by Council leaders masks a symptomatic silence which obscures the brutal class politics involved in the re-ordering of urban space.

The Rent Gap

For Smith, the physical deterioration and economic depression of the inner city are “a strictly logical, ‘rational’, outcome of the operation of land and housing markets.”²⁰ Deterioration and abandonment are the result of identifiable private and public investment decisions, and as such are far from neutral. Structured disinvestment is a normalised procedure designed to produce economically “rational” outcomes, regardless of social impacts. Buildings, like those in the Gorbals, are not always abandoned or left to deteriorate because they cannot be used meaningfully, but often *because they cannot be used profitably*.

Central to Smith’s analysis of gentrification is the rent gap theory: “The rent gap is the disparity between the potential ground rent level, and the actual ground rent capitalised under the present use.”²¹ According to Smith, the ideal investment opportunity for developers and landlords arises when the rent gap is sufficiently wide: “that developers can purchase structures cheaply [...] and can then sell the product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer.”²² Low prices in land and rents are central to a developer’s ambitions as is a renaissance in land values in adjacent areas, as the rent gap will then be sufficiently wide to return a large profit.

As gentrifying developments along the river at Oatlands, Crown Street, Laurieston and Tradeston gather pace, the rent gap at Gorbals is at an optimum level and demolition seems assured. This has not gone unnoticed by locals who have little power to shape development strategy but hope to remain by the river: “I just hope they ensure that the new homes they build are homes at reasonable rent and not like the expensive homes for sale in Crown Street.”²³ For developers with ambitions to gentrify, the central location and riverside frontage of Govan make it an obvious attraction. The conditions are ripe: “local people have for long complained that the area has been starved of investment as is evident from the large areas of derelict land that scar the landscape.”²⁴ The developments at Pacific Quay and the Glasgow Harbour development just across the river create potent rent gaps with enormous potential for anchoring gentrification strategies. Locals already desperately short of affordable housing claim a focus on commercial development “is eating up scarce housing land and killing the community.”²⁵

Meanwhile, 2,000 tenants in the Fountainwell high-rises at Sighthill await demolition in deteriorating homes without capital investment since 2003. While they consider their fate they have to listen to place-marketing cheerleaders offering Sighthill’s environment up for sale to provide temporary quarters for athletes as part of the city’s Commonwealth Games bid. The houses would then be put up for sale, rather than offered back to the community at affordable rents. The rent gap between current land values and post demolition new build on the back of the Games is likely to be considerable.²⁶

‘Blight’ and ‘Obsolescence’: Stigmatising Space

Rachel Weber (Associate Professor, Urban Planning and Policy Program, University of Illinois at Chicago) argues that state practices have increasingly mobilised discourses of blight and obsolescence against buildings and areas seen as appropriate for redevelopment—the Gorbals and Govan are prime examples of this. She goes on to argue that these discourses have become the ideal neoliberal alibi for Schumpeter’s notion of “creative destruction”, whereby “capital’s restless search for profits requires constant renewal through gale-like forces that simultaneously make way for the new and devalue the old.”²⁷

In contrast to other commodities the built environment exhibits remarkable durability. This presents a problem for the circulation of capital as it becomes locked into steel beams and concrete. A building is stuck with a long economic turnover time and the momentous force of creative destruction falters. To counter this problem the invocation of blight, with its

quasi-scientific allusions to unhygienic sanitary conditions, has been continually invoked by planners and developers to justify massive urban renewal schemes in post-World War II US and Britain on the basis of public health and social care measures.²⁸

Locating blight in the urban framework is one method in which wheels can be set in motion to destroy fixed property and rebuild anew. Weber quotes Friedman (1968), who fought the legal and scientific basis of blight: “Finding blight merely means defining a neighbourhood that cannot effectively fight back, but which is either an eyesore or is well-located for some particular construction project that important interests wish to build.”²⁹ One million people, mostly low-income, were *evicted* from US inner cities between 1949 and 1965 in the name of eliminating and containing this blight. Notwithstanding the shock of these momentous upheavals, the evictions and massive state-planned renewal projects followed, at least rhetorically, paternalistic paths. This is rarely deemed necessary now.

In the era of neoliberalism the old notion of obsolescence has been added to that of blight. Obsolescence differs from blight in that it is not generally associated with health and safety issues, but primarily with concern for loss of potential profitability. All that is required to justify regeneration is the developer’s ability to demonstrate an objective loss of exchange value in a building or locale. Weber argues that obsolescence presents itself as a technical managerial tool emphasising the economic imperatives whilst appearing “... morally and racially neutral, as if the social has been removed from an entirely technical matter.”³⁰ Little need then to feign municipal concern for health and safety. The argument is more often purely economic, citing concern with place rather than people.

These discourses have proved compelling in the traditionally industrial city of Glasgow, where a series of large scale urban development projects, often built on formerly industrial land, and characterised as blighted and obsolete by developers, are reformulating the urban space along the Clyde Corridor.

Large Scale Urban Developments – The Model

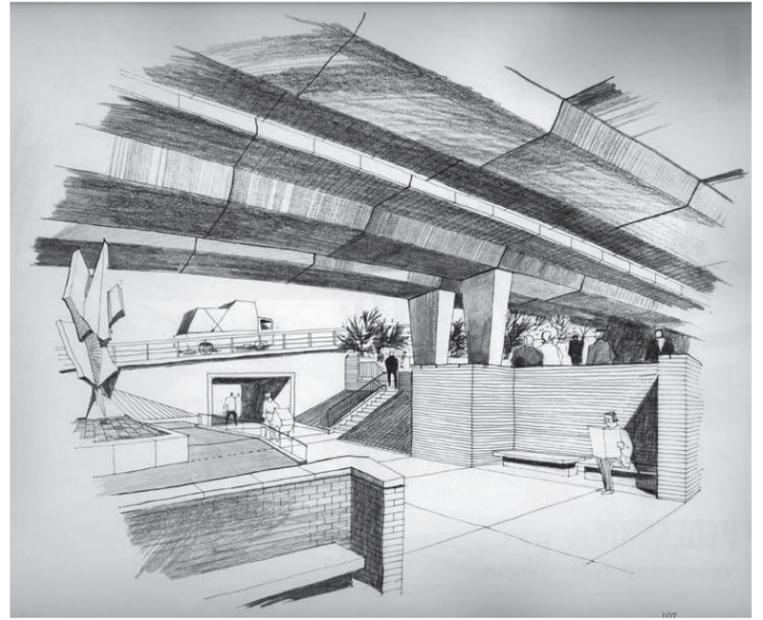
Erik Swyngedouw (Professor of Geography and the Environment, Oxford University) *et al*, recently conducted in-depth research on 13 large-scale Urban Development Projects (UDPs) throughout Europe, namely Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, Athens, Rotterdam, London, Lisbon, Vienna, Bilbao, Birmingham, Brussels, Naples and Lille. The researchers found, in contrast to a mythos of daring entrepreneurial activity, that the UDPs are almost without exception state-led and very often state-financed. Despite the rhetoric that accompanies these projects, they are marred by processes of social exclusion and marginalisation. Overall, the common theme in all UDPs is that their success ultimately depends on rent extraction from the built environment.

Four of the main points of confluence emerging across the 13 UDP examples are:

1. ‘Exceptionality’ measures: large-scale UDPs have increasingly been used as a vehicle to establish exceptionality measures in planning and policy procedures.

The £500 million, five-mile long, six lane M74 extension was recently consented despite the chief reporter of an independent public enquiry recommending against its authorisation. Business leaders considered the road to be a vital component in wider regeneration plans.

Key catalyst agencies for the road had argued that it would “support the place competitiveness” of the west of Scotland and help “some of the poorest areas in Scotland” through “a process of renewal, integrated with other regeneration activity”. In particular, they argued, the M74 should lead to the “reduction of [...] vacant, derelict and contaminated land”, an “increase in land and property values to help address market



failure constraints”, and “improved viability of future property development, through making development of key sites more attractive to the private sector...” In addition they argued the project would “promote tourism” and the “international image of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area”.³¹

Jam74 (a coalition of community, environmental, and sustainable transport groups) had objected to the publicly subsidised road’s construction on the grounds that it would be incompatible with Scottish Executive policy objectives on climate change, traffic stabilisation, urban regeneration, social inclusion, and commitments to environmental justice overall. Jam74 also argued that PPP or PFI financing would likely come into play, potentially increasing the cost to £1 billion.³²

The chief reporter agreed. His summary concluded: “... the public benefits of the proposal would be insufficient to outweigh the considerable disadvantages that can be expected”, the road “would cause community severance; would be of little use to the local population who have low levels of car ownership; and would have an adverse effect on the environment of the local communities without providing local benefits”. “[T]he conclusion is that this proposal should not be authorised, and that the compulsory purchase order should not be confirmed.”³³

Despite this highly critical summary ministers gave the road the go-ahead. The Scottish Executive’s head of roads maintained, in face of the enquiry’s evidence, that it had a number of “clear advantages”, including “social inclusion benefits” and “significant wider economic benefits [...] which have not been given sufficient weight in the [enquiry’s] conclusions.”³⁴ Arguments in favour of the road strongly emphasised the rhetoric of blight and obsolescence; how “vacant”, “derelict”, “contaminated” land would be revalued; and pointed to the role of the road in increasing land and property values. The full range of exceptionality measures were employed, including: “the freezing of conventional planning tools, bypassing statutory regulations and institutional bodies, the creation of project agencies with special or exceptional powers of intervention and decision-making, and/or a change in national regulations.”³⁵

Jam74 had always argued the planning process was inherently flawed. The developer, the planning authority and the planning enquiry process were all led by the Scottish Executive, leading to a pronounced democratic deficit. Their fears were well-founded, as reflected in First Minister Jack McConnell’s decision to ignore the enquiry’s findings. The narrative of growth-oriented regeneration, supported by discourses of blight and obsolescence requiring regeneration strategies, was central as justification for the overthrowing of the report’s decision. Undeterred, Jam74 will now fight a £10,000 legal case in an attempt to rectify Ministers’ flagrantly undemocratic decision.

2. Local democratic participation mechanisms are not respected or are applied in a very ‘formalist’ way, resulting in a new choreography of elite power.

Three years ago, in tandem with government

housing policy and as part of the wider regeneration effort, Glasgow City Council undertook the policy of stock transfer to Glasgow Housing Association Ltd (GHA Ltd) of all 81,000 Council homes. The full weight of blight and obsolescence discourses were mobilised to justify what was effectively a privatisation of public-owned housing.

An article of the period, 'Misery Key to Housing's Future', encapsulates the mood. Sighthill tenants looked out on a "world of blight and decay" and a "landscape of graffiti and windblown rubbish", from which there is "no prospect of escape". The day before, however, a ballot form dropped through their letter box with (according to *The Guardian*) "the pledge of a refurbished home in a transformed neighbourhood — if only they would tick the box marked 'Yes'".³⁶ It was on the basis of discourses like these that regeneration proposals were accepted.

The transfer was excitedly described as: "the largest public sector modernisation project in Europe."³⁷ A central argument was that "tenant participation" and "community empowerment"³⁸ would be fundamental to the move: "It will be the people of Glasgow who are the architects of this proposal. Their voice will be heard during every part of this development, their hopes and aspirations accommodated and their fears and worries answered. This is for the people. This is by the people."³⁹

GHA Ltd is made up of 64 tenant-led Local Housing Organisations, designed to become individual, fully fledged Housing Associations through a process known as second-stage transfer: "Choices will be available to tenants in exercising greater devolved management and opportunities for community ownership. In terms of devolved management, tenants will move to a local management arrangement *immediately* after city-wide transfer."⁴⁰ (My emphasis.) Nearly three years on, second-stage transfer has yet to begin, with no sign of immediate development. Meanwhile, the small amount of tenants who do make it onto Housing Association boards "...are bound by company law and, even if elected, will not be able to represent the tenants who elected them". As board members, they are duty bound to work for the "interest of the organisation."⁴¹ Housing once held universally and in commonwealth is now private and unaccountable.

These developments were predictable. Neoliberal models for urban regeneration show, "a significant deficit with respect to accountability, representation, and the presence of formal rules of inclusion or participation"⁴², and "Post privatisation, the priorities will be based around bottom-line accounting and not the wider social needs of the community." (*Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space*) Concurrently, an initial five-year rent guarantee is under threat, and the pattern of post-transfer cities in England shows rent increases of up to 56.65% between 1997-2004 (DCH). Moreover, tenants in 30,000 GHA properties, denied of capital investment since 2003, await their homes' demolition and removal to peripheral estates while a sufficient rent-gap opens up to justify profitable investment.

The discourse of blight and obsolescence played a significant role in clinching the privatisation measures: "The local state's dependence on its own property base and its willingness to subject that base to market rule accounts for the renewed zeal with which it stigmatises space", "Neoliberal development policies amount to little more than property speculation and public giveaways to guide the space and pace of the speculative activity".⁴³

In "the biggest regeneration programme in the whole of Europe", *our* public assets were deliberately run-down and undemocratically bargained off (through a £1 billion debt write-off and continued state subsidy) as part of a continuing shift from public to private lubricated with state finance. Tenant groups in Sighthill and elsewhere continue to fight for a decent deal as the transition takes place.

3. UDPs are poorly integrated at best into the wider urban process and planning system.

The 28 hectare Pacific Quay site hosts a digital media campus and business park with housing, hotel and retail facilities alongside the landmark Glasgow Science Centre. The developers trump its location at the "heart of Glasgow" with views down the river "to die for"; "Pacific Quay's central location ... brings all the choice of a modern, cosmopolitan city within reach."⁴⁴

The Pacific Quay site's claim to social integration is meagre, beyond the usual Thatcherite "trickle-down" nonsense, and seems to rest primarily on Festival Park, a leftover from the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival, "where they literally airbrushed out from the publicity material the communities behind the site itself."⁴⁵ The park will at one and the same time provide an amenity for white-collar workers, "the perfect spot for lunchtime jogs, a stroll around the park or an alfresco lunch"⁴⁶, and the working-class residents of nearby Govan and Kinning Park. It's revealing that this notion has been on the table since 1998, yet in a clear indication of the marshalling of 'public realm' space, no entrances to the park exist on the Govan side at Govan Road. The gates are situated for entry from the riverside where Pacific Quay, and its phalanx of professional and managerial workers, reside.

This small indicator of exclusion points to a much broader exclusionary process behind the gleaming frontage of the Pacific Quay. According to the *Evening Times*: "Streets of tenement housing have been razed to the ground and little but unemployment, crime and drugs have thrived since industrial decline hit. Shops lie empty, schools have closed and large tracts of waste ground blight the area."⁴⁷ This hyperbolic description (reflecting the tendency towards narratives of blight and obsolescence characteristic of right-wing tabloids) is not without grounding in reality.

Community activists believe that local people are being left behind and shut out from any benefits from regeneration: "Govan is supposed to be prospering from high-profile developments with the regeneration of the waterfront. But the population has fallen by more than 20% in the last 10 years alone and 51% of adults in the area are out of work. This is more than double the Glasgow average [...] Instead of repopulating the area with affordable housing, Glasgow City Council and Govan Initiative Ltd have secured considerable amounts of European development cash to build industrial units and offices ..."⁴⁸

Govan has been designated as a 'Core Economic Development Area' by planning authorities, and several residential areas razed to make room for industrial units. This strategy has created a vast industrial estate, which is transforming Govan into a poverty-stricken ghetto. Activists point to a chronic lack of decent housing in the area, and the potential for utilising Govan's central, riverside location for community-led rather than business-led regeneration. Meanwhile, public subsidy for the highly contested £20.3 million Finnieston Bridge across the Clyde was confirmed to ensure the BBC's conditions were met for moving to the Pacific Quay.

What's remarkable about Pacific Quay is not that it is breaking promises on social integration, but that it never bothered to make them in the first place. It was always a fantasy that a science and media cluster development would create jobs for the de-skilled, benefit-dependent, ageing population of Govan. The Pacific Quay site is designed as a prime tourist site, a media quarter and high-class business centre. The best the marginalised people of Govan can expect under current proposals is a fight over work in low-paid industrial units, which divide and fragment the landscape.

However, local groups like The GalGael Trust⁴⁹ and Govan Workspace⁵⁰ among others, continue to challenge this state of affairs. David Robertson and Pat Cassidy summarise the conflict: "The city's interest is simple: Govan is strategically placed for industrial and warehouse development and has an important riverside frontage. The community's case is more complex: Govan is a living community of people; the more industrial development encroaches on that space, the less sustainable becomes that community."⁵¹

4. Most UDPs accentuate socio-economic polarization through the working of real-estate markets [...] and the restructuring of the labour market.

The significance and scale of the £500 million riverside Glasgow Harbour site — "an integrated mix of high-quality commercial, residential, retail, leisure and public space" — shouldn't be doubted: "Glasgow Harbour is one of the largest waterfront regeneration projects within the UK". According to the website, the recipe is simple; the creation of "The ultimate modern urban community", in an "entirely new district within the west end of Glasgow."⁵² Apartment's start at £220,000 and go up to £495,000.⁵³

Despite the racy rhetoric, there are those who question what type of urban community Glasgow Harbour is becoming: "We see what is happening in our area in the name of 'development' as being an anti-poverty issue."⁵⁴ There are deep concerns about exclusionary, rocketing house prices in the area. Prices in the Harbour development will ensure it remains a "wealthy ghetto"⁵⁵, while its presence has stimulated gentrification nearby. In a process akin to the Highland clearances, "People are usually either forced to move away from their families or move into private rented accommodation in desperation. The days when people were forced into the arms of a private landlord are back with a vengeance."⁵⁶

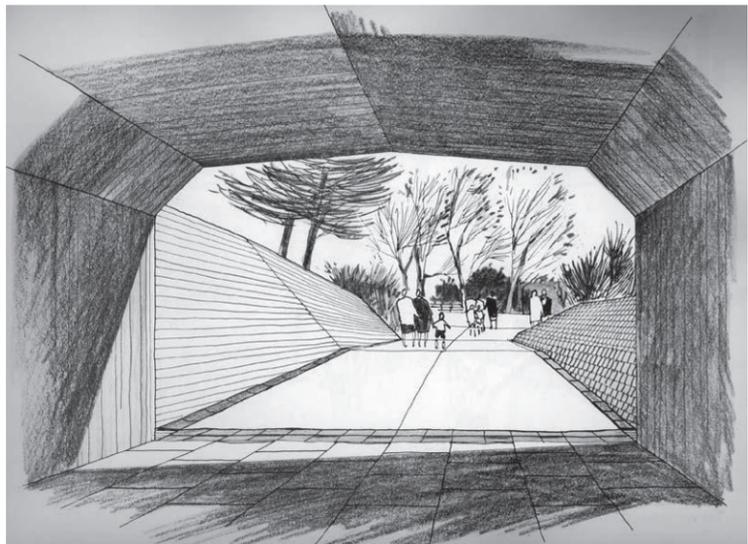
There is also evidence of two-tiered service provision and a form of apartheid consumerism: "Shops for the 'poor' and shops for the 'rich' are springing up side by side."⁵⁷ The poor have 99p shops and charity shops while the wealthy have shops "selling Spanish holiday homes."⁵⁸ Meanwhile Council Tax continues to rise, increasing the already potent benefit trap whereby people cannot afford to come off benefits due to wage constraints and the cost of living.

The shift from a productivist- to a consumer-led economy, epitomised in the shift in the Glasgow Harbour area from industrial use to property-led regeneration, is marked strongly by a widening income and opportunity gap between professional and managerial workers and those at the lower end who lack the skills for the new economy. The Glasgow Harbour Employment Team, with European and Government funding support, was set up to provide recruitment training and support to the Glasgow Harbour project and is responsible for bridging this gap and providing the social inclusion agenda for the development. Two hundred and seventy unemployed workers have been employed through workfare in this way.

The reality of changing labour market structures, however, means low-paid jobs in 'elementary occupations'—construction, manufacturing and low-end service jobs. Construction, for instance, is characterised by highly contingent, deregulated structures, and marked by very low levels of unionisation and training: "Given current government policies and practices, are people going to be forced off benefits to work on minimum wage in shops we can't afford to buy anything in? [...] Are we going to be servicing the rich and their lifestyle?"⁵⁹

The welfare to work agenda comes with "a strong element of compulsion and a retreat from the principle of universal rights to benefits and a decent income."⁶⁰ In very few cases do these courses provide meaningful training and opportunity: "These programmes have limited value in providing skills training as their main rationale is to deliver the unemployed into work."⁶¹ Service sector work, and subsidised labour programmes to produce amenities for the rich do not betoken a serious effort to provide meaningful, non-alienated work for the low-income and unemployed groups of the west end of Glasgow.

On the evidence of this brief and partial survey, urban developments in Glasgow mirror those of other European cities with exclusionary decision-making processes, speculation of land for urban rent, exceptionality measures in planning procedure, and social fragmentation with vast differentials in income, quality of life, and life expectancy. If Glasgow's development model continues on its present course, what might we expect from the future?



A Revanchist City

Finally, the neoliberal city, as a site of social polarisation and resistance, develops a corpus of disciplinary procedures including surveillance, welfare cutbacks, and punitive institutions to deal with the fall-out from its policies.⁶²

In reference to the 1870 Paris Commune, Neil Smith terms this the “revanchist city”⁶³. The 1870 uprising encountered military tactics bolstered by a moral discourse of public order on the streets which combined in a violent revenge (*revanche*) against the radical socialism of the Commune, and led to the killing of 20,000 people in Bloody Week alone. Smith’s point is that control of the city streets is often synonymous with control of its population. For Smith, the revanchist city pertains to a vicious reaction against minorities, the working-class, the homeless and unemployed. It is a place where the reproduction of social relations has gone disastrously wrong, and yet the oppressions and indignities that created the problems are ruthlessly re-affirmed. The revanchist city is at war with its poor, creating the kind of city acutely described by Mitchell: “The city as landscape does not encourage the formations of community or urbanism as a way of life; rather it encourages the maintenance of surfaces, the promotion of order at the expense of lived social relations, and the ability to look past distress, destruction, and marginalisation...”⁶⁴

Charles Murray, infamous author of *The Bell Curve*, takes a positive view of all this. Arguing for the “advantages of social apartheid” in a *Sunday Times* article last year, he wrote: “The underclass [...] is no longer even a topic of conversation in the United States.”⁶⁵ This is not because the underclass has disappeared in the US, rather: “The underclass is no longer an issue because we successfully put it out of sight and out of mind.”⁶⁶ To a large extent this has been achieved by a spatial fix: “Increased geographic segregation has facilitated social segregation”⁶⁷, with the underclass firmly ensconced in “decrepit neighbourhoods on the periphery that need not be on the travel route of the rest of us.”⁶⁸ Clearly, by “us” he means the people who now inhabit reclaimed inner city areas, with “glitzy shops and gleaming offices.”⁶⁹

In addition to this, Murray’s chief theoretical baby is the notion of “custodial democracy”⁷⁰ whereby the ‘underclass’ would be imprisoned both through institutional frameworks such as prisons, and by increasingly segregated ghettos “we seal away from the rest of us.”⁷¹ Moreover, Murray guesses that should a City Council leader or Mayor arrive in Britain who would adopt these practices openly, “... He would find the same surge in popularity that Rudy Guiliani experienced in New York.”⁷² With the odd exception, Government and City leaders refrain from stating strategies like these outright, but even a cursory glance at Glasgow’s urban developments show how segregation is more or less explicitly embedded and articulated in the construction of social space.

Conclusion

The limits of theory, however, should warn us of certain pitfalls. In constructing such a closed and controlling vision of an over-determining machine (such as large-scale urban developments) we run the risk of theorising our own defeat, where the “impulses of negation and revolt”⁷³ are seen as

vain and trivial in the face of an overwhelming system of power. In order to counteract this, existing and emergent groups from (to use a Zapatista phrase) “below and to the left”⁷⁴ must continue to challenge “growth-oriented” urban development with the voices, desires and actions of grass-roots organisations to the fore, in order to counter official hegemony and claiming their right to the city.⁷⁵

Recent anti-globalisation movements in Scotland, while welcome, need look no further than their own cities for sites of contestation. The wealthiest suburb in Scotland has a life expectancy of 87.7 years, while a boy born in Calton, in the east end of Glasgow, can expect only 54 years of life.⁷⁶ Starting from an analysis of the production of space, and the ownership of key functions within this production, we can begin to chart and challenge the uneven power relations that affect all of us wherever we are. Maybe we can then begin to visualise a world where the needs of all to engage in creative activity, play, imagination, physical activities, knowledge and art are given their rightful place, and urban space is constructed to facilitate these needs, rather than fostering a prolific extraction of profit from land as part of a monolithic economic rationalism which presents us always with a choice already made. It should be clear by now that we can dispel any notion of assistance from mainstream political organisations in this project, firmly embedded as they are in the neoliberal order.

Notes

- 1 Jameson, Frederic. ‘Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, P5, Verso.
- 2 Benjamin, Walter. ‘Illuminations’, P249, Pimlico.
- 3 *The Scotsman*, 29.10.05
- 4 ‘Spaces of Neoliberalism - Urban restructuring in North America and Western Europe’, P33, Blackwell Publishing.
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