

**CITYSPACES AS INTERIOR SETTINGS:
ON AN *INSIDE OUT EFFECT* IN THE CITIES UNDER NEW CAPITALISM**

A PAISAGEM URBANA COMO CENÁRIO INTERIOR:

*UM EFEITO VERSO-REVERSO NA CIDADE SOB O REGIME DO NOVO
CAPITALISMO*

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Abstract

The German cultural critic, Siegfried Kracauer, trained as an architect and active as a writer and journalist under the Weimar Republic, ended his 1930 article “Abschied von der Lindenpassage” [“Farewell to the Linden Arcade”], on the decline of that specific commercial venue, with the following broad question: “What would be the point of an arcade [*Passage*] in a society that is itself only a passageway?” (Kracauer, 1995: 342). Already suggested in such a perspicuous diagnosis was the fact that the ultimate horizon of the capitalist action on city economy is the overall commodification of urban places. What is implied here, from the onset, is the complete social and economic mobilisation of city spots and urban sites as in a walloping shopping mall (as in J.G. Ballard's dystopic novel *Kingdom Come* [2006]), resulting on a spatial effect in which no limit can be pointed out between the recognized selling station and the non-buying stand. This means that the first boundaries to be breached are those culturally constructed, dividing the allowed from the non-allowed, the private from the public and the provisional from the perennial, what leads to a ubiquitous marketing and gambling arcade. In terms of architectural space, this comes out as an ever increasing undifferentiation between indoor practices and exterior ones. Actually, on an observable *inside out effect*, exterior and public spaces are used to pursue inward experiences: building façades support outdoor advertisements as huge one-page magazine sheets; nightlifers roam and dance the streets as if inside vaulted arenas; graffiti and tags mark the city walls as personal and confessional mementos. In short, and paradoxically, the inside invades the outside.

Within an interdisciplinary approach, crossing cultural theory and analysis with urban aesthetics, this paper will address precisely these city phenomena in the context of which the tradition of bourgeois interiors (Lukacs, 1970) and modern public sphere (Habermas, 1971) were degraded by the cultural transformations of New Capitalism, synthesized by Richard Sennett as when “the institutions inspire only weak loyalty, (...) diminish participation and mediation of commands, (...) breed low levels of informal trust and high levels of anxiety about uselessness” (Sennett, 2006: 181): in other words, the stage set of a life drama in which the disappearance of an outer city scape is the token of a full capitalist incorporation and the threat of a vanishing future.

Keywords: inside out effect; interiors; public space commodification; New Capitalism.

Resumo

Siegfried Kracauer, crítico cultural alemão, arquiteto, escritor e jornalista, politicamente activo nos anos da República de Weimar, conclui o seu artigo de 1930 “Abschied von der Lindenpassage” [“Adens à Linden Arcade”], sobre o declínio, e encerramento, daquele recinto comercial, com a questão de lato âmbito: “What would be the point of an arcade [Passage] in a society that is itself only a passageway?” (De que serviria uma arcada [passagem], se a sociedade é ela mesma apenas um lugar de passagem) (Kracauer, 1995: 342). Sugerido já neste diagnóstico finíssimo, estava o facto de o horizonte último do regime capitalista, sobretudo na economia das cidades, ser a completa mercantilização dos lugares urbanos. O que, desde o início, está, pois, aqui em jogo, é a completa mobilização social e económica dos locais e sítios urbanos como num centro comercial desmedido (à semelhança do que sucede no romance distópico de J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come* [2006] [Reino de Amanhã]), resultando num efeito espacial em que nenhum limite pode ser identificado entre uma reconhecida estação de vendas e um balcão onde nada se compra. Isto significa que as primeiras fronteiras a serem quebradas são as culturalmente construídas, separando o permitido do proibido, o público do privado e o efémero daquilo que é perene, o que conduz a esse marketing ubíquo e ao regime militante da aposta no risco. Em termos de espaço arquitectónico, tal resulta numa indiferenciação cada vez maior entre atividades de interior e práticas de exterior. Na realidade, num efeito de verso-reverso [*inside out effect*], onde espaços públicos exteriores são usados para prosseguir experiências interiores: as fachadas dos edifícios são o suporte para outdoors como enormes anúncios de páginas única em revistas; a vida noturna ocupa e dessaruma as ruas como em ringues cobertos; graffiti e tags deixam marcas nas paredes das cidades com se de mementos pessoais e confessionais se tratassem. Em suma, e paradoxalmente, o dentro invade o de fora. Na linha de uma abordagem interdisciplinar, cruzando teoria e análise cultural com estéticas da cidade, este artigo focar-se-á precisamente neste fenómeno urbano, no contexto do qual a tradição do interior burguês (Lukacs, 1970) e da moderna esfera pública (Habermas, 1971) foi desagregada pelas transformações culturais do Novo Capitalismo, sintetizado por Richard Sennett como quando “as instituições inspiram apenas uma fraca lealdade, reduzem a participação e mediação nas ordens transmitidas, engendram fracos níveis de confiança informal e elevados níveis de ansiedade perante a inutilidade” (Sennett, 2007: 124): por outras palavras, o cenário de um drama de vida no qual o desaparecimento de uma paisagem urbana exterior é o símbolo da mais acabada incorporação no sistema capitalista, e a ameaça de um futuro em fuga.

Palavras-chave: efeito verso-reverso; interiores; mercantilização do espaço público; Novo Capitalismo.

Late [New] Capitalism is scratching its piles and trying to figure out where to shit next. All privy doors are closed except one. Buying a washing machine is a political act — the only real kind of politics left today.

J.G. Ballard

'Mr. Pearson? [...] You're not hurt?'

'He missed me. It's over there.'

'I didn't hear a shot. Let's get you indoors.'

'Indoors? We're already indoors. Aren't we?'

J.G. Ballard

THE CITYSPACE

In the comment on Paris across his «Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism», Walter Benjamin states a premonitory diagnosis about future life in the cities:

Die Passgen sind ein Mittelding zwischen Straße und *Intérieur*. (...) nämlich den Boulevard zum *Intérieur* zu machen. Die Straße wird zur Wohnung für den Flaneur, der zwischen Häuserfronten so wie der Bürger in seinen vier Wänden zuhause ist. Ihm sind die glänzenden emaillierten Fimenschilder so gut und besser ein Wandschmuck wie im Salon dem Bürger ein Ölgemälde; Mauern sind das Scheibpult, gegen das er seinen Notizblock stemmt; Zeitungskioske sind seine Bibliotheken und die Caféterrassen Erker, von denen aus er nach getaner Arbeit auf sein Hauswesen heruntersieht.

(Benjamin, 1991: 539)

[*The arcades were a cross between a street and an intérieur. (...) [A] boulevard [turned] into an intérieur. The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafes are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done.*]

(Benjamin, 1985: 37)

In the same spirit, through the 1929 review on Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* [On Foot in Berlin], the celebrated article entitled «The Return of the *Flâneur*», Benjamin restates virtually the same idea. However, he adds to it the notion of the masses¹: «[for] the masses (...), glossy enameled corporate

¹ The mass, as a distinctive character and the main subject of city interactions, enters the discourse of urban sociology by the hand of Max Weber: «the consumers for the local market are made up of large consumers if they are residents and for entrepreneurs, workers and craftsmen who form the great mass» (Weber, 1969: 27). For Weber, it is made clear, the mass is an agent of the economy, whereas for Benjamin, the notion acquires a mid tone between the *political* and what the benjaminian studies consecrated as the *dialectical imagery* (or the dream image) of a *Urgeschichte* [«the fossil,

nameplates are as good a wall-decoration as an oil painting is for the homebody sitting in his living room (...); the fire walls are their desks, (...) and the café terrace the bay window from which they can look down on their property» (Benjamin, 2003: 264).

What is at stake in the quotes above is somehow something further than vivid allegories, which used to help Benjamin's wording in reaching highly sophisticated thoughts. The occasion is instead one of looking back in time, even for Benjamin, in order to reveal the beginnings of a so to speak *spatial turn* that the recent critical theory has sustained, picturing the intellectual movement that stresses *place* and *space* in contrast to the emphasis put on *structures* and *ideas*. Let us name a few, such as the "spatial stories" [*récits d'espaces*] (Certeau, 1984), the "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988), the "heterotopias" [*des espaces autres*] (Foucault, 1997 [1967]), and "geohistory" (Soja, 2000). Nonetheless, the one this article privileges the most is the "conceptual triad", as formulated by Henri Lefèbvre in his major work, *The Production of Space* (1991[1974]), which comprehends a "spatial practice", a "representation of space" and "representational spaces" (Lefèbvre, 1991: 33), that Edward Soja turned into the "trialectics of cityspace", out of the analysis of a "*conceived space*", a "*perceived space*" and a "*lived space*" (Soja, 2000: 10-11).

In fact, looking into a historical phenomenon as the one described by Benjamin, I am not only seeking for the origins of an *inside out effect*, what, in a certain way, Soja calls "a kind of reverse

the fetish, the wish image, the ruin» (Buck-Morss, 1990)]; elements of a primal history, when, according to Benjamin's maxim in the «Exposés» of his *Passagen-Werk*: «In dem Traum, in dem jeder Epoche die ihr folgende in Bildern vor Augen tritt, erscheint die letztere vermählt mit Elementen der Urgeschichte, das heißt einer klassenlosen Gesellschaft (Benjamin, 1982: 47) [In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history <*Urgeschichte*> — that is, to elements of a classless society (Benjamin, 1999: 4)]. By this token, which relates the masses with its ancestral classless aspiration, it's worth recovering, in its full length, the footnote on the aristotelian thought about the theme, in *Politics*, that Louis Wirth inserted in his 1938 doctrinal article «Urbanism as a Way of Life»: «To the size of states there is a limit, as there is to other things, plants, animals, implements; for none of these retain their natural power when they are too large or too small, but they either wholly lose their nature, or are spoiled.... [A] state when composed of too few is not, as a state ought to be, self-sufficing; when of too many, though self-sufficing in all mere necessities, as a nation may be, it is not a state, being almost incapable of constitutional government. For who can be the general of such a vast multitude, or who the herald, unless he have the voice of a Stentor?/ A state, then, only begins to exist when it has attained a population sufficient for a good life in the political community: it may indeed, if it somewhat exceed this number, be a greater state. But, as I was saying, there must be a limit. What should be the limit will be easily ascertained by experience. For both governors and governed have duties to perform; the special functions of a governor to command and to judge. But if the citizens of a state are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit, then they must know each other's characters; where they do not possess this knowledge, both the election to offices and the decision of lawsuits will go wrong. When the population is very large they are manifestly settled at haphazard, which clearly ought not to be. Besides, in an over-populous state foreigners and metics will readily acquire the rights of citizens, for who will find them out? Clearly then the best limit of the population of a state is the largest number which suffices for the purposes of life, and can be taken in at a single view. Enough concerning the size of a state» (VII - 4, 4-14 [Wirth, 1938: 10-11]). This proto-benjaminian conceptualization, between the one envisioning [dreaming] and the ones envisaged [evil dreamt] has a deep resonance in this paper's argument of a chiasmatic figure of the public city man enclosed in his interior, and the inner city people flooding the streets with their practices, a political idea collected from that «peculiar dramatism» enunciated in the political writings by José A. Bragança de Miranda, *Política e modernidade : linguagem e violência na cultura contemporânea* [*Politics and Modernity — Language and Violence in Contemporary Culture* {my translation}], epitomized in that «mystery of obedience' [La Boétie] of the 'many' towards the 'few'» [Miranda, 2008: 13, 43 {my translation}].

teleology that leads the searcher to find roots and starting points that reflect his or her personal views of the present" (Soja, 2000: 19). On the contrary, I'm actually considering its present counter-culturally driven manifestations and its compulsory irruption in a nearby future, in the fashion of an interrupted revolution, the first steps of which Benjamin has only *conceived*. Nowadays, they can start being *perceived*, and *lived* hereafter.

Such a convolution is happening, and will keep happening, against the backdrop of what Richard Sennett calls the context of New Capitalism. When "the institutions inspire only weak loyalty, (...) diminish participation and mediation of commands, (...) breed low levels of informal trust and high levels of anxiety about uselessness" (Sennett, 2006: 181), people desert the homes they built under an architecture of *interdictory spaces* to go away with a fully prosaic fear (Baumam, 2006: 26).

Under such terms, you might certify how in the modern aesthetics of citylife, the primeval tread about city feelings is the one leading from a land of the free (supported by the dictum about living in post-medieval cities: *Stadt Luft macht frei* – 'the air of the city makes people free' [see Sennett, 1996: 155]), to a risky territory, the realm of crime and the dominion of police surveillance. A biased open space — the sheer exterior —, where the rule of law and the principle of order are simply provisional, since the step into Carl Schmitt's "State of Exception" [*Ausnahmezustand*] is just a matter of how subjectively serious the state of emergency seems to be.

THE CITY ELEMENT

However, previous to the question of *how does it work* and *how will it condition* citylife and cityspaces for days to come, what I've been hitherto naming as an *inside out effect*, it is due a methodological warrant in the line of the benjaminian reflections, the which lead to a *Ur*-questioning: what is the primeval element of cityspace that allows an effect as such, when what has been taking the aspect of inward *spatial practices*, became the motor of an outward *representation of space*, and by then a delirious ground for euphoric, if not dysphoric, *representational spaces*.

The literature about this sort of original backdrop of the people's drive for gathering in settlements, where number, density, and heterogeneity (Wirth, 1938: 10) constitute only a so to speak necessary formal setting, but not in the least a sufficient functional one, has divided itself according to what might have been the decisive element under which all the phenomenon of urbanization as a world movement, if not as an anthropological given, has gained pace and momentum since ancient times, fostering the initial notion of an urban revolution. Actually, the latter has been taken as an indisputable, if not dogmatic, theory based on what Edward Soja

discredits as «the conventional sequence: hunting and gathering – agriculture – villages – cities – states» (Soja, 2000: 20).

As a matter of fact, what seems of the utmost importance to this *elemental* debate is not a train of thought combining different disciplinary approaches from archaeology to paleography, sociology and economy. It is instead a tentative psycho-anthropological conjecture, which acquires its refulgent formulation in the *Ur-term* *synekism*, 'the stimulus of urban agglomeration'. As Soja puts it:

Synekism is directly derived from synoikismos, literally the condition arising from dwelling together in one house, or oikos, and used by Aristotle in his Politics to describe the formation of the Athenian polis or city-state. (...) Synekism thus connotes, in particular, the economic and ecological interdependencies and the creative – as well as occasionally destructive – synergisms that arise from purposeful clustering and collective cohabitation of people in space, in "a home" habitat.

(Soja, 2000: 13)

However clear this *Ur-root* might be, and in the lead for an undeniable pre-ancestor, even a gene, to the *inside out effect* in cityspace, what Soja fails to explain is the mechanism why the sheer interior dimension, the one of the home [*oikos*], moves people to share the same exterior space and therefore, to build a *representational* cityspace [*syne-oikos*].

To trace this missing link, I propose a still more daring approach, relating two concepts by Carl Schmitt, taken from his 1942 controversial intent of a reflection on the Universal History, *Land und Meer* [*Land and Sea*], which is, I argue, more of a benjaminian cultural theory than a scientific one based on historical evidence. The first concept is no other than that of *element*. For Schmitt, encompassing all of its mythic and infra-scientific implications, an *element* is some earthly substance in a deep contrast to humankind's existence, since human life can only be conceived against it:

[M]an is not a creature wholly conditioned by his environment. Through history, he has the ability to get the better of his existence and his consciousness. He is aware not only of the act of birth, but also of the possibility of a rebirth. When in danger or in a desperate situation, circumstances in which the other animals and plants left to themselves are likely to perish, man can save himself and start anew by his perspicacity, the conclusions he draws from his analysis, and the soundness of his decisions. The scope for his abilities and for action on history is vast. Man can choose, and at certain moments in his history, he may even go so far, through a gesture peculiar to him, as to change himself into a new form of his historical existence, in virtue of which he readjusts and reorganizes himself.

(Schmitt, 1995: 5)

In this line of thought it is undisputable that it would have to be an equal *element*, the one mastered by humankind, in order to pass from *oikos* to *syn-oikos* vice-versa. The one, I contend, that even Schmitt misses to perceive as a *Ur-element* in his dualistic account is the mythical *light*, since — it could severely be argued —, he erroneously puts de mastering of *fire* in the end of the line for the universal historical. On the contrary, the *Ur-ancestor* of humankind, its *pater*, is no other than the *pirokletic* Prometheus, that fire/ light stealer, the champion father of humankind, whose punishment was to be held imprisoned in the Caucasus, just where the first *syn-oikos* started to appear. Why shouldn't they, there, *readjust* and *reorganize* their cityspaces under the benefit of citylights granted by fire, something that only came out in the 15th Century Cordoba, and much later in the 19th Century London?

As well as for the *oikos*, the *synekistic* element is *fire*. As for the fireside [the *house*], light is the controlled environment effect of an urban space [the *city*]. That's the reason why the Marxist dialectics of rural space vs. urban space is completely at pains to the uncontrolled fire. In the collective mind, a natural reason for a devastating bonfire is always a feeble one. Fire brings men together and, as such, their very moral judgement: crime and disregard. In cityspace, under Modern Times, *fire* is bumpered by social alarm, a supreme scandalous entertainment due to a lack of class differentiation: a huge lit building, burnt to pieces, is a representational space of the collapse of a class-ridden society. As Walter Benjamin contends: «The appearance of the street as an *intérieur* in which the phantasmagoria of the *flanêur* is concentrated is hard to separate from the gaslight. (...) A street, a *conflagration*, or a traffic accident assemble people who are not defined along class lines» [second stress added] (Benjamin, 1985: 62).

The second concept I will take up from Schmitt is that of a *space revolution*. As Schmitt observes, in the sequence of his own question about what is a *space revolution*?:

The inhabitant of a big city has a different image of the world than does a farmer. A whale hunter has a vital space that differs from that of an opera-singer. Life and the world are seen in a different light by an air plane pilot, and they have different dimensions, depths, and horizons. The differences in the perception of space are even larger and deeper among various nations and among the various periods in the history of mankind.

(Schmitt, 1995: 28)

Secondly, he concludes:

This redeployment may be so profound and so sudden that it alters not only man's outlook, standards, and criteria but also the very contents of the notion of space. It is in that context

that one may talk of a space revolution. Actually, all important changes in history more often than not imply a new perception of space.

(*ibid.*: 29)

Nowadays, viewing the globe from the outer space, it is obvious that, against the spirit of Schmitt, the struggling stage of this *space revolution* is not being undertaken neither by land, nor air or sea, but under the dominion of *light*: the most illuminated parts of the planet are the ones where *synekism* is at loose.

To the profound redeployment, of space which Schmitt defends is able to sustain a space revolution, I do want to add the argument of the overwhelming post-modernist, if not hyper-human and post-apocalyptic, mechanism of capitalistic incorporation (Jameson, 1991): that ever increasing inversion of values, in which, on the one hand, what is outside is being systematically integrated as essential inwards comfort and commodities². And on the other, the outside cityspace is much more, or even less, than a *syne-oikos*: just a passageway, a mall, a shopping-centre, the *element* of which, like fire, consumption and consumerism are the sheer ignition.

KINGDOM COME

The title of this section is borrowed from the eponymous 2006 novel by J. G. Ballard, verbatim *Kingdom Come*. Its narrative genre is of a simple kind: a crime novel where a murder is committed within the suburbs of London. However its sociological and urban implications are of a broad scope: in the outskirts of a large cityspace people conduct themselves as if there were no outside, public or fixed settlement, but a huge interior surrounding precinct to which the population adopts a feeling of belonging — a circular highway: «the protective shoulders of the M25 were virtually an invention of the advertising industry, or so account executives (...). The suburbs, we would all believe to our last grasp, were defined by the products we sold them, by the brands and trademarks and logos that alone defined their lives» (Ballard, 2006: 4).

But let us go back in time to assert the right lineage of the *space revolution* from which this paper started from. In 1930, the German cultural critic, Siegfried Kracauer, trained as an architect

² As Frederic Jameson well puts it: «For our purposes, therefore, the fact that the living room emerges in a space already built in the older house, while the kitchen is in effect an additional room outside of that, does not seem as significant as the sense that both are somehow equally new, in a way that remains to be evaluated. Indeed, both the now sunken living room and the dining areas and kitchen opened up between the loosely draped external wrapper and the "withering away" of the now unnecessary structural frame now seem to me the thing itself, the new postmodern space proper, which our bodies inhabit in malaise or delight, trying to shed the older habits of inside/outside categories and perceptions, still longing for the bourgeois privacy of solid walls (enclosures like the old centered bourgeois ego), yet grateful for the novelty of the incorporation of yucca plants and what Barthes would have called Californianity into our newly reconstructed environment. We must insist, over and over and in a variety of ways, on the troubling ambiguities of this new "hyperspace."» (Jameson, 1991: 115).

and active as a writer and journalist under the Weimar Republic, ended his article “Abschied von der Lindenpassage” [“Farewell to the Linden Arcade”], on the decline of that specific commercial venue, with the following broad question: “What would be the point of an arcade [*Passage*] in a society that is itself only a passageway?” (Kracauer, 1995: 342). Already suggested in such a perspicuous comment was the fact that the ultimate horizon of the capitalistic action on city economy is the overall commodification of urban places. What is implied here, from the onset, is the complete social and economic mobilisation of city spots and urban sites as in a walloping shopping mall, resulting on a spatial effect in which no limit can be pointed out between the recognized selling station and the non-buying stand. That's the core of Ballard's novel, when a formidable shopping mall transforms the whole entire system of relations into the typical schmittian *space revolution* where an environmental *element* is put totally under (or out of) control. The element, there, starts to be *lighting*, which bears no distinction between the broad daylight and the darkest night. As the novel opens: «The suburbs dream of violence. Asleep in their drowsy villas, sheltered by benevolent shopping malls, they wait patiently for the nightmares that will take them into a more passionate world...» (Ballard, 2006: 3).

This latter is simply the world of terminal consumerism. That's where people, from inside an uprising shopping mall, like in the most class-ridden and hated 'Metro-Centre', start erecting typically exterior shrines to the fainting god of consumerism: «a retail messiah for the age of cable TV» [a shopping channel screen presenter] (Ballard, 2006: 60). And they do so out of the ultimate interior settings, *i.e.*, home appliances: «the modest workstation was almost a neo-fascist altar» (*ibid.*: 55).

The biting question is that the present social theory of New Capitalism seems to reaffirm the diagnosis made a half a century way ahead of his time, by Walter Benjamin when he pointed out that the perspective of a vanishing schism between interior and exterior was the greatest social achievement of *ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochskapitalismus* [a *Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*]. Likewise, as Richard Sennett states about the contemporary biased heroe, the 'Citizen as Consumer': «Overload prompts disengagement» (Sennett, 2006: 172).

The ironic and fully phantasmal turn of J. G. Ballard's novel, in complete accordance with the *inside out effect* defended to this point, which is willing to haunt cityspaces for way to long, is that the unabashed revolution won't come, as in ancient times, from outside the spot. The «many» will control the «few». But from within.

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