City and Crisis: Learning from urban theory

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Georg Simmel has become famous in urban studies for his essay "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben" on the mental effects of living in the metropolis (1995/1903). In this classical text, he is drawing conclusions from his life in Berlin at the turn of the century. The German capital at that time exploded because of an unknown flux of migrants into the city. The population density was higher than ever before and equaled that of Chicago and New York. Simmel asked himself on his daily walks through the overcrowded city, in what way people orient themselves and how do they come into contact which each other. In line with psychological discussion at that time, he described the urban dweller as a person who is overcharged by stimuli and thus developing a kind of nervousness. To protect against the massive flux of unfiltered stimulations, the urbanite hides behind a kind of defensive system (being blasé) and controls interaction by a process of directed intention. Simmel (Junge, 2012) saw this as a crucial socio-psychological competence by which to avoid outbursts of aggression between strangers and enable the necessary distances to unknown people. This profound insight, one can say, is one of the most influential ideas about why urban segregation is occurring and why cities are as unequal as they are even today. But Simmel has not worked out a theory on urban inequalities or any kind of theory on the development of cities in general. Rather on the contrary, Georg Simmel understood himself as a philosopher in the first place. Despite him being a founding member of the German Sociological Association and entitling a book comprising a series of his essays as "Sociology", Simmel is often misunderstood as an "easy to take" reference for the urban social scientist in need of an ancestral thinker to help in making their point more than one-hundred years later.

It is no surprise that European intellectuals (Fontana, 2013; Händler, 2014, Maggioni, 2012) are returning to Georg Simmel and his view on the city. His basic text on mental life in the metropolis has been reinterpreted in many ways before the current crisis reached the level of academic reflection. In their edited volume, Mieg, Sundsboe and Bieniok (2012) have discussed Simmel's elementary idea of the metropolis in relation to various subjects like ethnic segregation, urban poverty, gentrification, architecture, marginalization, creative class, or postindustrial change. Apparently, the basic concept of Simmel remains powerful for enabling an analytical view on the city. While it is not here the place to review these attempts to give Simmel's text an actual meaning in the current situation, one can draw a rough conclusion from these readings what the "actual Simmel" is and thereby avoid unfruitful debates about who has "really understood" him or what the better reading might be. It needs to be said, in the first place, that Simmel's style of writing an essay provokes a rather "postmodern" and fragmented reading of his article on the city, as his works are not put into any overarching theoretical framework, although lines to other articles and to his major philosophical ideas can certainly be worked out (cp. Frisby, 2013). Most of the references in urban studies do not take full account of related perspectives in Simmel's work but concentrate on his view of spatial sociology and are often missing the emphasis that he puts on the aesthetic dimension of the urban. This is particularly problematic, as it is with his view on aesthetics and perception that Simmel develops a theory of modernity. The following short interpretation of these three aspects of Simmel's early reflection on the chaotic city of Berlin, with its immense suffering, estrangement and alienation, provides a starting point for discussion of the urban dimension of the contemporary crisis and possible alternatives.

1. Money and the city

As a philosopher, Simmel was more interested in explaining particular phenomena he observed by linking them to a consideration of how we can perceive the world rather than following an empirical research paradigm. The latter was more realized by the Chicago School of Sociology whose charismatic leader Robert Park had the chance to listen to Simmel's lecture during his time in Germany. While Park and his colleagues had

been engaged in research that not only shared the academic interest in how the city develops but also wanted to explore the empirical reality as if the city was a laboratory, Simmel worked out his argument for such an explorative sociological research agenda. Simmel and the Chicago School shared a moment in time and opened the development of science to the inclusion of society in a naturalistic manner (cp. Hooker, 2013). While the Chicago School saw itself as part of a movement, still inspired by the Progressive Era and American Pragmatism, Simmel aimed at the predominance of some kind of European philosophy that blockades a view on the empirical reality of modernity. His major argument, working from the classical concepts of perception by Immanuel Kant, in short, lays the fundaments for a larger theorization of society based on the reflection of strangers and poor people and on modernity in general.

Modernity in the eyes of Georg Simmel is based on the same principal assumption that he worked out with regard to encounters and their mental effects in the metropolis. As referred to above, the main theoretical problem Simmel wants to clarify is the establishment of society by the thin lines between individuals. He assumes the city as worked up from below, in contrast to ideas where the city is the place of abstract social structures or in which the differentiation of society is only mirrored or reproduced in space without reflecting the effects of space on society. Nevertheless, it is modernity, as such, that interests him in the first place, not so much the city. The city however is characterized as being a describable unity with a clear distinction from the country-side and rural life. And it is part of a modern life style that differs from the life on the countryside in a particular tension between closeness and distance. Above all, the reflection on the city needs to be framed in a more general understanding of a modernity that is shaped by exchange. The nervous encounters in the city are of the same kind of exchange as are all affairs transacted in modernity. In this way, the city is a part of the "philosophy of money" which is by no coincidence the most important work of Simmel, as he himself saw it, and elaborates the character of exchange relations (cp. Rammstedt, 2003). It is all about money in the city as this is the major driver of exchange. Money however is not a morally estimated goal in itself but an expression and a creation of value. While the stranger in the city seeks to find relationships valued for supporting a lifestyle similar to his own, money is a means to express values for objects. The interference of strangers can work out to create a common understanding and in its most

optimistic end point: love. Money undergoes changes as well. First it is an expression of a valued object (as for the stranger: a desired person), then the money becomes an object of estimation by itself. Turning into a value, money becomes exchangeable. The exchange of money, the urban lifestyle and the appearance of a modern individualism are interrelated aspects mutually supportive of each other and all are essentially based on the modern principle of exchange. The main question is how these exchange processes are generated and in what way individual appreciation becomes a social value producing tokens of exchange (money) which in themselves become valorized. In a second step, these valorized goods influence individual perception, identity and their systems of valorization. Simmel speaks of "Wechselwirkungen" (relations of mutual influences). Erotic, religious or just social drives are the starting point of these relations and motivate people to join struggles for, with or against the coexistence of others. Play, teaching, help, attack and other forms of making these contacts differ, but the underlying intentions are similar. For Simmel, interaction, in its eventual sociological sense, still refers to the whole world of interaction and does not make so much difference between objects and other human beings. Societal desire is the starting point for both, interference and exchange with others and with regard to goods. In his view, the city is a place for individualism as it needs a certain intellectualism based in the individual capacity to reflect on individual desires. The urban intellectual is the most outspoken figure of a modern citizen who undergoes the transformation of his desires by rationalization. It is not only that one needs to calculate cost-effect-relations for social and economic investment, but also the very estimation of values requires a sort of calculation. If money becomes a goal in its own, all other valued objects can be calculated in their monetary distance. Everything becomes more or less – countable in euros and cents – equal important and close or far, because all desirable objects can be measured by money. In contrast to the Marxian observation that this transformation means a kind of alienation, it is rather a melancholic feeling that comes to mind (Rowe, 2005). Many of the contemporary discussions underlining the emotional meaning of the crisis share this point of observation when the greed and avarice of bankers and the rich are addressed. With Simmel, these criticisms can be linked to an understanding of economy where the equalizing effect of the monetization of individual desires is not fully accepted – which Simmel, reading sub alinea, seems to share as well.

Two other important aspects of the monetization of urban life are to be taken into account in contemporary discussions. Firstly, the transformation of desires into money and its "flattening" effect allows a calculated, industrialized and effective way to produce a consumptive answer to those desires. In this way, the societal response to individual needs and wishes allows the construction of the paradox of individual mass society: everybody has different longings, but in this everybody is the same. Acceleration of interactions (Wechselwirkungen) can be ensured by mass organization. As an effect, the massification requires the installation of the individual offer as an illusion. The disillusion becomes sensible as soon as the effects of mass production are becoming obvious. That is the reason for a permanent reproduction of fashion. Intrinsically, mobility, fashion, and speed are the consequence of this upheld theatre of distinctiveness. The individual thereby is captured in the hiatus between the "objective culture" offering infrastructure, means of transport and goods and everything that objectively ensures our lives and his personal "subjective culture" which cannot hold pace with the general production of culture in society. Most obviously, this gap between the objective and the subjective part of modern life expresses itself in the accelerated speed of society. Individuals attempt to cope with the "ups and downs" of the modern and urban rhythms but as the exchanges are realized in an increasingly faster process, the individual suffers greater difficulty to adapt. Individualism therefore is nothing that eo ipso is a beneficial achievement. It puts new challenges in front of society and burdens the individual with a fight against the predominance of objective culture and the ever faster speed of exchange caused by the monetization of individual desires.

2. Learning from Simmel?

In sum, reading the city from Georg Simmel's classical texts, the concern about the mental health and well-being of the individual person becomes evident. As some readers suggest, Simmel offers an additional point of view to the prevalent theorization in critical urban studies which takes much from Marx' theory of exchange as a starting point (Cantó Milà, 2003). Simmel has put an "underground" in the Marxian theory on value creation that allows the capture of phenomena of modern society

into a theoretical understanding of money. Significantly, the appearance of an urban life style based not only on the idea of distinction – as in the classical concepts of class society up to studies on the "small differences" – offers a view on the effect of objectivation of spatial organization, the individualism of urban dwellers, the rise of a fashion type of industry and life style. It is the feeling of being separated, overwhelmed, fragmented, and the longing for others and beautiful objects rather than the facts of expropriation, class distinctiveness and alienation from production that are the concern of Simmel's reflection on the city, the monetization of life and the challenged individualism. With his alternative reading of the "mental life in the metropolis", the German philosopher emphasizes aspects of a crisis that derive from modernity and the modern city itself. While Marx would support the crisis nature of capitalism, with Simmel the focus lies on the intrinsic generation of crisis because of the psychological and social construction of life in the modern metropolis.

Already the Chicago School did not follow the melancholic notion of the monetization and its encapsulating effects on urban life. For Robert Park, the city was pushed by the processes of exchange and mobility to a large extent but these forces did not dominate as they did for Georg Simmel and even more so for the Marxists. "The city", as Park wrote, is a place "in which more than elsewhere human relations are likely to be impersonal and rational, defined in terms of interest and in terms of cash." But despite the strong effects of capitalism, the city remains a place of "collective behavior." (Park, Burgess and McKenzie, 1925/1997, 22).

Conceptually, the city is not identical with society and the collective behavior of its inhabitants is worthy of study as an objective in its own:

> "The city shows the good and evil in human nature in excess. It is this fact, perhaps, more than any other, which justifies the view that would make of the city a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be conveniently and profitably studied." (46)

Social processes in this sense are also separated from a psychological starting point, as Simmel has argued for. In the Chicago School's empirical work, especially with the introduction of first hand material, original wording, photographs, maps, and biographical reports, the individual is given a prominent place in their sociological studies. Nevertheless, it is not individualism and the individual suffering from the predominance of

the objective culture that is the interest here. The focus lies rather on those "little worlds" of which the city is composed and which make life exciting but also dangerous. In a more general comparison, the empirically open view on the city and society does not presume an automatic downward spiral of the individual because of speed, objectification and mass society. In a sense, the famous circle model of Burgess aiming at an explanation of urban development can be regarded as an optimistic perspective where people can potentially progress into a more liberal society where their feelings, memories and values are shared. Assimilation as a kind of final merger of cultures and people from different backgrounds has been therefore foreseen in Parks "race relation cycle". Indeed, the Chicago School can be seen as a kind of liberal criticism of capitalism as it leaves open whether "the good and evil in human nature" are getting to the foreground in history (Smith, 1988).

Placing the city into an historical dimension, however, remained a weakness in the sociological analysis of Simmel and the Chicago School alike. The conceptualization of modernity remained in loose contact with the historical narratives. In contrast, Max Weber has been the major thinker of the late 19th and early 20th century who saw the particularities of the European city. He worked out his intellectual position on the basis of the then available sources and contextualized the rise of European modernism as a result of a long lasting historical development overrunning other civilizations' leading positions. As a core idea, the autonomy of the European city was for Weber a nucleus of development of a society where consensus and self-regulation could be achieved. His major concept was, as with Simmel, based on a small-scale construct of society. His focus on the "conjurations" however emphasizes the building of local society rather than the pressure that the individual feels in Simmel's "modern metropolis". In Weber's view, the meeting of strangers and their livingalongside each other is the key element for the development of the European civilization and its advantages comparable to others, especially Asian societies. Today, we know that Weber's perception on the sharp differences between European and other cities does not hold ground and must be blamed on the generally little knowledge about Asia at that time (cp. Bruhns and Nippel, 2000). More critically reviewed, Weber has limited himself to the raising of a partly romantic idea of the Middle Age city in Europe where conflicts, discrimination, segregation, political and religious persecution and other aspects of the "ugly side" of

urban life were not appropriately considered. Even more problematic is the neglect of the effects of the industrial revolution on the concept of the "European" city. Though Weber probably saw the technological progress that industrial society embodies as a result of European history, he seems to have closed his eyes to its character as a crisis driven society.

3. The European city

Considerations on the "European city" nevertheless remain in current discussion and are politically powerful constructs of imagination. In many intellectual and political discourses the very understanding of Europe being made up locally and the local as a backbone for democratic politics is simply unquestionable (Le Galés, 2011; Siebel, 2010). However, the debate on the European city is at least partially a normative one and fulfills a socio-psychological need as a quasi authentic place of democracy is identified in which freedom and economic progress are seen as intertwined. In the contemporary readings of the European city, the heritage of the welfare state, political accessibility and social integration are embedded. To some extent this recalls Weber's idealization of the European Middle Aged city and the generation of a rational way of life (Domingues, 2000). While the return to the concept of the European city can be regarded as a counter position to the neoliberal city, its analytical strength remains highly questionable (cp. Kemper, 2012). In the context of the current discussion of crisis, the most critical failure is the lacking notion of crisis at all. This is in particular true for the violent 20th century which Weber could not foresee but which has brought the experience of totalitarianism and fascism with the most painful result that large parts of the historically "grown" European cities have been erased and destroyed.

To explain these historical phenomena would require obviously more space than available. However, it is clear that there is not a convincing argument for the treatment of local and national levels of society in a dual and simplistic way, meaning that the cities have been the victims of nation-wide, non-local structures and processes. On the contrary, local conflicts and crises can evolve and erupt from "local societies" in the Weberian sense and become a global disaster. In the post-totalitarian age, the lesson should not be forgotten that it all started small and local. A simple return to the notion of the historical European city will not explain how this

kind of very fundamental crisis of European civilization has happened. If one wants to keep upright the idea of a more democratic society based on the "local", then the potential for crisis needs to be acknowledged and theoretically conceptualized.

From a selective point of view, different accounts can be referenced as the working-out of a historical perspective on crisis that might help to re-conceptualize the European city as a legitimate description. Beyond the most prominent analysis in urban studies referring to regulation theory or neo-Marxist positions, a different approach can be outlined following the key idea of the historian Reinhard Kosellek (cp. Olsen, 2012). His major insight stems from various historical analyses but mainly from his research on the situation in France before 1789. Koselleck wanted to find out at what moment the French Revolution really started. Correctly, he linked the upcoming changes back to changes of thought in the first place. From a structuralist point of view, the social stratification did not change much in advance of the French Revolution. One can say that the consistency of the social inequalities did not have any direct influence on the events happening. Many acts of the revolution, like the storm of the Bastille, did not have a "real" link to a changed society or any other direct political intention. This symbolic layer of the revolution, according to Koselleck, is a consequence of the changes brought about by the long foregoing critique on the absolutist state. In other words, the changes in attitude towards the role of politics and the state are the starting point of a profound crisis of society. It is a critique that is deeply rooted in crisis and vice versa. The impact of critique is ensured by its moral position to question the architecture and the governance of the state. Modernity in this sense has changed the role of the Hobbesian state that needed to ensure peace between citizens but had not to fulfil any of the moral obligations that the Enlightment expected. In his further analysis, Koselleck explains the rise of terror and totalitarian rule as a reaction to the permanent tension that enlightened perspectives are putting on political leaders.

In the light of the analysis of Koselleck, the idea of a crisis needs to be seen as an intrinsic moment of the culture of modernity. As it is correct to point at the role of critique, the term of "critique" should not be confused with a notion of "critical theory" that is often intruding on urban studies. Critique means here an intellectual challenge of politics in its by-then current state of mind. It challenges established ways of perception and self-description. These challenges are not purely academic exercises but

are placed in an arena of political decision-making and preparation. As critique is interrupting the management of society, the urge to limit and overcome the questioning of the existing modus vivendi is high. Critique creates a loss of trust, insecurity, moral pressure and time gaps between decision-making and reflection. All this leads to the creation of essential moments where time pressure forces quick (alternative) decisions. If a crisis is understood this way, there is no way back to any kind of "normality". Crisis is then not just a period between two phases of normal life. Rather, modernity can be regarded as a permanent flow of faster or slower crises. Whether changes appear to us as "crisis" or not depends on the speed of these transformations. Critique however is the main source of provoking these crises as they produce permanent irritations. Critique fulfills this societal function not only in its classical manner like the philosophers in the 18th century or the investigative journalists in the 20th century. Irritation of the normality of society derives from everyday life and actors (in the broadest sense) who act differently – the alternative milieu keeping old paper for recycling instead of putting it into the garbage, refugees crossing national borders or critical consumers. The existing socio-political order can integrate this critique by changing political frameworks or with terror. Critique can create dangerous and risky situations for the society and for particular social groups and individuals. Saying that in modernity crisis is normal sounds like neglecting the damaging aspect of crisis. Losing a house, your family, your health or your job or all these together can be the most serious threat in one's life. However, what seems to matter is the speed of events in the first place and the interpretation of the "critique" that goes together with these crises with regard to self-understanding and valorization. Already Émile Durkheim (cp. Girola Molina, 2005) had pronounced that the sudden appearance of collapse creates a situation of losing orientation and an individual or collective status of anomy. As irritations can have different scopes and can concern more or fewer parts of society, the evoked crisis can include different layers of society, affecting socially different groups and impacting society at different scales. A general crisis, as "revolutions" might be counted for, distracts from the fact that the modern crisis has to be thought of on a scale of speed and depth from where it is correlating, impacting and causing other crises in society. If critique initiates crisis, the variety of critique – from small-scale "Manöverkritik" (critique de maneuver, debriefing) to the critique of the grand narrative – needs to be taken into account.

Understanding the interference between crisis, modernity and critique in this way means that history itself can no longer be thought as a simple line of events or the producer of artefacts and achievements. The European city as a picture of a certain form of urban order, social tolerance and architecture therefore is a simplification of the "many histories" (Koselleck) running through at different speeds and on various layers. It has to be discussed what kind of critique this is and what are the reasons for the creation and proclamation of such a picture. Taking it as critique, the "European city" appears in times of a deep crisis but it does not question those forces promoting another way of thinking in Europe. This can be made clear by the example of the so-called "Leipzig Charta" which was launched by the European Union to acclaim the "Renaissance of the European City" in the early years of the 21th century (Eltges and Nickel, 2007). The text itself included not one single coherent new way of thinking but aimed at harmonizing the prevalent rebellion of neo-liberalism and its emphasis on economic competitiveness with the aggravated philosophy of social cohesion derived from the lasting intellectual social-democratic hegemony in Europe. The criticism of the current intellectual basis of our societies by using the stereotype and kitsch version of the "European city" shows only that new ideas that would irritate the current self-descriptions of Europe and the routines of political crisis management are not deriving from a reorientation that once contested the predominance of the modern city.

It remains thus to be critically discussed what kind of critique is produced, if formative and guiding thoughts are still related to the "city" (cp. Bourdin, 2010). The obvious danger is the illusion that local actions can provide an irritation that can challenge the installed narratives of austerity and competitiveness. Will it be possible to think of a critique that allows the creation of another intellectual attack on the omnipresent self-descriptions in the European societies while still talking about the city and referring to politics of nearness and planability? The replacing of the self-descriptors, the "urban" and the "locale", – outside of the neo-liberal attitude to the city as a purely economic entity to be steered and governed as an enterprise – already takes place, but the intellectual powers working in this direction do not irritate the social order in a way that classical left criticism intended. The contemporary re-orientation to the city has nothing to do with a form of societal provocation of existing hierarchies of values and social positions. It is all too well known that

gentrification, NIMBY-politics and the panoptical control of the city do not intend to break up existing orders of social perception and interpretation. On the contrary, we can observe more rigid interpretations of norms in the public, a less tolerant attitude to socially deprived persons and an increasingly invisibility of the "unsuccessful". Academic discourses have produced overwhelming evidence and have placed the "just city" at the top of urban research.

4. Critique of the city

Apparently, attempts to cope with the crisis are related to the establishments of new practices or at least reactions and adaptations on the local level. At the end of the day, the crisis always manifests itself into something material and tangible, something than can be felt and that exists in some way or the other in the symbolic order of individual life. This is the description of the crisis that is nevertheless hard to represent. It is assumed to be "visible" and able to be told in a story of before and after-situations with actors which "act" and victims. The relevance of this crisis narrative is related to the communicative situation it is anchored in, that is a mostly multi-media setting combining a real and a textual and metaphorical picture. The logic of the creation of a crisis and the representation of a crisis do not fall together. It can be stated with more accuracy that these two aspects of the crisis are de-coupled and the representation of the crisis is either part of the irritation ongoing or it is bound to be reclaiming the old social order. In this sense, the linkage of crisis to a local representation needs to be reflected as a form of critique that, to a very limited extent and in a particular way, represents the current multiple crises of Europe. If a particular point of the contemporary situation is characterized by financial markets which are "out of control" and are so because they are no longer linked to the "real economy" then how could this feature of the present economic crisis be reflected in representations of the so-called local impact or the urban dimension? The logical argument would derive from a chain of presumed causalities that leads from quasi-bankrupt states to localities without financial space to maneuver, so that the social aspect of the crashes of the job and housing market cannot be counterbalanced. Obviously, the attempt to tell a "local" story of the crisis requires a certain

narrative that leaves out many complex layers of society and selects the events, actors and policies.

This crisis narrative reestablishes the city as a place of public drama. In a time where the local has been virtualized in an extensive way and democracy became exhausted, the narrowing of perspectives on something visible, local and which can be represented in a public space is an understandable attempt to revitalize the idea of the city. In the nation state, the public space had an established function for expressing demands and critique and it was part of an opposition to a well-defined government. It is however questionable today whether this kind of "city politics" has the same role. In a globalized world the role of the urban has taken on a different meaning and in this political framework is serving another function. As sympathetic as the newly emerging social movements are to the local story, especially the "Right to the City"-groups everywhere, it needs to be recognized that the idea of a city and the political and societal significance of the "locale" have been transformed in the last thirty years. It is not only that the regime of capitalist accumulation has been changed from a fordist to a post-fordist logic, more important might be that this foregone structural change has been prepared and legitimized by a fundamental critique that wanted to overcome the narrowness of the local and the cemented order of social networks in the welfare state.

"Think global, act local" was the slogan of an internationally oriented ecological movement, but it could have also been the motto of the neoliberal reforms. Thinking local in times of global interferences means something profoundly different when the world market is opened up completely, mobility of goods and people seems to be unlimited, global flow of images and ideas and the speed of technological innovations transform the most private and personal affairs (cp. Bourdin, Eckardt and Wood, 2014). What the city has become or still is remains an open question. Competing ideas are circulating. In the nineties, attempts for new descriptions wanted to irritate the existing concepts by pointing at its fragmentary, dispersed, splintering, regional, virtual, aestheticized, emotionalized and networked character. The coining of another term has not been successful and those that have been proposed remained alive only for the time of an academic fashion (Metapolis, Zwischenstadt, Global City, Postmetropolis etc.). Intentionally understood, these formulations wanted to create a space to recognize the crisis of the city already happening. In its darkest colors, Mike Davis and his "City of Quartz" gained some prominence but a

general interruption of the blinded view on the disappearance of the city "as we know it" was not achieved by this noir urbanism. Looking back on these writings of urban scholars, the return to a terminology of the city appears as a capitulation of the critique on the idea of the city. It is obvious that most intellectual responses on the current situation refer back to theoretical discussions before the appearance of the mentioned reformulations of the significance of the "urban". We are "excavating Lefebvre" (Purcell, 2002) with his claim for more accessibility to the city in general and to the street, as it was important for the May 68-movement. In this way, we return to a terminology of "rebellion" like David Harvey which reminds of that same kind of spirit.

It is not clear what kind of effects the rebirth of the idea of the city will have It might be a mighty weapon for some local movements and actions to make their point and to influence certain areas of politics. Conceptually spoken, their terminology of the city differs not from the one that is installed by their ideological enemies, as it reassures the importance of the locale and denies the complexity of global embedding which produces global-local places, so called "glocal" societies. These glocal societies drive on networking thoughts and pictures about "place" which are disturbing, transforming, interrupting, expelling, destroying and recreating local communities and making them losing the power of defining the local. The multiplication of the crises starts, as Koselleck would formulate, with a change of thought – think globally. Yes, we do and we do in all regards. Can we really still act locally when everybody is consuming, producing, travelling, communicating, dreaming and marrying globally? Insisting on the remaining meaning of the city and consequently looking for rebellion – which is a typically local phenomenon – does not give us the necessary answers on this question. Once a powerful critique against the failures of the nation state, globalism has abolished the idea of the city as a Weberian "local society" and has devalued the importance of urban exchange as in the classical concept of Simmel. Intellectualism is no longer the consequence of too many stimuli on the street and the objective culture is deeply embedded in our imaginations of the local.

5. Returning to urban critique

The resurrection of protest in the cities as reaction to the multiple crises has nowhere led to a change in the main fields of neo-liberal activities. Still, the European banks are regarded as little resistant against the next financial crisis. The budgetary reforms have by far not equilibrated the social costs incurred. The disastrous unemployment, especially among the youth, has not been addressed in a substantial way. Nevertheless, many local initiatives have organized their forces to return to some kind of a more solidary way of living. These activities are criticizing the predominant way of capitalist thinking in a more substantial degree. It remains however clear that they cannot evoke a crisis of neo-liberalism. There are many discussions among activists about their own weakness, about why in these times many people do not trust alternatives and why the desire for "business as usual" seems to be the strongest wish. One could say, the crisis has reached all parts of society but not our thoughts about us.

Understanding this book as a contribution towards challenging existing perceptions of the Southern European cities and the multilayered crisis, it was the foremost intention of the editors and authors to make that step. In different ways, the contributions from urban theory and empirical urban studies intend to find a way out of the most concerning situation with its multiple dimensions of crisis.. Learning from urban theory so far, means that we have to struggle forward to a critique of the city, if we want to overcome the crisis of our cities. Learning from urban theory does not mean that we have to see the crisis through the eyes of one theoretical guide like Weber, Simmel, Lefebvre or whosoever. It is rather the treatment of their thoughts that can us help to cope with the current intellectual blockades. The conceptual contradiction between the existing theoretical approaches warns us about the failing attempt to see the city as the key idea of a potentially progressive critique of society. The disillusion with the "lasting" European City (whatever that was), the vulnerability of the "local society", the dangerous isolation of the individual amidst strangers, the overwhelming principles of competition and ownership form the massive intellectual barricade that an urban critique must run against. It is no longer the city but it is a new form of urbanity that has been established in the recent struggles. Often ridiculed or stigmatized as "Facebook revolution", the power of the idea that individuals can meet,

cross borders, join forces and return to the essentials of life has been demonstrated:

> "There were first a few, who were joint by hundreds, then networked by thousands, then supported by millions with their voices and their internal quest for hope, as muddled as it was, that cut across ideology and hype, to connect with the real concerns of the real people in the real human experience that had been reclaimed. It began on the internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations [...] By sharing the sorrow and hope in the free public space of the Internet, by connecting to each other [...] individuals formed networks [...] They came together." (Castells, 2012, 14)

The new social movements from Brazil to Turkey, from Tahir Square to Wall Street, have produced a new way of social networking, something the conventional location-based public would have never been able to create. Interestingly, however, the streets and squares have not become irrelevant and there has been a revolution not only on Facebook. Highly visible, this is an emotional urbanity that strives via physical presence after the authentic experience in the encounter of the others. Physicality and spatial structure are the targets of these activities. You learn to know about these others not only in the public squares, but you already know – or rather feel, wait and hope – who may come.

Therefore, it is short-sighted, if now a renaissance of public spaces is discussed, as if it would matter that places are provided for demonstrations, as was the case in the modern city. Strikingly, the speeches of the great "leaders" of the rebellions and the Arabic revolutions play no role. This applies especially to the Occupy movement, which deliberately wanted to initiate an alternative speech culture. Artists, musicians, journalists and a few politicians in the modern sense can be seen at these places. The new urban movements are not oppositional in the classical sense. That is why there is no opposition leader who can be either arrested or even identified as a legitimate representative. In the light of modern democratic thought these movements are weak because they produce no organized opposition and provide no alternative personages and programs. Such a requirement is, however, completely misleading, because it is not at all about being an opposition with a unifying narrative that could also be action-oriented. The one-issue movements such as the ecology protest have been thoroughly integrated today into the narrative of the "policy

for all", however the digitization of the urban – the number of existing narratives – potentialized to almost infinity. Therefore, the logic of these processes is not based on finding one unifying narrative, but to allow the diversity of existing narratives and thus allows very personal body-reconstructing and emotive interactions that provide for the individual search for experience and meaning thereby reacting to the uncertainty of the multiple crises. The common sense structures are fragile and are based on relatively rudimentary statements, but they are an expression of "mass self-communication" as Castells called them. Their structure is diversity. You will not be able to enforce them to be integrative into further existing authoritarian, uniform and abstract narratives, even if they were temporarily transformed into a single narrative. The cracks and contradictions of the dominant narratives, the wild knowledge and unplanned spatial constructions and reinterpretations of existing places are the breeding ground of diversity that can be sometimes subversive and inclusive, sometimes aggressive and sometimes poetic. For this "city", the descriptive vocabulary is missing, because it is a bulky, irritating, exhilarating, seductive and intensive experience of oneself and of others, which you do not want to tame by any language. Rather, the new urban critique derives more from gestures, looks, acts, mimicry and non-verbal symbols and infinite fictional constructs. As a carpet it lays out pieces of a critique in search of new narratives with challenged perceptions, innovated perspectives, dared actions and reconstruction of social lines beyond the "urban" – the city as we have known it so far.

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