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Disaster movie or New Jerusalem?

Alternative urban scenarios for the 21st century

Through the 1990s, a strand in urban commentary depicted contemporary cities as sites of dystopia. Mike Davis, for instance, likens the future scenario of Los Angeles to the scripts of disaster movies. When the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York – known as 9-11 – brought the projected disaster into reality television with repeated scenes of the falling towers, it seemed this script had served its purpose (although since then it has been reincorporated into projections of climate change). This dystopian imagery contradicts earlier modernist ideas of the city as a location of a new, utopian social order from the 1920s to the 1960s. This idealism builds on romanticised images of the city as a site of culture in an uncultured landscape, or a place of safety, a citadel, in face of wild nature. A difficulty uniting dystopian and utopian images of these kinds is that both tend to universalise the experience of urban dwelling while privileging the plan and the design over the material reality. At the level of everyday life, as Lefebvre and de Certeau argued, urban space is produced in another way by its inhabitants. Similarly, taking the argument to today's alternative society and its ecological and socially equitable settlements, new social practices emerge as moments of liberation within the restrictions of present structures of power. The paper outlines this argument, and gives several examples of alternative urbanism. It makes no claim that these practices constitute an ideal society, but rather re-frames the utopian within the everyday as a really possible future other than catastrophe.

Key words: alternative urbanism, dystopian city, urban space, utopian image

Introduction

In 1998, Mike Davis (1998) likened the future scenario of Los Angeles to the standard plot of a disaster movie. Post-industrial cities, it seemed, were dystopia, now framed in the categories of post-modern architectural discourse. From the 1920s to the 1960s, the city of international modernism was intended to provide security, decent housing and public services for all through the agency of rational planning. But by the 1990s the dream had crumbled. Cities – Los Angeles in particular – were sites of insecurity and disintegration as the affluent class withdrew to gated compounds (in a phenomenon called white flight), and streets became zones of crime and the arbitrary power of privatised security agencies. In 1992, the disaffected vented their frustration in Los Angeles and other North American cities. Leonie Sandercock (1998: 11) recalls:

“Twilight, Los Angeles, 29 April 1992. ... The city is burning. As the smoke and the glow from the fires begin to rise over the city, millions of horrified citizens huddle in front of TV sets which transmit images that confirm everyone's worst nightmares”.

The burning followed a not-guilty verdict on four white policemen tried for violent assault on a black citizen. But in all parts of the industrialised world – the global North – structural economic changes caused new insecurities for both blue- and white-collar workers. In many cities, by the 1990s, manufacturing had been replaced by immaterial

production to leave vast areas of vacant industrial lots, while redundant industrial buildings were used for cultural purposes and the mall became a ubiquitous consumer space, often privatizing city streets watched by security cameras.

In the first section of the paper I look at three overlapping aspects of cities in the post-industrial economy – the city as a war-zone; the city of symbolic economies; and the city as ruin. In the second section, I turn to contemporary utopian possibilities, aware that a frequent criticism of utopias is that they cannot accommodate change. Yet Richard Sennett (1995: 155) and Edward Soja (2000: 248) remind us that city air makes people free (*Stadt Luft macht frei*) – or was said to do so in the port-cities of the Hanseatic League. I take this sentiment as a basis for really possible urban utopias today, within the dominant society in, as yet, localised experimental models such as eco-villages – the research and development work for a new society.

Section I

City as War Zone

In *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis observes the white suburbs of Los Angeles. He sees “*carefully manicured Lawns*” and “*ominous little signs warning ‘Armed Response!’*” while the most affluent areas were constituted as gated compounds “*behind walls guarded by gun-toting private police and state-of-the-art electronic surveillance*” (Davis 1990: 223). Davis notes that middle-class people have access to facilities in cafés and art galleries, but the homeless, whose sleep in the park is broken by randomly activated sprinklers, have only the street for convenience. Forced to relieve themselves in the street, homeless people’s behaviour reinforces their status as outside civil society. The term street people becomes pejorative, and streets are seen as dangerous. (Davis 1990: 226, 235.) But even the burnt-out sites of civil disorder are opportunities for redevelopment.

The provision of new public open spaces is ubiquitous in urban redevelopment. This has some validity. Sites such as Paley Park in Manhattan attract high levels of use (figure 1). William H. Whyte (1980) shows, using time-lapse cameras in the 1970s, that such small urban social spaces are more likely to be successful when they offer a variety of spaces, planting, water features, a café, and moveable seating which users configure as they like.



Figure 1. Paley Park, New York City. All figures are the author’s original photographs

The difficulty is that such spaces tend to figure in a privatisation of public urban space and subsequent re-coding for consumption. The planners in Barcelona welcomed the new mall (figure 2) near their offices because it gave young people a place to socialize in a subway café.¹ Non-affluent groups use malls for their own purposes, hanging-out instead of consuming (Miles 2003), but the commonplace use of private security firms to guard such sites suggests that non-standard uses



Figure 2. The New Urban – a mall in Barcelona

are at best tolerated (and not always).

New centres create new margins, geographically and psychologically. When the new public spaces of a city constitute a celebration of global consumerism, those to whom it is denied become marginal people. For those who access consumerism, the presence of the marginal breeds fear. Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 38) notes, “*Ours is a time of patented locks, burglar alarms, barbed-wire fences, neighbourhood watch and vigilantes ...*”. Insecurity leads to compulsive life-style consumerism as defence against being no-one; and, implies that those for whom such consumption is not accessible are non-people, to be generalized as the underclass.

The underclass has no power, unlike the traditional working class which exercised its power in France in the general strike of May 1968. Among the visual signs of its existence is graffiti. This was an issue in New York from the 1970s, when graffiti on subway trains was perceived as a sign of an underclass living, literally, underground in subway tunnels. Tim Cresswell (1996: 37) observes a sense of dissolution in the popular press, for whom graffiti was a new plague:

“Throughout the 1970s graffiti is referred to variously as garbage, pollution, obscenity, an epidemic, a disease, a blight, a form of violence, dangerous, and a product of the mad, the ghetto, and the barbarian.”

Cresswell (1996: 38) cites a letter in the *New York Times*, “*No civilized metropolis ... would endure such garbage and its continuing proliferation ... shocks many visitors and repulses untold numbers of local travelers.*” Similarly, Richard Sennett (1990: 206) quotes a subway passenger:

“I do not find myself consciously making the connection between the graffiti-makers and the criminals who occasionally rob, rape and assault passengers ... [but] the sense that all are part of one world of uncontrollable predators seems inescapable. ... their ever-present markings serve to persuade the passenger that ... the subway is a dangerous place. ... The issue of controlling graffiti is ... one of reducing the ever-present sense of fear.”

Strangely, late in 1989, graffiti on a section of the Berlin Wall removed to a small plaza near the Museum of Modern Art, a piece of street furniture behind white tables and chairs, is a monument to



Figure 3. Section of the Berlin Wall in Manhattan

the free world (figure 3). The style is like that of the subway, and among those who added graffiti to the Berlin Wall was New York street artist Keith Haring. Then, graffiti was bought by art dealers. Jean-Michel Basquiat, previously known by his tag, SAMO (Cresswell 1996: 36), became an art-star.

Perhaps it is a question of place, or dominant perceptions of an urban environment corresponding to underlying anxieties. Graffiti is annoying, often tediously repetitive, but its status as sign of social collapse requires explanation. Cresswell (1996: 38) cites anthropologist Mary Douglas (1996), for whom dirt is matter out of place, differently constructed in different societies. Cresswell (1996: 39) cites Julia Kristeva (1983) for whom dirt, or that which pollutes, exceeds its boundary. Marginalised (like the Freudian repressed), it returns to disrupt the centre. For Kristeva this applies to the place and status of women. It can equally be applied to the place and status of the vagrant and insane, who were excluded from the visible streets of Paris to be removed to the *Hôpital Général* in 1656, in what Michel Foucault (1967: 38–64) calls the great confinement. Perhaps this is the beginning of the city-as-war-zone, in the demarcation of boundaries between what can be seen in a city and what is to be removed from sight.

To take this argument one further, Rosi Braidotti (2006: 48) writes that, following Foucault’s analysis of the production of the subject in modern society, Gilles Deleuze sees the representation of the embodied subject as no longer simply visual, or specular in the sense of a self defined in a dualism of self and other, but now “*schizoid, or internally disjointed ...*”. Braidotti (2006: 51–52) cites the call-centre worker in India who must mimic the subjectivity of someone in Minneapolis:

“The cultural cross-dressing performed by call-centre digital proletarians is ... [a] variation on the theme of bodily exploitation, which fits into the global marketing of both material commodities and Western life-styles, cultures and accents.”

It is a suitable image for global consumerism which trades on anxieties of personality, enforced by global media in the increasingly fused news and entertainment industries.

City as Site of Symbolic Economies

In post-industrial society, immaterial replaces material production. Sectors such as financial services, public relations, media and culture take the place of manufacturing as the basis of a city's economy. The material outcome tends to be de-industrialisation and abandonment of swathes of urban landscape. In the new suburbs, in gentrified inner-city districts and in cultural quarters or heritage zones, new centres create new margins. As in the perception of graffiti, fear drives the new scenario. Bauman (2000: 92) cites an architect (George Hazelton quoted in McGreal 1999) designing a gated residential compound in South Africa: *“Today the first question is security. Like it or not, it's what makes the difference ...”*. The designer recalls his childhood in London and the security there of being watched over by a community. He says he wants to recreate this. Bauman (2000: 92) comments, *“‘Community’ is ... the last relic of the old-time utopias of the good society; it stands for whatever has been left of the dreams of a better life shared with better neighbours all following better rules ...”*.

The nostalgia for a better life is at odds with modern spatial zoning. Inner-city streets of mixed use and multiple emotional ownership are regarded by developers as targets for clearance. In a study of Thamesmead – a 1960s housing development in south-east London – Edward Robbins argues that middle-class ideas of suburbia were imposed on plans for mass housing, while the functionality of space informed the poor relocated there from inner-city neighbourhoods that they were unable to structure space for themselves. Robbins (1996: 286) notes of the inner-city street,

“What appears to be the very chaos of the street is its attraction. Cacophonous though these streets may be, shared understandings of the rules of engagement make the street a most ordered and organized place.”

This suggests an everyday ordering of space by its users, which is not planned but is not accidental either. In a climate of fear, however, the latent order of ordinary life is marginalised by more visually obvious forms of ordering, as in street surveillance.

Bauman (2000: 94) cites Sharon Zukin (1995: 38) on the *“watershed in the institutionalization of urban fear”* in the 1970s, when elites *“chose to buy protection, fuelling the growth of the private security industry.”* Sennett observes another aspect of the situation in a study of new patterns of work. He notes the inability of workers in a bakery to mediate the evident inefficiencies of a mechanized oven, the sense of failure for executives whose career is ended by rationalization, and the exploitation of flexitime:

“The system of power which lurks in modern forms of flexibility consists of three elements: discontinuous reinvention of institutions; flexible specialization of production; and concentration of without centralization of power” (Sennett 1998: 47).

The post-modern, or post-industrial, corporate entity, that is, de-centres its own power at the same time as increasing its control over labour and consumption. Key functions, from accounting to recruitment and public relations, are out-sourced while routine tasks are out-sourced to consumers (as in airline self-service check in and supermarket self-service check-out). The freedom of choice remains the incentive to subscribe to mainstream society, as Bauman (2000: 86) argues replacing the coercion on which Foucault (1975/1991) wrote with spectacle – enticement disguised as free will. And as cities compete globally for inward investment and tourism, it is in their symbolic economies reliant on visual spectacles that image and surface dominate.

Art has a key function in providing memorable images in the construction of a symbolic economy, and in the institutions which characterize the post-industrial city, such as the flagship art gallery. In Barcelona, the museum of contemporary art (MACBA) is at the northern end of el Raval – a neighbourhood of 18th- and 19th-century apartment blocks, hitherto (and to an extent still) ethnically diverse, the red-light district but now the cultural quarter. Intrepid tourists, warned not go but seeking to be travellers, flock there to find authentic bars and mingle with people whom they seldom encounter at home. In the 1990s,



Figure 4. The New Ramblas

Barcelona linked tourism with the building of a new, Catalan cultural infra-structure. Playing on the tourist-traveller's quest for the authentic, information on cultural events was given only in Catalan. (See Dodd 1999: 53–64.) But this did not prevent a policy of opening up el Raval as a means to cleanse the city of one its low-life quarters. Several blocks were demolished to provide the New Ramblas (figure 4), a vast public space with palm trees and street lights resembling a sculpture by Richard Serra.

The old Ramblas connects the commercial centre to the port, traditionally site of the evening promenade and flower-stalls. The New Ramblas connects one narrow street to another. A plan to build a four-star hotel on one side remains unrealized. The New Ramblas, however, has a purpose beyond such use: it denotes a shift of image from the Mediterranean port with its labyrinth of narrow streets and overhanging balconies on which dwellers sit, store tins of oil or piles of vegetables, or keep birds in cages, to a post-industrial city, hub of a West-Mediterranean arc from Valencia to Montpellier and Genova.



Figure 5. el Raval – old and new buildings, with and without balconies

In some streets, in-fill development has occurred in which the new apartment blocks have no balconies (figure 5). The balcony is a transitional space, neither quite public despite being over the street nor quite private despite extending the living space of the apartment. It is a kind of transgression, a stepping over a boundary, in context of a new urban uniformity, and must be denied just like dirt, vagrancy and insanity.

Writing on New York, Sharon Zukin remarks the image of the city for external consumption is determined by elites. Property developers find the boards of cultural institutions useful for networking, and the institutions are drivers of redevelopment. At the same time, the market is adept at subsuming street fashions:

“Styles that develop on the streets are cycled through mass media, especially fashion and ‘urban music’ magazines ... where, divorced from their social context, they become images of cool. On urban billboards advertising designer perfumes or jeans, they are recycled to the streets, where they become a provocation ... The cacophony of demands for justice is translated into a coherent demand for jeans.” (Zukin 1995: 9.)

History, too, is airbrushed. A poster promoting Gdansk in Poland, where Solidarity began in the shipyards, depicts a water-skier in front of a skyline of gleaming towers (figure 6) in imagery reminiscent of that used to promote redevelopment in London's docklands – where an equally militant labour history was erased in the corporate environment of Canary Wharf (Ghirardo 1996: 193). Since then, the vocabulary of gleaming towers and sparkling water has become the most common source of promotion for urban redevelopment.



Figure 6. Poster for Gdansk, in Krakow

City as Ruin

The development of the post-industrial city is a process of demolition as much as of construction. Films, from *Clockwork Orange* to *Strange Days*, depict a parallel, as if consequential, disintegration of moral values. In the 1990s, male urbanists drew attention to the city-as-war-zone. For Neil Smith (1996), the redeveloped quarters of Manhattan constituted a new frontier. Architect Lebbeus Woods (1995: 50) cites Marshall Berman's account of redevelopment in New York:

"The wrecking machines that levelled houses and urban blocks were no less destructive to culture than if they had been the tanks ... of an attacking army. The finished highways and parks ... were actually monuments to the victory of autocratic authority over the fragile lives of mere people."

That was the period of rational-comprehensive planning when technocrats such as Robert Moses saw themselves as representing the future. For Moses, progress was inevitable; if people were in the way they could be moved. I think Woods is trying to introduce a serious discussion of alternatives to architectural design as servant of rational-comprehensive planning, though his trope of architecture as war also plays on a masculine taste for war stories. I want to extend the critique in another direction, in part reflecting on the Freudian idea of the return of the repressed. I interpret this in two ways: first, as the adrenalin of demolition; and second, more significantly, as the reclamation of city spaces for women and people of colour.

In the Romantic period, poets and artists found ruins attractive. Travelling in Italy or Greece, the broken columns of temples and pieces of sculpture strewn on the ground denoted the weakness of power in time. No regime was invincible, despite rhetorical the grandeur of its buildings. Ruins also signified a return of emotion, as grass grew through stone pavements and nature re-invaded the Cartesian plan of culture.

There is still a fascination of demolition sites, when house or apartment interiors are exposed to daylight – the inside transposed outside – and the tower-blocks of post-war mass housing projects are dynamited. This is a fascination for the disinterested whose own living spaces are secure, a feeling not unlike nostalgia for something which never existed (like a free public sphere). But it is there. Stephen Barber (1995: 29) writes:

"Demolition: the transformation of the city is a restless process of negation. When the city is settled, an atmosphere of congelation rises to the surface, tempting acts of aggression against the city. The city is perpetually invested with a dynamic jarring and upheaval of its configuration. Demolition ... strengthens what remains, and also strengthens the sense of a vital damaging through which the city takes its respiration. ... The periodic demolition of entire areas of the city makes its perspectives swing crazily, imparts a sense of exhilaration which is compounded from anticipation of a new 'coming into being'; and from a lust for raw destruction."

Barber is careful to differentiate this demolition *within* a city by its developers from that of external destruction, as in war. But he touches on a real feeling. The irrational transgression of the demolition site counters the sense of timeless repose and invincible authority of a city's public realm, stated in its statues and vistas of ordered facades; and, like the ruins of a colossal statue of Ramses II on which Shelley based his poem *Ozymandias*, fractures the seamlessness of power.

In another way, women urbanists have reclaimed a right to the city. Viewed as transgressors in the 19th-century public realm, and reduced to visual objects of men's desire in art (as in Impressionism), women's rights to the city are brought into focus by writers including Doreen Massey (1994), Elizabeth Wilson (1991), and Nancy Fraser (1993). Massey argues that the triumph of the visual is in the power of vision to distance its objects, and Wilson argues that women, seen as disordering the city, can regain it as a place of excitement. She cites Sennett's (1970) *Uses of Disorder* to say, "*Sennett was right to grasp the nettle of disorder, and to recognize that the excitement of city life cannot be preserved if all conflict is eliminated*" (Wilson 1991: 156). Earlier, Wilson writes of 1980s novels set in cities such as New York that they reconstitute the city as spectacle, as if a movie playing permanently: "*This postmodern city recalls the medieval 'ship of fools', in which the mad were herded on to a ship that endlessly sailed the rivers and seas of Europe*" (Wilson 1991: 138). Women, she says, are central to this disordered city, consumed as visual objects of the gaze and themselves consumers. Indeed, visits to city-centre department stores did liberate women from suburban domesticity, from the 19th century, but the quality of Wilson's account is its ambivalence. A city in which conflict is eliminated is an un-liberating utopia. The idea of city spaces as sites of contestation runs through

much recent writing. For Iris Marion Young (1990), for example, group identity offers release from the enforced conformity of assimilation into a dominant society. And Sandercock (2006: 48) argues for a right to difference:

“As a daily political practice interculturalism recognizes the right to difference, expressed as the legitimacy and specific needs of minority and subaltern cultures. ... [It] must be perpetually contested against other rights – human rights, for example – and redefined according to emerging considerations and values. The right to difference must always be tempered by the imperative of peaceful coexistence and the recognition of shared societal and global challenges such as ecological sustainability and social justice.”

It appears the fluidity which, for Bauman, marks anxiety is also location of creative tensions and contestations in which the order of a city is contingent rather than corresponding to an ideal stasis. This opens the way to a utopia, also contingent but free and produced by its inhabitants in their everyday lives.

Interlude

The City as Leakage

Of course, no machine is perfect any more than its motion is perpetual. Ideal visions tend to be brittle. While theories of revolution plot a trajectory in which freedom, as rationality, is the objectively given end, if the city is site of contestation and negotiation no such end is viable. The means then become the ends, rather than being justified by them. The means, that is, enact the end and the new is located in temporal and spatial co-presence. That it is possible to, as it were, live the new society within the dominant society, is demonstrated by alternative settlements. But the dominant society, however totalitarian, in any case never has total control. For Henri Lefebvre, power is prone to leakage. Andy Merrifield (2006: 26; see also 175 n.13)² glosses, *“Lefebvre could never comprehend modern capitalism as seamless; his mind revelled in openness not closure ...”*. Lefebvre (2000: 196–197) regards consumer society as the administration of conformity, writing, *“the social territory ... of controlled consumption, of terror-enforced passivity ... reveals its latent irrationality beneath an apparent rationality.”* For the Situationists in Paris in 1968, Lefebvre’s remark that beneath the city’s pavement

was the beach (literally in the sand used to bed down the stones then torn up by insurrectionists) was used as a slogan. Lefebvre was displeased at his words being taken out of context, but in his critique of everyday life he proposes that within the dulling routines of work in a capitalist society, occur moments of sudden clarity, or presence. These are ephemeral but transformative. Rob Shields (1999: 58) describes moments as, *“those times when one recognizes or has a sudden insight into a situation or an experience beyond the merely empirical routine of some activity. A moment is a flash of the wider significance ... our relation to totality.”* He locates them in festival and revolution, saying that Lefebvre sees them as revolutionary practice. For Stuart Elden (2004: 170), the events of the Commune and 1968 are examples of *“instants of dramatic change and disruption to everyday routine,”* also moments in Lefebvre’s sense. Moments disrupt measured time. Elden (2004: 173) writes that, *“Lefebvre ... challenges abstract reductive understandings of time just as he does space.”*

Lefebvre’s theory of moments, then, an earlier formulation of his theory of space,³ offers a vision of urban life as carnival, when normative order is upturned. The rich serve the poor if only for a day, but the moment fractures power. Lefebvre (2000: 206) writes of the rediscovery of festival as *“the final clause of the revolutionary plan.”* Similarly, Herbert Marcuse (1969: 30) wrote lyrically of the counter-cultural aspect of May 1968:

“the piano with the jazz player stood well between the barricades ... The new sensibility has become a political force ... the atmosphere ... carries the virus.”

Recently, Nigel Thrift (2007: 248) has investigated the quality of affect and the contagion of ideas. He argues that the arts of rhetoric concern the swaying of constituencies *“through the use of affective cues ... often founded in spatial arrangement.”* This, then, is an issue for architects and planners as well as geographers and sociologists. Power leaks, and the desire for freedom spreads like a rhizome.

Section II

City as Utopian Image

In the 1880s it seemed in progressive cultural and political milieux that metropolitan cities, supported by factory-production in the suburbs, were potential sites of a post-scarcity society.

Unlike literary utopias of the 16th to the 18th centuries set in far-way places and recounted as travellers' tales, the post-scarcity society is material when technological advance renders scarcity obsolete by producing enough for all (who contribute according to ability, while the necessity for work is reduced by automation). Most days are days of rest, a perpetual Sunday. Work becomes play. George Seurat gives an impression of a ludic society in two paintings, *Baigneuses, Asnières* (1883, London, National Gallery) and *La Grande Jatte* (1885, Chicago, Art Institute). Set on opposite banks of the same stretch of the Seine, the first shows the artisan class at ease, and the second the bourgeoisie. For all, there is the *promesse du bonheur*, as articulated by Charles Baudelaire in his poem *L'invitation au voyage*.

The post-scarcity society never happened. Instead, mass production assumed a new force in consumerism, and has been replaced by immaterial production. Where manufacturing is retained it tends to be relocated to the global South where social and environmental regulation is weaker. Yet the desire for a new society is no less strong today, and takes place, in thousands of local initiatives – intentional communities of the 1960s and more recent eco-villages.

Christiania

The Freetown of Christiania (figure 7) began in September, 1971 when groups of mainly young people took over redundant buildings in Christianshavn barracks in protest against a shortage of housing. This followed an occupation at Copenhagen University in 1970: “hippies, feminists, artists, musicians, and political activists – came together in new youth and peace movements and



Figure 7. Christiania, preparations for a march to the city, 2004

actions” (Lauritsen 2002: 11). Jacob Ludvigsen, publisher of the youth newspaper *Hovedbladet*, wrote, “*Christiania is ... the ... biggest opportunity to build up a society from scratch ... is the part of the city which has been kept secret to us – but no more*”.⁴ The squatters converted the warehouses, factories, barracks, officers' quarters and stables to new uses, and built houses in green spaces. An agreement was reached with the city of Copenhagen whereby dwellers in the Free Town collectively pay for services such as water and energy.

Christiania today has shops selling organic food, plants, garden items, and clothes, several cafés, and a Buddhist temple. It remains car-free but the street of marijuana stalls for which it was once famous (or infamous) has gone. Marijuana remains an issue, however. For many in Christiania the right to soft drugs, combined with long-term rehabilitation work for hard drug users, is not negotiable. For others it is, if it means the city authorities will leave Christiania alone. For the authorities, negotiating with several factions is not easy. The underlying plan, nonetheless, seems to be to redevelop the site, with its attractive waterside location, as a gentrified enclave.

The charter drafted in the 1970s remains the Freetown's key document, and a weekly Common Meeting instituted to discuss matters of common concern has developed into a complex network of decision making. The Charter states,

“*Christiania's objective is to create a self-governing society where each and every individual sees themselves as responsible for the well-being of the entire community. Our society is to be economically self-sustaining and our aspiration is to be steadfast in our conviction that psychological and physical destitution can be averted.*” (Lauritsen 2002: 15.)

Co-Housing

Co-housing means the shared use of a property or group of properties by individuals and families each of whom retains individual living spaces while sharing facilities such as a laundry, workshop, gardens, and children's play areas. Shared meals are often taken on a voluntary basis in a common dining room. Members of co-housing groups tend to pool individual resources to buy land on which to build, or existing properties for renovation. They may evolve a shared vision for the project, bond in the early stages of work on



Figure 8. Co-housing in Cambridge, USA

site, commission an architect, and either employ a contractor or undertake the building or renovation work themselves. While there is no standard model, there are national networks of co-housing groups in countries including the United States (figure 8) and Australia. One advantage of co-housing is that the built area tends to be smaller than for separate houses, and costs and energy use consequently lower. Some co-housing dwellers find the proximity of neighbours they trust an advantage over urban anonymity.

The idea of co-housing began in Scandinavia and the Netherlands in the 1970s, in the efforts of middle-class urban dwellers – in Sweden through women’s groups – to find affordable homes (Ghirardo 1996: 157; Barton 2002: 74). Diane Ghirardo (1996) cites the Danish examples of *Tinngården* (1979) and *Tinngården 2* (1984) in the town of Herfølge, and *Savvaerket* (1984) in Jystrup, designed by Tegnestuevo Vandkunsten and Karsten Vibild; the Swedish case of Ivo Waldhör’s design for a co-housing scheme in Malmö (1987–1991); and the Dutch example of *Hilversum Meent* (1977) designed by Leo de Long and Pieter Weeda.

In North America, co-housing schemes were established in 1991 and 1992 at Davis, California and Bainbridge Island, Washington state. A dweller at the Winslow co-housing project at Bainbridge Island reflects, “*I feel better about my kids growing up here. ... I know that they’re in a place where, not only are they safer than in a single-family house situation, but they’re also getting support and caring*” (Winslow Cohousing 1993: 39); another writes, “*I think we have developed a shared sense of what it takes to get along together. We are all willing to be a little softer, to listen to people, and to reconsider what we want in light of what other people want*” (Winslow Cohousing 1993: 41). In relation to

Bauman’s comments (above) on security, co-housing groups appear to have found methods to build communal links without resorting to the nostalgic (and totalitarian) regime of, say, the Disney venture into real estate at Celebration, Florida (see McCannell 1999). This is important in context of the rhetoric of new urbanism, the key complaint of which is the loss of community. The experience of co-housing with its architectural, cultural and ethnic diversity is that a white picket fence (used by Disney in its marketing of Celebration) does not produce community.

ZEGG: a German eco-village

ZEGG (*Zentrum für Experimentelle Gesellschafts Gestaltung* – Centre for Experimental Culture Design) is in Belzig, between Berlin and Dessau. The site was previously used as a spy training school in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and before that a Nazi youth camp. ZEGG was founded in 1991, two years after German reunification, by a group, most of whom were from the West, seeking to establish a socio-ecological settlement. ZEGG now houses about 90 people of all ages who rent their living space. These range from a single room to a shared flat, small house, or a caravan or self-built structure in the woods. All contribute to running costs and repayment of the loan used to buy the site (which was relatively inexpensive given its past). Some dwellers have external incomes, or are home-workers in the arts and media. Incomes are not pooled but this is a subject for discussion. A large permaculture garden provides most of the food but by buying some items from local producers ZEGG is integrated in the local economy. There is a reed-bed waste treatment plant; heating is provided by a central system burning locally supplied wood chips. The site’s buildings are being renovated with sustainable materials. There is an open-air, organically purified swimming pool, next to an outside dining area and kitchen used by visitors for weekly workshops and a summer camp. There is also a stable for two horses used in work on the site, with a craft shop, a tailor, a bookshop, an internet café, and a bar. In the centre of the site is a circular meditation space. For the fifteen or so children living at ZEGG there are play spaces and a kindergarten school, while older children go to local schools.

More interesting than the buildings at ZEGG is the everyday life of the community and its development of the Forum method of conflict

resolution and self- and group-knowledge. Forum is “an artistic way of sharing, a stage for whatever is happening inside ourselves. ... This focus on transparency, sharing and clarifying unsolved situations of daily life makes it an invaluable catalyst for one’s own growth ...”.⁵ In effect, Forum is the means to social coherence, not by displacing conflict but by facing it directly and maintaining an ambience of mutual trust in which to contest issues and actions.

ZEGG works with anti-globalization and anti-nuclear groups: “... to be politically effective, ZEGG needs as much communication and co-operation as possible with other active people, institutions and communities” (Ecker 2004: 30). ZEGG is characterised, too, by an emphasis on woman-power, and workshops on love and sexuality. Leila Dregger (2002: 84) writes, “Some women felt responsible for intimacy, love and sexuality in the community. They tackled questions such as: where do those who don’t have a partner find emotional and sexual intimacy, and security? Does a certain couple need help in their communication? Do the young people need more support or protection? ...” Free love is part of the social architecture of ZEGG, seen as integral to a viable self-organizing society:

“Love and sexuality are sources of life. We see it as an essential task to create ways of living that integrate these sources in a conscious and positive way. ‘Free Love’ ... is an all encompassing cultural work to heal these sources of life. ... A peaceful culture is rooted in solidarity between the sexes. ... We see love as a political issue as social and cultural changes are needed for the development of love.”⁶

Those who dwell at ZEGG live the revolution



Figure 9. ‘Another World is Possible’ – painted on a wall at ZEGG

before the revolution (figure 9). But they do so less in the public realm than in what has been known as private life, which may indicate a need to reconsider the status of the public realm as where social transformation occurs.

Endnotes

1. Conversation with members of the city planning department, July 2002 during a conference *Waterfronts of Art* at the University of Barcelona.
2. The butterfly image is used in Lefebvre (1959: vol. II, 428) – Lefebvre recalls being distracted by a butterfly while on military service in 1926, and being labelled a subversive as a result.
3. For this insight I am indebted to Edward Soja, in a conversation at a conference at the University of Aberystwyth in June, 2004.
4. <http://www.en.wikipedia.org>
5. Workshop paper distributed at a workshop prior to the Global Ecovillage Network (Europe) meeting, July, 2005. The paper continues, “What comes to the surface when we begin working in Forum is not always nice. In the beginning, the suppressed and hidden emerge into the light of awareness. However, an effective and skilful Forum will bring out the dark side with humour, or in some theatrical way so that it can be perceived without judgement. Forum wants to lift the energy level, wants to trigger the life force and its expression. When the energy can be successfully raised a change of perspective on both the body and soul level happens. Sometimes this energy shift can be very simple, as when the facilitator invites the presenter to move faster, or to exaggerate gestures, or to put a sound the feeling. Trying out different ways of behaviour and theatrically acting out emotional processes is an important step towards dis-identification. I come to see that I am not this anger. I am not this fear. I am not this jealousy. To lose identification with these passing states means that you have found an inner position of witnessing what is going on, of standing back from it. You have found your unchanging centre. At the same time, Forum is no substitute for each individual’s ongoing inner work.” [not paginated]
6. <http://www.zegg.de>

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