

# Traces of Utopia: Socialist Values and Soviet Urban Planning

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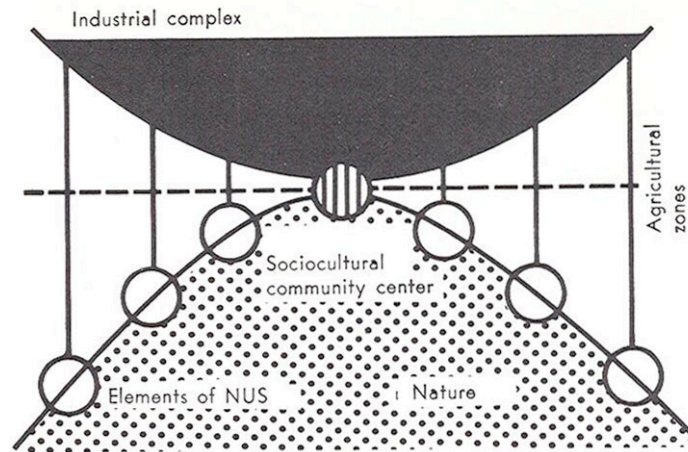


Diagram of Group Distribution in the Urban Environment  
© *The Ideal Communist City* by A. Gutnov et al.

Not long after the most recent turn of the century, but well past the point at which a wide variety of commentators had signed and date-stamped socialism's death certificate, the publisher of a libertarian website made a disturbing discovery: the criticisms of suburban sprawl articulated by planners advocating "smart growth" matched almost exactly the vision put forward by Soviet urban planners in a book entitled *The Ideal Communist City*. Mixed-use development would facilitate access to public services. High-density housing would promote equality and community. Public transportation would ease congestion by reducing the need for private automobiles. The New Urbanism was nothing short of a communist plot and its outcome, the author of *Vanishing Automobile Update #53* warned, would be just as grim and foreboding as the gray world once enclosed within the Iron Curtain.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, of course, this was the sort of hysterical slippery slope paranoia that would have made Colonel Jack Ripper proud: If the communists tie their shoes with bows, we'd better use square knots! Fallacious reasoning along these lines was certainly not new in American society, but in

<sup>1</sup> "Smart Growth and the Ideal City" <<http://ti.org/vaupdate53.html>>.

2005 it was strangely anachronistic. Yet, despite its rather feverish overtones, the recognition of a connection between urban planning and the socialist tradition was not altogether inaccurate. Socialist politics and urban planning do have something to do with each other, and understanding their relationship to one another can help us to transcend the ways in which both friends and enemies of the socialist tradition have often misrepresented many of its most important elements.

Several of those elements are strongly present throughout the text of *The Ideal Communist City* – a fact that is especially intriguing given their severe limitation or outright denial in the policy agenda of the Soviet Union. This point alone is worthy of some reflection. Despite the inability or unwillingness of Soviet leaders to pursue a political strategy recognizable to Western socialists as analogous to their own, socialist ideas and ideals seem to have remained present and legitimate in the world of Soviet professionals. But this would represent only one possible reason for reexamining such an obscure text as *The Ideal Communist City* and perhaps not even the most important one. It is unquestionably true that our understanding of the Soviet Union remains clouded by the ideological context in which so much scholarship about it was produced. More immediately pressing, though, than the correction of Cold War errors regarding Soviet socialism is the shoring-up of socialist political philosophy. It will be my contention here that an analysis of *The Ideal Communist City* offers us two opportunities in this respect. As a text directly concerned with the practical transformation of the world, *The Ideal Communist City* offered readers an unusually clear presentation of its political agenda – something ironically lacking in many works more immediately concerned with political theory. First, then, an examination of some Soviet planners' visions of a socialist future will allow us an opportunity for reflection on the central elements of socialist political philosophy. Some aspects of that vision are far-reaching – even utopian in their aspirations. Others, however, are so seemingly pedestrian that we risk overlooking their importance – and here lies the second opportunity that awaits us. The direct materiality of the register of urban planning can help to reveal that even at its most utopian, socialist political philosophy retains an immediately practical side whose presence is never far from daily life.

### ***Urban Planning and the Socialist Tradition***

The American edition of *The Ideal Communist City* found its way into print through something of a circuitous path. In the late 1950s, a team of Moscow University academics led by Alexei Gutnov produced the book originally titled *Novye Elementy Rasseleniia* (New Elements of Settlement). An Italian translation was issued in 1968 under the title *Idee per la Città Comunista*. This text was then translated into English in 1971 by New York publisher George Braziller.<sup>2</sup> The original date of the text's production is important, as it helps to explain its somewhat surprising tone. The bold socialist utopianism driving the book's vision seems to run counter to our typical expectations of Soviet scholarship. But we sometimes forget that the late 1950s was a time of relative intellectual openness and socialist renewal in the USSR, initiated by Khrushchev's 1956 condemnation of Stalin's tyranny. It was in the climate of the Khrushchev Thaw that Gutnov and his colleagues set about to create what architectural critic James Mayo called "a concrete spatial agenda for Marxism."<sup>3</sup>

Mayo's description of the book is meant to indicate something beyond the use of architecture simply to legitimize political authority. Rather, in *The Ideal Communist City* we find an attempt by socialist architects and planners to "interpret physically what their political ideals could achieve."<sup>4</sup> They begin their work, then, from the basic assumptions of historical materialism – physical necessity and the social transformation of our environment:

The premises in question concern human beings, each with a specific biological make-up. They include their need for food, clothing, shelter, etc., the context into which they are born (natural and social), and finally their own vital activity, which takes two different forms: the natural – birth, growth, and reproduction –

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<sup>2</sup> Alexei Gutnov, et al., *The Ideal Communist City*, trans. Renee Neu Watkins (New York: George Braziller 1971). See also Boris S. Pushkarev, review of *The Ideal Communist City* in *Russian Review*, v. 31, n. 2 (1972), pp. 189-90, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> James M. Mayo, "The Manifestation of Politics in Architectural Practice," *Journal of Architectural Education*, v. 50, n. 2 (1996), pp. 76-88, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

and the social – the collaboration of many individuals in a system of common action to ensure survival.<sup>5</sup>

But to these basic premises, historical materialism adds the crucial observation that human societies organize themselves into classes based on the control of surplus production.<sup>6</sup> Property relationships between direct producers and appropriators of economic surpluses are understood as central to both social organization and class conflict.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Gutnov et al. recognize connections between class structure and the spatial organization of urban environments.<sup>8</sup> Turning a critical eye to the capitalist West, they note a relative lack of planning, limiting the ability of architects to grapple with the problems of mass construction. Worse yet, the architect in capitalist society “must adapt his work to profound social inequalities.”<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, Gutnov, et al. acknowledge that a communist society must begin its development from within an inherited urban environment. On the other hand, though, they also express a bold, forward-looking ambition:

Unlike similar transitional stages in the past, however, the present does not call on us simply to wait and see how the new communist environment will shape itself and then to note its characteristics. It is the special and historical claim of communism to be a work of conscious creation based on theory.<sup>10</sup>

We can hear in this a strong echo of what Donald Sassoon has described as socialism’s moral agenda: a refusal to accept distress as the fated human condition.<sup>11</sup>

There is also here an indication of the affinity between urban planning and the basic impulses of socialist politics. Historically, urbanization and industrialization have led to the severe compression of human activities and thereby to discomfort and disease. Yet, the beginnings of urban planning lie not with the onset of discomfort itself, but with

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<sup>5</sup> Gutnov, et al., p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Duncan Foley, “Recent Developments in the Labor Theory of Value,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, v. 32, n. 1 (2000), pp. 1-39, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1999), p. 70

<sup>8</sup> Gutnov, et al., p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25-6.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism* (New York: New Press 1996), p. xxiii.

the rise of mobilized protest by those most grievously affected by it.<sup>12</sup> It was in this context that Robert Owen was led to produce what Leonardo Benevolo has identified as the first fully elaborated urban plan.<sup>13</sup> In the early part of the nineteenth century, fierce riots broke out in several British mill towns. Owen, at the time a young industrialist, was asked to produce a report on the causes of the unrest and solutions to whatever lay behind it. He went well beyond his charge, arguing that the source of the riots lay in the squalid conditions of working class neighborhoods and creating a detailed blueprint for the complete transformation of urban settlement. Owen's plan was summarily dismissed by the government officials who had commissioned it and is now remembered only as an artifact of nineteenth century utopianism. In it, however, we can recognize germinal elements of the socialist agenda: a central concern with the lives of ordinary working people and a desire to improve their lot through the political regulation of property.

Socialist planning is now more typically identified with centralized economic coordination. Yet, the definition of socialism in such narrow terms has largely been insisted on by its adversaries. Milton Friedman, for example, bases his critique of socialism in *Capitalism and Freedom* on a strict binary choice between market and plan as methods for economic organization.<sup>14</sup> Marx, however, tells us little about economic planning, and the broad range of social democratic, socialist, and communist governments that have come to power since the beginning of the twentieth century have employed varying mixes of market and non-market mechanisms. In truth, of course, economic planning and the operation of markets have never been mutually exclusive options. Every capitalist firm begins its production process with planning, and every contemporary capitalist economy relies on state intervention for its continued operation.<sup>15</sup> As much as the sometimes comically poor performance of the Soviet economy pointed out the severe limitations of centralized economic planning, the impossibility of unadulterated laissez-faire capitalism was demonstrated conclusively by the Great Depression. Economic planning is, to be sure, an element of socialist political practice,

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<sup>12</sup> Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1971), p. 32

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>14</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> David Schweikart, "Criticism of Ticktin" in Bertell Ollman (ed.), *Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists* (London: Routledge 1998), pp. 126-7; Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* (New York: Harper Collins 1991), pp. 43-44; Gabriel Kolko, *After Socialism* (London: Routledge 2006), pp. 94-99.

but it by no means excludes other economic management techniques, nor is it the fundamental defining feature of socialist ideology.

In the broadest sense, wherever law is applied with the intention that social order will result, planning is at work. We might say, for example, that behind the legal edifice of contract and property law forming the foundation of a market economy lies a plan for the enrichment and empowerment of those lucky or skillful enough to acquire sufficient quantities of the right resources and put up for sale the right goods or services. The fact that this plan does not announce in advance the names of those to whom social surpluses will flow or the particular mix of goods and services that will appear on the market means only that the plan – liberal capitalism’s plan – includes certain unplanned elements, as any plan must. What, then, could we say is specific about planning in the socialist tradition? The greatest emphasis on planning is surely to be found in the work of the utopian socialists and their production of highly detailed imaginings of radically reorganized human settlements. In More and Bellamy, these take the shape of literary excursions into either the foreign or the future.<sup>16</sup> Here, the fictional narrator’s position as both outsider and amateur social scientist is used to reveal the intentional design behind social order. Science fiction often depicts alien societies whose difference from our own is due solely to the ontological difference of alien life itself.<sup>17</sup> But More’s Utopians and Bellamy’s future Americans are human beings like us. Their foreignness lies only in the fact that they have designed for themselves new institutions and chosen to live according to new rules. Owen and Fourier then proceed to the next step – moving from fictional accounts of societies radically reorganized by planning to the production of such plans themselves.

The New Unit of Settlement (NUS) described in *The Ideal Communist City* resembles nothing so much as Owen’s Village of Cooperation or Fourier’s Phalanx. But in this resemblance we encounter an intriguing contradiction. The NUS is a blueprinted community, redesigned from the ground up as an intentional effort to produce socialist values through urban design. Yet, the institutions in which Gutnov and his colleagues trained and worked routinely declared themselves to be connected to a scientific socialist

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia* (New York: Penguin Books 2003); Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (New York: Penguin Books 1986).

<sup>17</sup> See Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso 2007).

tradition that had broken with utopianism. Though Marx suggests in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* that certain elements of socialist society cannot be planned in advance, it is Engels who draws a sharp line of demarcation between utopian and scientific roads to socialism.<sup>18</sup> The former he finds to be unscientific precisely in their striving for unachievable levels of exactitude, saying of Owen and Fourier's designs: "The more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure fantasy."<sup>19</sup> For Engels, the opportunities for socialist advance lay not in a complete break with the present, but in the dialectical possibilities offered up by capitalism. Here, he draws an analogy with Darwinian evolution, suggesting that every new development must emerge from within the existing, as both the solution to a fatal limitation and the chance to extend the usefulness of previous achievements.<sup>20</sup> Socialism, in other words, could not be the product of a lone genius, drafting in isolation the design for a perfect, yet alien world. Instead, capitalism's own successes and failures would make the outlines and building blocks of socialism apparent. Interestingly, this is also the position taken by Bellamy, who imagines the transition to socialism not as a revolutionary rupture, but as the natural outcome of capitalism's own evolution.<sup>21</sup>

The dialectical tension here – between organic emergence and planned transformation – is worth examining, as it runs throughout both socialist political thought and architectural theory. Socialists since Marx have debated the inevitability of transformation. During much of the twentieth century, a radical version of Engels' scientific socialism held that a socialist transformation would be brought about virtually without intentional human intervention. Capitalism's own drives and contradictions would result in the necessary forms of change, meaning that no setback was ever really a setback – everything happened for a reason and all roads led toward the socialist future. Late twentieth century post-modernism arose as much-needed assault on this view of history, but too often resulted in the equally hopeless and inaccurate conclusion that political action led nowhere, except to identically totalitarian forms of closure. Both sides in the debate could have benefited from one of the fundamental insights of architecture,

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* in Terrell Carver (ed. and trans.), *Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), pp. 214-15.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: International Publishers 1998), p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48; 52.

<sup>21</sup> Bellamy, p. 61.

that within the existing lie multiple, though limited possibilities for change. A particular site will support certain structures, but not others. Yet, the nature of a site is never such that all of a structure's design features are given in advance. Social formations encounter limits and contradictions. They produce grievances on the part of those who live within them. But no contradiction or grievance indicates in advance a single, discrete solution. There is never only one way forward. Engels and Bellamy are entirely correct to suggest that the ground cannot be cleared and a wholly new society built from scratch. Yet, the practices of urban planning and architecture suggest their deepest affinities with the socialist tradition in their ability to remind us that within the realm of the possible, we remain responsible for an enormous range of very meaningful decisions.

### ***Socialist Values in the New Unit of Settlement***

Gutnov et al. identify four fundamental principles governing their design for the NUS:

- (1) Equal mobility for all. Residential sectors are at equal walking distance from the center and from the forests and parks surrounding them.
- (2) Distances are planned on a pedestrian scale. No home is so remote from the center or from the park area that it cannot be reached by a reasonably short walk.
- (3) Elimination of danger from vehicular traffic. Rapid public transportation operates outside the pedestrian area yet is linked centrally with NUS. (Its circuits carry people from home to work and from home to home.)
- (4) Green belts. Every sector is surrounded on at least two sides by open land.<sup>22</sup>

The planners' central concern with social equality is immediately apparent in their preference for pedestrian and public transportation over privately owned vehicles, as well

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<sup>22</sup> Gutnov, et al., p. 117.



as in the related bias toward high-density apartment housing. Here, they clearly acknowledge what is at stake in the planning of residential developments:

Ideal conditions for rest and privacy are offered by the individual house situated in the midst of nature. But this is an expensive kind of well-being. . . . The villa is the traditional retreat of the leisured minority at the top of the bourgeois society. The attempt to make the villa available to the average consumer means building a mass of little houses, each on a tiny piece of land. . . . The mass construction of individual houses, however, destroys the basic character of this type of residence.<sup>23</sup>

In their rejection of the American model of suburban sprawl, Gutnov's team specifically notes its unfeasibility in a society premised on equality.<sup>24</sup>

As Noberto Bobbio has suggested, the attitude toward equality can be taken as a defining line of demarcation between the political valences of Left and Right.<sup>25</sup> Within the somewhat narrower range of specifically socialist proposals for the reorganization of human communities, the emphasis on material equality has always been a defining feature. More's Utopians stake out the furthest boundary here, pursuing a radical equality of personal possessions that extends to items of clothing and obviates the need for locks on the doors of homes.<sup>26</sup> Modern socialism retreats from the Utopians' radical fundamentalism, but retains a central concern with equality:

Equality is the expression of the equal value of all human beings and the precondition for the free development of the human personality. Basic economic, social and cultural equality is essential for individual diversity and social progress. Freedom and equality are not contradictory. Equality is the condition for the development of individual personality.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Noberto Bobbio, *Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1996), p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> More, p. 53; 55.

<sup>27</sup> Socialist International, *Declaration of Principles* <<http://www.socialistinternational.org/viewArticle.cfm?ArticleID=31>>.

Yet, liberalism also claims equality as one of its defining values. What, then, can we say is specific about the socialist understanding of what it means to be equal? Equality might be had in any number of different realms: legal, political, economic, or cultural.<sup>28</sup>

Against the feudal order's juridically recognized hierarchy of hereditary ranks, liberalism demanded legal equality: the law's perception only of abstract individuals, each with identical packages of rights and responsibilities. Socialism's origins, of course, lie in the unveiling of a contradiction between liberalism's promise and its performance. Marx's early writings remain the most eloquent and incisive discourse on the sterility of legal equality for ordinary working people, who discover daily that liberalism's abstract individual is presumed to possess farms, factories, businesses of all kinds, and to be at all times in the position of an employer of labor, rather than that of an employee. While liberalism demands legal equality between individuals, it calls with equal vigor for the protection of private property and, thereby, of economic inequality. Yet, the wealthy individual's accumulation of property can, in reality, easily be converted into legal, political, and cultural forms of advantage.<sup>29</sup> Further, within the bargaining regime of the capitalist labor market, there can be no guarantee that the employer's naturally advantageous position (possessing a large stock of resources and being, therefore, able to survive longer without the laborer than the laborer can survive without a wage<sup>30</sup>) will not draw to him or her a disproportionate share of the enterprise's rewards.<sup>31</sup> Many hands contribute to social production, but as profit is measured against wage in the liberal capitalist world, some abstract individuals find themselves vastly more equal than others.

Surely the most famous statement of a socialist equality principle is that quoted by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*: "From each according to their ability; to each according to their need!"<sup>32</sup> Here we find a complex vision of equality, far richer than the leveled-down uniformity of More's Utopia, as well as a more precise understanding of the value placed on equality by socialists. Equality might be valued for its own sake, in which case spartan homogeneity would serve not only adequately, but

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Stuart White, *Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2007), pp. 4-11.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in Robert C. Tucker (ed. and trans.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton 1972), pp. 71, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Hackett 1993), p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Robin Hahnel, "Exploitation: A Modern Approach," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, v. 38, n. 2 (2006), pp. 180-1.

<sup>32</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, p. 215.

efficiently. Yet, the emphasis on abilities and needs in Marx's equality principle suggests not homogeneity, but difference. What is meant to be equalized, according to this principle is the distribution not of resources, but of opportunities for self-realization.<sup>33</sup> As Amartya Sen has argued, equal resources put into the hands of people who are by nature unequal (in terms of strength, disposition, innate skill, etc.) would result in a skewed distribution of real possibilities for the development of human capabilities.<sup>34</sup> Of course, the search for all possible human capabilities and the matching of resources necessary to equalize their distribution across a large population would immediately exhaust the potential of even the most highly developed society. Perhaps as Stuart White suggests, a more realistically achievable socialist equality principle might aim at the equalization of a limited set of core capabilities.<sup>35</sup> Even this more restricted version of socialist equality, however, directs its ultimate attention not toward particular goods to be allocated to all in equal amounts, but toward an equal sharing of the potential for human freedom.

Yet, freedom is precisely what liberals charge socialists with violating in their pursuit of greater material equality. Liberalism's notion of freedom is famously described by Isaiah Berlin as the absence of external forces steering or restricting individual choice.<sup>36</sup> Milton Friedman usefully illustrates this idea with his suggestion that Robinson Crusoe, trapped on his island, lacks not freedom, but power.<sup>37</sup> So long as no government compels him to obey speed limits or pay his man Friday a minimum wage, he remains free. This, for the libertarian anarchist, is paradise: the private island on which law can never be anything more than the individual owner-ruler's whim. Lawless markets, though, can be savage affairs and capitalism has nowhere survived without states to define and defend property rights, and ensure that transactors keep their contracts. But even this small step toward political order requires the restriction of negative freedom. Protecting the shop-owner's goods from my thieving hands will mean

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<sup>33</sup> Norman Geras, "The Controversy About Marx and Justice" <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/geras.htm>>.

<sup>34</sup> Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1997).

<sup>35</sup> White, p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in Robert E. Gooding and Philip Pettit (eds.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962), p. 12.

denying me a range of choices I would otherwise remain free to make.<sup>38</sup> One type of socialist response to the liberal insistence that freedom is found only in the absence of law, then, is to say that restricting some forms of action might result in a net gain of freedom for all. Prohibiting murder, for example, meaningfully limits the range of choices available to potential murderers. But it is also likely to result in a net gain of freedom for all in society who might now be able to walk the streets without fear.<sup>39</sup>

In his consideration of freedom, Larry Preston identifies a fundamental contradiction shaping our ability to explore the idea in meaningful terms. On the one hand, we would want to define freedom as a condition in which an agent's conscious deliberation plays an essential role in the process of choosing between alternatives. On the other hand, as observers, we remain unable to enter into the agent's consciousness in any unmediated fashion. Thus, any understanding of freedom requires an assessment of the conditions under which choices are made.<sup>40</sup> Liberal political thought, for example, defines freedom in terms of the presence or absence of external coercion – most typically in the form of law. As Preston notes, however, this way of understanding what it means to be free crucially ignores the role played by material resources in the conditioning of choice. The person who lacks musical training is not free to choose to play an instrument. The musician who possesses ability but no instrument is similarly unfree.<sup>41</sup> For those concerned with what Berlin called “positive freedom,” Robinson Crusoe indeed lacks freedom of many kinds. Interestingly, after denying the importance of positive freedom in the case of a stranded castaway, Friedman makes the case that in a socialist society, advocates of capitalism would be denied freedom because they would lack the necessary resources to press for their political cause.<sup>42</sup>

Positive freedom is crucial to Marx's understanding of both human nature and the nature of the good society. The human essence, for Marx, is found in our potential for activity unconnected to the demands of physical necessity. The work that we do in order to live is forced from us by bodies that grow hungry and thirsty, and a world that

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<sup>38</sup> G. A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5; 237.

<sup>40</sup> Larry M. Preston, “Freedom, Markets, and Voluntary Exchange,” *American Political Science Review*, v. 78, n. 4 (1984), p. 961.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 961, 963.

<sup>42</sup> Friedman, pp. 16-17.

stubbornly refuses to provide sustenance without labor.<sup>43</sup> Only when our physical needs are met and we choose to remain active do we do so freely. The resources with which to satisfy physical necessities represent the preconditions of that freedom. A form of society compatible with human nature, then, would endeavor to provide its members with real possibilities for free activity, to the greatest extent possible.<sup>44</sup> It is in this sense that we can best understand Marx and Engels' description of communist society in the *Manifesto* as, "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."<sup>45</sup> We might note here the stress they place on both equality and freedom. Equality is valued precisely to the extent that it means equal freedom to develop human capabilities. We hear this idea echoed by a range of socialist theorists and organizations:

Every socialist movement's proud and beautiful goal is a society based on freedom, mutual cooperation, and solidarity, where all exploitation is abolished and each individual's free and harmonious development is the condition of everyone's free development.<sup>46</sup>

Democratic socialism is an international movement for freedom, social justice and solidarity. Its goal is to achieve a peaceful world where these basic values can be enhanced and where each individual can live a meaningful life with the full development of his or her personality and talents and with the guarantee of human and civil rights in a democratic framework of society.<sup>47</sup>

The socialist understandings of equality and positive freedom now allow us to perceive the importance for socialist political theory of public goods. All but the most radical anarchists will admit the need for certain resources to be decommmodified in cases where free-riding would undermine the supply of a necessary social good. Friedman, for example, admits that local law enforcement and national defense would be impossible were consumers allowed to choose on an individual basis how much or how little they

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<sup>43</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 74, 76.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Verso 1998), p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> Swedish socialist leader Nils Karleby, quoted in Timothy Tilton, *The Political Theory of Swedish Social Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990), p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> Socialist International, *Declaration of Principles*.

would like to purchase.<sup>48</sup> Socialists, though, have always made the supply of public goods – and the expansion of such supply – central to their political agenda. But here, liberal political theory detects a contradiction between positive and negative freedom. For every public good to be supplied in decommodified form by the state, private resources must be seized from individuals. And in seizing private resources to be redistributed as public goods, the state also usurps a range of choices that would otherwise remain with the individual. Every form of positive freedom supplied collectively by government comes at the cost of a quantity of negative freedom individuals must surrender.

The best case that can be made for liberalism's promotion of freedom lies here, in the vision of individuals free to pursue their own good in their own way. Yet, both game theoretic modeling and empirical reality readily demonstrate that lacking political intervention, the presence of any significant inequality in the possession of productive resources in a market economy will result in increasing levels of material inequality.<sup>49</sup> Unless the scales are to be continually rebalanced by some sweeping form of confiscation and redistribution, liberal capitalism will always fail to make all individuals equally free to pursue their versions of the good. As we have already seen, though, any real-world socialist government will also fail to fully equalize the distribution of all possible human capacities and must necessarily settle for the goal of a more egalitarian apportioning of a limited range of core capacities. This compromise will never satisfy the demands of radical liberalism. Who is to say, the liberal will ask, that the portion of my income you intend to seize in order to pay for universal public education is not better spent on my own consumption of fine cigars? If we are forced to weigh goods one-for-one in this fashion, there may be no adequate response to the charge that nothing more than individual taste is responsible for valuing one over the other. What we might identify as core capacities, however, have intriguing multiplier effects that alter their equation with other goods. Physical necessities – food, clean water, shelter, sanitation – function not simply as goods, but as the preconditions of our enjoyment of any good. Health care and education act in even more dynamic ways as multipliers, extending and expanding the

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<sup>48</sup> Friedman, pp. 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Hahnel, pp. 181-3.

range of choices we might make and goods we might pursue. The provision, in other words, of certain forms of positive freedom – those connected to core human capacities – may cost us a quantity of negative freedom at the outset, but repay the investment in kind, many times over.

The support of core capacities through the provision of public goods is, in fact, the keystone of a broad tradition of social egalitarian political philosophy encompassing socialism, communism, and social democracy.<sup>50</sup> We find this in More's Utopia and in Owen's New Lanark, where fully decommodified supplies of food, clothing, shelter, education, and child care figure prominently.<sup>51</sup> We find it also in the policy agendas of the socialist and social democratic parties tracing their lineage to the formation of the Second International.<sup>52</sup> It became common during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to draw sharp distinctions between the designs of the utopian socialists and the far more modest achievements of the European parliamentary parties. But such sharp distinctions may serve the purposes of political competition more adequately than those of political philosophy. Though far more limited than the provision of public goods imagined by More or Bellamy, the attempts by Second International parties to even partially decommodify housing, health care, or education can be understood as sharing with the utopian imagination an underlying desire to equalize the distribution of opportunities for freedom.

What is perhaps most intriguing about the urban design described in *The Ideal Communist City* is its strong connection to this element of the social egalitarian tradition. As we have seen, the importance of positive freedom is found in the relationship between human activities and material resources. Gutnov et al. begin their radical reimagining of urban space from precisely this nexus, mapping a wide range of human relationships onto spatial forms. Kinship and family, for example, are seen as linked to individual housing, school communities, parks, and nature. Necessary productive work is mapped to schools,

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<sup>50</sup> It is worth recalling here that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, no firm lines of demarcation had yet been drawn between these three terms. Only after WWI and the emergence of strong sectarian divides between parties did it become possible for political theorists to begin to distinguish the goals of social democracy from those of socialism or communism.

<sup>51</sup> More, pp. 53-55, 62-63, 67, 70, 110; Benevolo, pp. 40-41.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), pp. 28-30; Sassoon, p. 24; Tilton, p. 45, 268.

public services, research centers, and industrial or agricultural complexes.<sup>53</sup> Two (related) aspects of the map are particularly intriguing. First, clashing with the Cold War portrayal of Soviet thought as uniformly oriented toward a totalitarian insertion of rigid state control into all areas of life, Gutnov's team includes both freely chosen relationships and solitude in their list of vital human activities. Their concern to provide for privacy and solitude is reflected in the discussion of residential space:

Housing for the general population will be substantially altered, yet its fundamental purpose will remain the same. The human being needs a private place where he can separate himself from others, rest, sleep, and live his family life. Housing must respond to these needs; it must create conditions suited to restoring the physical and moral forces that a man expends in his productive and social life.<sup>54</sup>

Second, consumer activity is recognized as representing one particular set of relationships, rather than the means by which all types of relationships might be established. The Soviet planners specifically contrast their vision of public parks, recreational facilities, and club venues with the typical form taken by space devoted to leisure activity in capitalist countries: the shopping center.<sup>55</sup> On the one hand, in the context of the Soviet Union's centrally planned economy, it is presumed that spatial goods will be connected to the system of public supply. On the other hand, though, Gutnov's team does not allow the presumption of a state-owned economy to cause them to lose sight of the connection between the supply of public goods (as forms of positive freedom) and the support of both core capacities and, ultimately, negative freedom:

Life structured by freely chosen relationships represents the fullest, most well-rounded aspects of each human personality. These are developed through choices made during the time free from work, on the basis of interests, desires, and cultural options open to all. . . . Leisure activity creates numerous individual

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<sup>53</sup> Gutnov et al., p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.



and material needs. These mean that areas must be assigned to leisure activity, areas that, of course, should be fully accessible to everyone.<sup>56</sup>

Rather than assuming that publicly provided forms of positive freedom will satisfy in and of themselves the full range of human needs, Gutnov et al. echo Marx's understanding of positive freedom as the foundation from which individually chosen paths might be pursued. As contrasted with the liberal version of the good society, however, the provision of positive freedoms in the form of public goods is meant to ensure that the ability to develop individual tastes, preferences, and capacities is not monopolized by a wealthy elite.

But in addition to spatial and other material resources, an additional element is required in order for negative freedom to be truly realizable: time must remain in the day, unabsorbed by the range of necessary activities in the workplace and the household. The recognition of time as a form of positive freedom was a central aspect of Marx's work that has too often been underappreciated. Marx's early writings divide the field of human experience into spheres of necessary and free activity, noting that both draw upon the same pool of time in which any activity might be carried out.<sup>57</sup> In *Capital*, Marx reflects on the connection between capitalist class stratification and the distribution of time, and points to a shortening of the working day as the fundamental premise for an expansion of human freedom.<sup>58</sup> Socialism, it is worth remembering, was for Marx and most of the other 19<sup>th</sup> century social egalitarians a way of putting the gains of industrialism to best use, not a method for the high-speed industrialization of underdeveloped countries. But rapid industrialization was precisely what Soviet socialism became during the Stalin years, Marx's notion of freedom from necessary labor giving way to the Stakhanovist glorification of work in the sphere of necessity.<sup>59</sup> Here again, in *The Ideal Communist*

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>57</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 76.

<sup>58</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* v. 3, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* v. 37 (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1998), pp. 806-8.

<sup>59</sup> The dynamics of the Stalin-era cannot, of course, be separated from the personality of Josef Stalin himself. Yet, the brutality of the period of Soviet industrialization compares in many ways with the brutality of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, Western Europe, and North America. The fact that the latter process was driven by the invisible hands of market forces should not obscure the fact that as a direct result of the push for rapid industrialization, working hours increased dramatically, living and working conditions deteriorated, and the lives of most ordinary working people were cut tragically short.

*City*, we can feel the new mood of the Khrushchev Thaw and the attempt by Soviet intellectuals to put the socialist project back on its rails. Their analysis of the economic context in which the NUS will emerge specifically cites Marx's goal of a reduction in the working day:

The working day can be reduced through the extraordinary growth in labor productivity, which in turn can be attributed to electrification, automation, and efficient production procedures. As this change takes place, the proportion of work time to free time changes radically. For the first time in the history of man, leisure time will exceed work time. The problem becomes "how to reduce to the minimum the time required for socially necessary work." If we consider the demands that are apt to be made in various kinds of labor, we can estimate that an individual's work time will tend to average approximately four hours per day.<sup>60</sup>

Soviet socialism may never have achieved this goal, yet its statement as a goal remains significant. While liberals and social egalitarians might both find virtue in the idea of human freedom, no contemporary neoliberal would ever call for a reduction of the working day as a goal to be achieved by the good society. In this respect, it could be said that the distribution of time remains one of the key questions demarcating a now vacant political space waiting to be filled by a new social egalitarian movement.

### ***What's Missing?***

What is particularly intriguing about *The Ideal Communist City* as an artifact of mid-century Soviet intellectualism is its connection to the broad social egalitarian tradition, despite the multiple ways in which Soviet political leaders too often ignored, deferred, or abandoned that tradition's values. Two values central to the social egalitarian tradition, however, are missing from the NUS design. The first is democracy. As August Nimtz has argued, the modern movements for social egalitarianism and

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<sup>60</sup> Gutnov et al., p. 36.

electoral democracy evolved in close connection with one another.<sup>61</sup> Yet, radical liberals such as Milton Friedman have long held socialism and democracy to be incompatible. Without the freedom to own farms and factories, Friedman maintained, the freedom of the ballot box would soon be lost.<sup>62</sup> Curiously, though, an earlier generation of liberal political thinkers feared not that socialism would curtail democracy, but that democracy would result in socialism.<sup>63</sup> In considering this dramatic reversal of liberal political thought, we might reflect on the contrast between nascent bourgeois rule, struggling to secure its foothold, and mature, robust capitalism, utterly confident in its hegemony. A more pointedly material explanation for the turn in liberalism's attitude toward democracy is offered by Albert Einstein, who turns Friedman's fear of a state controlled media against him, reminding us that with the concentration of capital, it is capitalists who control the means of information, and thus wield tremendous influence over the electorate.<sup>64</sup>

Democracy, wherever it appears in political life, is premised on equality. To the extent, then, that socialism is aimed at the pursuit of meaningful social equality, democracy is a natural extension of its logic into the realm of politics. Just as with the values of equality and positive freedom, we find the belief in democratic politics woven throughout the broad social egalitarian tradition. More's Utopians elect neighborhood representatives who in turn elect town mayors (campaigning for office, though, is prohibited).<sup>65</sup> Marx and Engels made clear in both their written work and their political activism a belief that democracy was a prerequisite of socialism.<sup>66</sup> And while we cannot minimize the importance of their debate over the proper form to be taken by democratic institutions, both Lenin and the leaders of the Second International parties put forward powerful claims for the legitimacy of democratic politics.<sup>67</sup> Yet, whether because of the

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<sup>61</sup> August H. Nimtz, Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (Albany: State University of New York Press 2000).

<sup>62</sup> Friedman, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Berman, p. 1; White, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Albert Einstein, "Why Socialism?" in Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy, *Introduction to Socialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1968), p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> More, pp. 54-55, 86. The Utopian electoral system bears an interesting resemblance to representative institutions in contemporary Cuba. See Peter Roman, *People's Power: Cuba's Experience with Representative Government* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2003).

<sup>66</sup> Nimtz, pp. 286, 303-4.

<sup>67</sup> V. I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers 1983); Sassoon, pp. 10, 24; Socialist International, pp. 1-2.

tyrannical intentions of political elites, the material constraints of underdevelopment and industrialization, or the external pressures imposed by hostile aggressors in the international arena, the political institutions of the USSR failed to develop in a genuinely democratic direction. Thus, Gutnov's planning team is silent with respect to questions of politics.

In considering the possible connections between urban planning and democracy, at least two broad approaches present themselves. Planning itself might somehow be democratized, bringing citizens and their concerns directly into the process of organizing collective urban space. Yet, urban planning may represent one of the areas of life in a highly developed mass society in which expertise must be allowed to correct the potential shortsightedness of the layperson. A second approach, then, might emphasize planning *for* democracy: the organization of collective urban space in such a way as to improve the ability of citizens to engage meaningfully in political life. Thinking in this register, we can recognize some ways in which the NUS design, while not speaking directly to the needs of democratic politics, might nonetheless serve such needs. Pedestrian-scaled communities might lend themselves to a higher degree of social interaction than the highway-linked suburbs in American cities that today often lack sidewalks altogether. Accessible neighborhood community centers could facilitate deliberative democracy in a way utterly ruled out by privately owned shopping malls bearing "No Solicitation" signs on their doors. Needless to say, the reduction of the working day called for by social egalitarians and foreseen by Gutnov et al. would be a necessary prerequisite for the practice of engaged democracy.

The second value central to the social egalitarian tradition, but missing from *The Ideal Communist City*, also takes root in the basic notion of equality and extends its logic outward. If citizens are to be equal with one another in the nation-state, not only legally and politically, but socially as well, on what good grounds should our pursuit of equality stop at the nation-state's boundaries? Various forms of nationalism have sometimes combined concepts of endogenous equality and exogenous inequality, but since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, internationalism has been a vital component of the socialist, communist, and

social democratic movements. It has also, of course, been a key point of contention and division between various sectarian elements within that broad tradition.<sup>68</sup>

The founding statement of modern internationalism remains both the boldest and the most influential. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels asserted that their vision of working class political practice could be distinguished from other contemporary varieties solely by its insistence on the transcendence of the nation-state:

1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, [communists] point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.
2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

Yet, it was not the case (as too many interpretations have suggested) that the founders of the First International simply found it implausible that the industrial proletariat might be swayed by the siren songs of nationalism. Rather, as Marx's comments on the failed revolution in France make clear, the development of capitalism as a transnational form of economy meant that any attempt at social revolution would be meaningless until it too had transcended national boundaries:

Just as the workers thought they would be able to emancipate themselves side by side with the bourgeoisie, so they thought they would be able to consummate a proletarian revolution within the national walls of France, side by side with the remaining bourgeois nations. But French relations of production are conditioned by the foreign trade of France, by her position on the world market and the laws thereof; how was France to break them without a European revolutionary war, which would strike back at the despot of the world market, England?<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See J. C. Myers, "Politics Without Borders: Internationalist Political Thought," *New Political Science*, v. 24, n. 3 (2002).

<sup>69</sup> Marx and Engels, p. 51.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France* in Saul K. Padover (ed.), *On Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1971), p. 162.

Internationalism, in this sense, was less a giddy feeling of humanist universalism than a gritty realization that if capitalism now operated globally, emancipation from it would be possible on no smaller scale.

The belief in internationalism was carried into the mass social democratic parties in Europe, but new debates and new conditions also significantly reshaped its meaning. On the one hand, both the accelerating practice of colonialism and the looming threat of national war suggested a renewed emphasis on Marx's call for transnational political action by and for the working class. On the other hand, as the new social democratic parties increasingly found their way into the halls of European parliaments, some leaders began to suggest that each national proletariat had a significant interest in its own country's power and well-being. Thus, as the Second International took shape, it did so along the lines of a solidaristic alliance between organizationally distinct national parties.

The collapse of that alliance, as all but a handful of the European social democrats followed their national governments into war, led thinkers such as Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky to argue for the creation of a new International, with binding power over its members and a genuine capacity for transnational action. The founding of the USSR (as Perry Anderson notes, the only state in history to make reference in its name neither to nationality nor to territory<sup>71</sup>) made possible the realization of this new Third International, but also tied their fortunes tightly together. For a time, party organizations, propaganda organs, and political actions gained an unprecedented level of coherence and coordination. But as Stalin steered the USSR toward his vision of "socialism in one country," the Third International was increasingly undermined and eventually eliminated in a wartime concession to Churchill and Roosevelt. Thus, we can imagine that by the late 1950s, Gutnov's team of planners and architects would have carried out their work in an atmosphere complimented by statements of internationalist sentiment, but lacking material structures of international solidarity and action.

Here, too, we may find ourselves entering a sphere in which the urban planner qua planner has little to say. It may be perfectly possible, for example, for contemporary American architects and planners to carry out their work in the context of a world market economy without allowing this fact to influence their designs apart from, perhaps, the

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<sup>71</sup> Perry Anderson, "Internationalism: A Breviary," *New Left Review*, n. 14 (2002), p. 14.

availability of various building materials. We might imagine, though, at least two ways in which the concerns of egalitarian internationalism could find their way into the work of planners. First, to be sure, would be the question of global environmental sustainability. While even the forces of the market economy can – with sufficient political will – be restrained within nation-state boundaries, the forces and elements of the Earth’s environment know no such limitations and it becomes increasingly clear that all life we know of shares one world. Planning decisions of all types, then, must take into account the sustainability of urban communities within the global environment. This issue becomes even more pointed for social egalitarian planners, who cannot assume that some will be rich enough to shield themselves from climatic change, while the rest will be poor and powerless enough to ignore.

But Marx’s comment on the political limitations imposed by the world market suggest a second way in which internationalism might impact upon the work of urban planners. Just as the interconnected nature of the global environment makes it difficult – if not impossible – for lone communities or even nation-states to ensure environmental sustainability, the flow of capital within the world market severely limits the ability of small or isolated political entities to pursue planning initiatives supportive of social egalitarianism. This is not to say that local movements and administrations cannot drive forward planning agendas rooted in egalitarian values, but that broader forms of change will require broader and more powerful forms of political foundation. In this sense, we might say that Gutnov et al.’s NUS design was never the basis for real urban redevelopment precisely because the USSR remained an isolated socialist experiment within a hostile capitalist world.

Here we touch upon the now hopelessly stale and unhelpful question that has always riven the socialist, communist, and social democratic traditions, both internally and from one another: can meaningful progress toward social egalitarian goals be made only in the context of a sweeping revolutionary transformation or can such progress be made incrementally, through small-scale efforts at reform? Tragically, what has always been missing from this debate was a recognition of the dialectical tension between its poles. The practice of politics is necessarily the pursuit of goals and values in the context of unending change. Even the maintenance of a tradition means constant adjustment to

circumstances that are forever in flux. Every revolution is made in the context of a world that has not yet been transformed and, therefore, engages at each step in forms of incremental transformation. Even those revolutionaries who inaugurate the most perfect form of constitution will leave to future generations a continual struggle to defend and renew their achievement. The image of socialism or communism as a final end-state, then, has always been an illusion. Curiously, though, the European social democratic parties that rejected the rhetoric and strategy of revolution also tended to fall into the trap of perceiving the moderately reformed, controlled market society as an end-state. As a result, they often failed to develop effective strategies with which to defend and deepen their victories. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the forces of neoliberal capitalism pushed back against social democracy, it became clear that “reform” could have more than one political valence.<sup>72</sup>

The intellectuals whose ideas helped to drive the neoliberal resurgence felt no need to invent elaborate plans for the total transformation of society in order to argue for the values of capitalism. Despite the fact that, in their view, those values were unjustly muted, blunted, and restrained, they existed and could be seen in every privately owned farm, factory, and newspaper stand. In much the same way, we might recognize the presence of socialist values in every public school, public park, and public sidewalk – the very mundane, material elements given so much attention by Gutnov’s planning team. It remains undeniably true that nothing resembling their NUS design is likely to emerge from within a society that has not already undergone a dramatic political transformation driven by a social egalitarian movement. Yet, it is equally true that no such movement is likely to emerge outside of a political context in which ordinary citizens come to recognize and to value the ways in which their lives are made better by the provision of positive freedoms in the form of public goods. Gutnov’s planners, in other words, may have set out to create a utopian vision of the future, but in the context of the future that actually arrived, the importance of their work now lies in its ability to remind us of the political values contained within the elements of everyday life.

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<sup>72</sup> See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005).