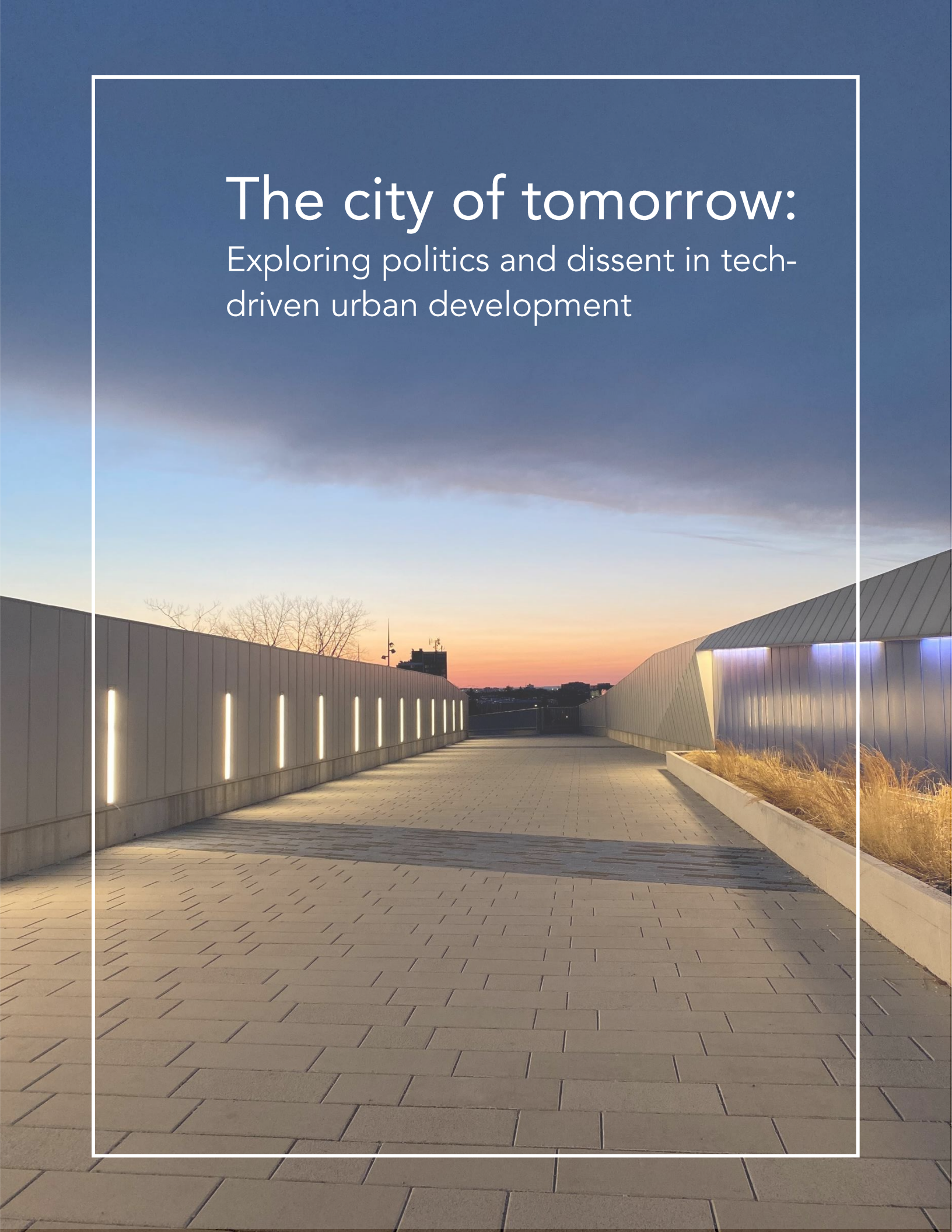

The city of tomorrow:

Exploring politics and dissent in tech-driven urban development

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August 2021

Supervised Research Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Urban Planning.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Professor David Wachsmuth for his valuable insights, both during the process of completing this SRP as well as in his lectures on urban governance which inspired my chosen topic. His introduction to the complexity and nuance that make up a city was both one of the most challenging and intellectually stimulating elements of my academic career, and I appreciate it deeply.

Also, a thank you to my wonderful cohort. I could not have asked for a more fun-loving and intelligent group to have gone through this program with. You all made living through this pandemic so much more bearable, and I doubt I could have completed this program without your support. To those closest friends–you are all aware of how invaluable you have been during this time, and I am forever grateful.

Contents

Introduction

Technology is taking over the world. The writing is all over the walls—or rather, the news. Whispers of an AI takeover mingle with assertions that machines will take over the menial jobs that, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, were being hailed as essential. The theatrics of Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos' space exploration and interplanetary colonisation are just further confirmation: there is something big brewing in the tech industry. This can hardly come as a surprise, considering the omnipresence and sheer computational power of modern technology. We would all, I suspect, heavily feel the absence of all of those smart gadgets which we now use to operate our lives. Despite concerns about surveillance and data privacy which have been circulating in an important way since the enactment of the Patriot Act in 2001, it is clear: big tech is here to stay, and it is here to grow. Urban governance and development is one of the newer expansions that the tech industry has undertaken, and the growing interest that many governments have expressed in partnering with tech giants to optimise urban life makes it a pressing subject to explore. In particular, this paper asks: if technology is the future of the city, what will that city look like, and for whom is it desirable?

I argue that urban governments and their private partners are actively undertaking a process of depoliticizing the technology that is driving current development trends. Presenting this technology as value-neutral effectively strips it of the capitalist context in which it has been created and the neoliberal ideologies which it perpetuates. These ideologies can then fill the vacuum in urban governance left by depoliticization. As such, even plans which are framed as being pro-social or left-leaning can continue to entrench urban governance within a model which espouses market values, seeks deregulation and privatization, and reprograms citizens as consumers. To add a spatial dimension to this analysis, this paper also proposes public space as an antithesis to the neoliberal city produced by this model of governance. Public space's continuous erosion is presented as both a confirmation of this fact as well as a nod in the direction of possible modes of resistance to growing alienation in the city. While its importance is expanded upon in the Context chapter, the discussion points to the ways in which movements have mobilized within and for public space with demands for more democratic urban governance, the implications of this for the future, and a last note on the role of cyber public space in this as well.

This paper begins with a literature review which is explores the neoliberal ideologies which inform these tech-driven plans. Urban governance in North America has been deeply permeated by neoliberal ideologies and this is reflected in development trends which aim to maximise the exchange value of land, often at the cost of the quality of life of the average resident. Leaning into neoliberalism is painted as both desirable for a small group of urban elites who stand to profit from this process,

as well as a necessary move on the part of urban governments who are increasingly embedded in the highly competitive global market. The dispossessive nature of this process is illustrated particularly in the phenomenon of the privatisation of public space, which serves as a tangible example of what the sociopolitical impacts of neoliberalism look like beyond theory and on the streets.

Faced with the alienating nature of this process, the next chapter argues that urban governments and their private partners attempt to manufacture consent surrounding the neoliberal model of urban governance and the development trends which emerge from it. I present two tactics which serve the aim of social control: first, the use of elements of repressive desublimation; and second, the creation of post-political conditions. Repressive desublimation is a theory developed by Herbert Marcuse which refers to the way in which urban governments and their private partners gratify the pro-social desires of citizens by inserting small liberalisations in growth-oriented plans and policies, thus embedding the city further into the neoliberal project under the cover of centre-left sentiment. On the other hand, creating post-political conditions refers to these same urban governments and their private partners stifling dissent surrounding their plans and policies by centring discourse around technical and infrastructural questions. This tactic effectively allows them to sidestep any deeper questions about the sociopolitical impacts of these plans and the neoliberal ideologies that underlie them. This trend toward political coercion is then contrasted with the example of public space in order to highlight the fact that these tactics are merely a process and not a static state, and thus can be resisted. Public space is presented as having democratic potential due to its ability to house discourse between a variety of communities, as well as act as a site for revolutionary action. I end by arguing that the privatisation of public space discussed in the previous chapter is thus all the more an urgent issue to address, since it is both a product as well as a tool for reinforcement of the neoliberal project.

Following the literature review and theoretical approach chapters, I apply the arguments established above to four tech-driven plans in order to illustrate the ideological underbelly of each one and the tactics used to camouflage their dispossessive potential. The methodological approach draws on the first of these plans, a Smart City redevelopment scheme for Toronto's Quayside. Carr and Hesse (2020) provide their account of the manufacturing of post-political conditions in this motivating case study which will inform the analysis of the three other plans I have chosen. Furthermore, Stoner's (2021) exploration of repressive desublimation in green development plans is also drawn on as a methodological approach to be applied in the rest of my analyses.

The analysis chapter thus takes on three more plans, all of which touch on plans which centre technologies that have been enjoying some popularity: Smart City

developments, and urban blockchain initiatives. The first is the Barrio Smart initiative in the town of San Andres in Puebla, Mexico, a Smart City plan which is meant to complement the analysis of Toronto's Quayside summarised in the previous chapter. The two urban blockchain initiatives are in Berkeley, California, where the City Council is reviewing a proposal to fundraise through the use of blockchain-coded municipal bonds, and Miami, Florida, where the mayor is courting tech companies by proposing that municipal funds start being converted into cryptocurrency. These cases present evidence of repressive desublimation in the manner in which injecting technological innovation into plans serves to turn the attention away from the alienating impacts they engender. Further, the promotion of post-political conditions is picked out in the degree to which urban governments and their private partners will collude to flatten discourse and obstruct dissent. Although the range of political backgrounds, scales of governance and operation, and types of policy vary in all of these plans, the tendency towards public leadership rollback and neoliberal ideology are highlighted.

Lastly, the discussion chapter ties together the theoretical frameworks as well as the plan analyses to answer the initial question of what the city being built by these ideologies will look like. The sociopolitical impacts of neoliberal governance are argued to be exacerbated by the technological optimisation proposed by these plans. Underlying values and ideologies which have been actively endorsed by urban governments and their private partners are extrapolated into the future in order to paint a picture of what these plans would represent for a city and its residents if taken to the extreme. Issues of surveillance, the widening wealth gap, and the climate crisis are linked directly to the current model of development and used to argue that the latter is unsustainable and must be resisted.

This paper concludes by calling back to the example of public space and presenting tangible ways in which it has been used as a space for resistance. The two Smart City plans analysed in the previous chapter are referred to in order to present ways in which residents of those cities used public space—both real and digital—in order to protest the plans that had been imposed upon their city. By reintroducing an element of dissent into the public consciousness, politics are created, and the fragility of the neoliberal project is exposed. I also argue that tech-driven plans are particularly vulnerable to this form of dissent since the technologies they are built on rely on frictionless interaction. The superimposition of digital smoothness onto the complexity of the analog world is presented as a situation that is destined for conflict, with the example of resistance to tech-driven development in San Francisco via public space occupation. This paper ends on a final note of caution with regards to calling for public resistance, noting the uneven distribution of vulnerability to state violence and the importance of accounting for this in any acts of dissent.

Literature review

The depoliticization of tech-driven urban development plans leaves an important vacuum in urban government. The very technologies which these plans are built upon act as a tool for filling this vacuum: I argue that they realise neoliberal ideologies by trending towards privatisation and marketizing an increasing number of aspects of urban life. This chapter provides an overview of the growing role that neoliberalism has played in urban governance. The transition into a global financial economy is tied to the changing relationship urban governments and residents have to the real estate of the city, and the dispossessive impact this can have. Trends towards privatising once-public amenities are especially pointed to as an important marker of the influence of neoliberal ideologies in urban governance and development. Public space and its erosion via privatisation acts as an illustrative example of the exclusionary nature of the neoliberal city and the sociopolitical implications of a rollback of public leadership which allows for the emergence of corporate power in urban governance.

The growth machine

Scholars have argued that a quiet consensus has been formed around the role of urban governance in the contemporary city. Logan and Molotch (2007) famously dubbed the latter a 'growth machine': modern development, rather than being directed in ways which are meant to better the quality of life of urban residents, is undertaken namely in order to assist in the expansion of the exchange value of land in the city. Vying for a greater mobility of capital marks an important trend in governance configurations—both at urban and broader scales—which reflects a widespread adoption of the neoliberal project and a transition into a globalised and post-industrial economy (Harvey 1989). The Fordist era now a relic, more brute production processes have been outsourced to less wealthy regions and displaced by the finance, investment, and real estate sector. Its modus operandi is converting real goods and services into financial instruments which can be more broadly and rapidly exchanged through a complex set of transactional processes. This has thrown urban centres, and particularly what are now dubbed 'global cities' into the spotlight as they have become the homes of agglomerated sets of firms that specialise in the aforementioned financial processes (Sassen 2001). For some, this amplified speed of capital flow has been freeing, allowing them to take advantage of the risky but rapid wealth accumulation it creates the conditions for. For others, however, the shift towards financialization has been a deeply spatialized dispossessive process. As finance becomes omnipresent, the physical space of the city has entered the market: real estate has become a relatively stable site for wealth accumulation, and buildings have been reduced to the value of their development futures. The prices of homes have skyrocketed, particularly in urban centres, due in no small part to the newly speculative nature of the housing market, and the human cost has been great. Many cities now recognise that they are engulfed in a housing affordability crisis, and threats of displacement loom over the heads of countless tenants as they wait for their neighbourhood to gentrify and the rent gap to

get large enough to justify their eviction (Stein 2019). In the face of the unsustainable nature of this model, whose flaws were all the more exposed in 2008 during the global financial crisis, one might begin to wonder how this consensus around growth has formed and why serious alternatives have not gained significant traction in mainstream political circles.

The power to organise space is an uneven and conflictual process, and urban governments have had a significant part to play in the dispossessive process of building the neoliberal city. Those same governments have largely taken an entrepreneurial role by allying themselves with private interests and painting urban growth as the ultimate desirable outcome without soliciting input from their larger population. Rather than focusing on economic projects which improve overall living and working conditions across a territory, these urban entrepreneurs, under the guise of public-private partnerships (P3s), focus on the construction of space—that is, on projects whose effects may be felt at a larger scale than their physical location. Pouring funding into public housing, for example, has ramifications for those in need of it within the municipality's territory, but little other potential for economic impact (Harvey 1989). A waterfront redevelopment, however, if outlined in a glossily-rendered plan which borrows from the most current trends in urban design, has the ability to create a positive image of a city on the global scale, implicitly marketing it as a site for investment and boosting its entire economy—hence the preferred term, waterfront revitalisation. The members of the growth coalition promoting this entrepreneurial stance can argue that these projects are undertaken *for the city*. The benefits are implied to go beyond the most obvious stakeholders, such as developers and municipal offices, and to extend to the entirety of the citizenry (Harvey 1989). Despite these claims, dispossessive processes such as the gentrification discussed above highlight the uneven nature of this style of development—capitalist wealth accumulation requires space for loss and alienation by its very nature. It is, in the end, a zero-sum game.

That urban governments would resort to such means is not the result of some coordinated effort to mimic Marx's critiques of capitalist society to the letter. Rather, it is important to recognise where these governments lie in a long chain of dispossessive processes. The classic example of alienation within capitalist modes of production argues that workers are estranged from their own humanity, surrendering their agency and being reduced to instruments used to further the broader economic goals of capitalists (Marx 1959). This deprives workers of the ability to choose direction in their life, or to take pleasure in their labour. The process of alienation also has a spatial component, which must be recognised as the neoliberal project seeks to marketize an ever-growing number of aspects of our lives. The exchange value and development future of land has risen to a new prominence under the financialized model, which risks alienating residents from the space they inhabit. Cash-strapped municipalities are motivated to use the relative safety of real estate investment to their advantage and enter into public-private partnerships in which they absorb the potential risk of a failed development while the private sector provides the immediate funding necessary to

boost the project and subsequently reaps the majority of the profits should the project succeed (Harvey 1989).

While this revenue stream may seem inordinately risky for a small government to undertake, this is a staple of the neoliberal model: after decades of austerity have slowed higher-level governmental funding to a mere trickle, municipalities are forced to implement these policies since there is little budget left for the infrastructural development projects necessary to incite growth. Faced with the prospect of state failure, municipalities have little choice but to partner with private entities and enter into increasingly risky development projects (Peck 2012). This enmeshes the city within the global economy, creating a tension between place-based assets and financial speculation. The black box of financialization means that these exchanges almost inevitably exist outside of the realm of public consultation and consent, yet it is the very space that the residents of municipalities occupy that is being pawned off as bonds and futures. The question of public space and its function in the growth machine is particularly evocative when discussing the future form that the neoliberal city might take as well as its sociopolitical implications, and thus merits to be expanded upon briefly.

Municipalities have increasingly started negotiating with developers to introduce privately-owned public spaces (POPS) into new construction. This politically graceful move manages to satisfy at least the surface-level interests of all actors involved: providing public amenities to avoid seeming hostile to or disinterested in their voter base, as well as incentivising private investment and development to inject rapid revenue into a fiscally distressed municipal budget. Though desperate for financing, cities in North America are also keenly aware that they are the gatekeepers to the physical real estate that is so appealing to finance capitalists. By leveraging spot zoning exceptions and floor area ratio increases, they incentivise developers to include public amenities in their new construction. If that amenity is to be public space, it will typically take the form of either an outdoor plaza on the lot of the development or it might occupy its ground floor. These spaces are arguably public, in that they are publicly accessible; however, their management is still private and in the hands of corporate property owners. The latter are known to prioritise the use of POPS to either house or support commercial activity, and though there is nothing inherently wrong with coffee shops or boutiques, retail spaces require a certain level of sterility, predictability, and income in order to operate smoothly (Németh 2009). If public spaces are meant for spectacle, then commercial space is expected to be the opposite (Kohn 2001). A high level of social control therefore begins to materialise in the realm of POPS.

In the North American context, there has been a significant level of attention brought to the question of security following the September 11th attacks. Even outside of New York City, a fervour for surveillance and control has manifested in the design and layout of the built environment to degrees that might have been unthinkable in the 20th century (Angotti 2011). Most security measures in POPS are of the soft design variety; these are not barriers that will be immediately noticeable to the average passerby but are rather there to serve as a macabre version of Jane Jacobs' *eyes on the street*. Stars of hostile

architecture are present, such as dividers on benches and metal spikes on ledges, subtle-not-subtle security cameras which wink at you from a corner, private police who benignly patrol the area until they find a reason not to be so benign…the list could go on! The fact is that the private entities which manage POPS have every right to put these measures in place since the argument can and has been made that they are not about exclusion so much as they are about security (Kohn 2001, Németh 2009).

However, the body of theoretical work on the relationship between people and the built environment is large and exhaustive enough to highlight the fault in that argument, at least at the academic rather than legal level: Henri Lefebvre famously made the argument that the right to the city is a question of who has the right to participate in the production of space (Harvey 2003). As much as it is a physical entity, the city is also a reflection of class struggle, and it is important to question both the fact that private entities are engaging in filtering out classes of people from ostensibly public space, as well as who it is that gets disproportionately targeted for this exclusion. If the role of real estate under finance capitalism is to be a form of wealth accumulation, then at the level of the individual development as well as the municipality, private entities have every interest in clearing markers of poverty so as to maintain the profitable reputation of their investment on the financial market, and cities have every interest in allowing this (Stein 2019). The most obviously targeted population of this kind of exclusion are those experiencing homelessness: when they are unable to access housing and often lack the resources to remain in commercial spaces for extended periods of time, public space tends to be the only place left. Their exclusion from the latter in the case of POPS is especially malicious in the current context of the housing crisis, which has been exacerbated from the financialization of housing and a global pandemic that is leaving increasing numbers of people in precarious housing situations.

Placemaking is a matter of codifying space, and truly public spaces are not exempt from exclusionary practices. Last year's racial justice movements, for example, brought a renewed attention to the fact that Black bodies have long been criminalised on city streets where everybody supposedly has a right to be. But if the public realm is a space for interaction and tension, it can also be a space for resolution: there is a certain revolutionary aspect to everyone being technically able to appropriate and occupy a space with no law preventing it. The same streets which are the scenes for police killings are also those which see the marches of thousands demanding justice and asserting, very visibly, that Black Lives Matter. But privatisation explicitly gives the power to criminalise certain types of bodies and behaviours to a very small set of people who are not publicly accountable. POPS may be physically accessible to most people, but they are by no means inviting to everybody. The neoliberal city is one which, due to the threat of deficit looming over its head, has been an active agent in the process of financialization and the subsequent privatisation of the urban fabric. This Faustian bargain ensures a consistent overrepresentation of financial interests over those of the residents of the city and leaves those most vulnerable with no space to occupy and, effectively, no protection. If municipal governments keep transferring the responsibility and rights to provide a public realm onto private entities, it would amount, tangibly as

well as discursively, to the erasure of marginalised people from our cities. The consensus that has formed around growth thus seems positioned to serve a very particular set of interests while grossly undermining those already-vulnerably others, and it becomes imperative to trace the processes through which such a dispossessive norm has taken such an important space in urban governance and development.

Theoretical approach

Privatization and deregulation in favour of financial interests are representative of a larger issue, that of the erosion of democratic processes in the city. The creation of a consensus around growth, rather than being a sign that the vast majority of urban residents have actively endorsed policies and plans which reduce them to being producers of alienated labour and rents, is instead indicative of the fact that repressive tactics have been employed to disguise the less palatable effects of an ideology of growth (Carr and Hesse 2020, Stoner 2021). This chapter develops a theoretical perspective on consensus through an analysis of two tactics which aim to flatten discourse. Herbert Marcuse's analysis of Freudian theories of coercion produce the first tactic, that of repressive desublimation, in which complex political desires are falsely satisfied by the provision of small liberalisations which ultimately only embed urban development further in the neoliberal project. The second tactic, which consists of the production of post-political conditions, refers to the ways in which dissent is eradicated from discourse via an emphasis on technological and infrastructural questions, thus halting the political process. In contrast to these strategies for social control, this chapter ends on a discussion of the democratising potential of public space, drawing on theories from Jurgen Habermas and David Harvey, thus highlighting the importance of protecting these spaces from the rising tide of privatisation brought on by neoliberal ideologies.

Creating consensus

Repressive desublimation is one tactic which will be dissected in order to gain clarity on the matter. Coming from Herbert Marcuse, it is a response to Freud's theories surrounding coercion. The latter argues that civilisation as we know it is the result of an indirect form of social control: the authority-seeking superego tames the instinctual id into conformity through sublimation, which is the act of transforming basic emotional and physical instincts into higher modes of expression, such as art. Sublimation legitimates certain forms of domination and exploitation, creating the kind of internal coherence necessary for a society to function at the cost of leaving those basic instincts unsatisfied (Stoner 2021). This constant state of dissatisfaction strengthens the death drive and, pessimistically, leaves those in 'civilised' society in perpetual tension. Marcuse seeks to challenge the idea that this dynamic is inherent to civilization and presents it instead through a Marxist lens: under conditions of monopoly capitalism, sublimation becomes repressive as it transforms those primal human instincts into productive labour. This firstly establishes the existence of a non-repressive form of sublimation, one which drives the individual towards Eros, in opposition to the death drive. Secondly, and more importantly, it calls into question the necessity of repressive sublimation as technology and automation advance and the social necessity of work dissipates (Marcuse 1964). This implicitly challenges the entire capitalist social order—if there is no longer a technical need for the working class to be exploited for their labour, class boundaries quickly start to dissolve. Thus, "the stability of the social order in

technologically advanced capitalist societies [...] depends on the production of false needs and new forms of control" (Stoner 2021, 498). In order to hide the increasingly irrational nature of current modes of production and repression, repressive desublimation reverses the process described above to whittle down higher modes of expression—such as critical thinking or political dissent—into the baser desire to satisfy one's physical or emotional instincts. Marcuse argues that the defining feature of social control under monopoly capitalism is one-dimensionality, "the flattening out of the contrast (or conflict) between the given and the possible, between the satisfied and unsatisfied needs" which is allowed by the illusion of satisfaction that repressive desublimation provides (Marcuse 1964, chap. 1). Within urban development and governance specifically, these can be seen in the small liberalisations which are strewn throughout many plans and policies: environmentally-friendly architectural features, for example, gratify the emotions of a society which has largely progressed to the point of agreeing that it might be worth preserving the world we live in, which blurs the larger truth that these mean nothing if they are integrated into growth-driven plans which rely on the exploitation of nature to produce surplus value. Repressive desublimation deeply integrates individuals within the capitalist apparatus by simply making them feel less as if it were an oppressive force. Wendy Brown further contextualises repressive desublimation within the neoliberal project, stating it is the mechanism through which market values permeate into our rationality and morality as "capitalism becomes necessity, authority, and truth rolled into one" (Stoner 2021, 499).

While repressive desublimation is a useful lens through which to examine the incongruence between seemingly liberal plans for urban development and the larger dispossessive processes which underlie them, as well as the ways in which criticism towards the latter is eroded at the level of the individual and their psychology, this is by its nature a larger-scoped process. To that end, it is equally important to engage with this issue at the broader scale of urban governance and the markedly post-political processes which define it. Within the scope of this paper, discussion of the post-political borrows from Jacques Rancière's definition of politics, which have two main components: police and dissent. Policing, here, is in reference to those agents which have been given the authority to assign social roles and the positions associated to them. Dissent, on the other hand, refers to challenges made to that assignation (Bassett 2014). Those othered by police orders contest its authority by instead demanding an egalitarian and democratic alternative in which no one is granted the authority to command another. Thus, politics are formed when the two enter into conflict and the police order is disrupted. It is also, importantly, an eternal process: in an urban context, if every policy or plan were rigorously combed-through in order to verify that there are no dispossessive processes which are set into motion, dispute would become an integral part of governance (Davidson and Iveson 2015). Under this framing of politics, it is easy enough to see how this constant conflictual state becomes an important and bothersome obstacle to the free flow of capital and uneven wealth accumulation. Quashing dissent, therefore, becomes the primary objective of post-political urban governance. Cultivating a consensus surrounding urban growth by no means signifies

a democratic process; rather, it is one which seeks to obscure the existence of oppositional debate by positioning growth as a value-neutral and necessary state to strive for. Debate, then, may abound surrounding the ways in which growth is achieved, but the assumption that growth in and of itself is desirable is never questioned, despite the notoriously dispossessive effects of this style of urban development, discussed in the chapter above. A striking example of this is found in the rebuilding of lower Manhattan post-9/11: community groups were used to legitimise the prioritisation of developer-driven development, investing public funds into private real estate projects under the guise of restoring the city centre to its former glory in memory of those New Yorkers who had lost their lives in the attacks. Grand gestures towards public participation managed to sidestep any kind of engagement with those who had lost their livelihood, health, or family members, and instead moved to centre the conversation around technical infrastructural questions and security issues. That a tragic event should not become a financial opportunity for developers and property owners seemed to never enter the realm of debate (Angotti 2011).

Despite their hegemonic and oppressive nature, it is important to note for the Analysis and Discussion that follow that tactics of repressive desublimation and post-political conditions are both constantly challenged. In the absence of discursive space for debate and democratic engagement, those who find themselves marginalised by the plans and policies unanimously put forth by municipalities and urban entrepreneurs must showcase their opposition in more straightforward, and more visible ways. The act of physically taking up space within a city which seeks to erase their voice, and by extension their existence, is a radical one, a strategy used pointedly by the Occupy Wall Street movement which made New York City's public spaces its home (Cao 2017). It is also not a new one—that public spaces are sites for democratic and civic engagement has long been mythologized through images of the Athenian agora or Roman forum. The core interest in designing and implementing public spaces is centred on the free access and interactions with new people that they are meant to foster; without them, it would be impossible to meaningfully engage with the heterogeneity of the city, and as such they serve a crucial purpose as spaces for dialogue, appropriation, and transformation. Flattening oppositional debate is a complex process which, in the true all-encompassing nature of the neoliberal project, seeps into almost every aspect of our lives. Since public space and its increasing privatization was offered as a tangible example of the dispossessive effects of the growth machine, it is thus also relevant to bring up the ways in which these spaces can act as sites of democratic action and resistance, and why it might be in our best interest to preserve them. Sociologists and urban critics have produced useful theories which dissect this role that public spaces play, contextualising the latter overwhelmingly in urban centres. Two main lines of thinking exist: one which focuses on the role of public space as the public sphere, and the other which emphasises public space as a site for confrontation and struggle (Tonnelat 2010).

If one were to carefully examine contemporary municipal plans, particularly in North America, it would be possible to extract a common theme. Behind every vision for a

mixed-use neighbourhood or complete community lies a certain yearning for the romantic bustling and liveable streets found in the works of writers like Jane Jacobs. Hers was a vision which pushed back on the dominant modernist urban form, which she critiqued as being authoritarian and placeless (Jacobs 1961). The New York she walked through and described abounded with playfulness, or as Kevin Lynch put it, the feeling that one could be surprised at every turn around the corner (Lynch 1960). The public space described by these thinkers takes its roots at the streets and extends beyond that into plazas, small urban parks, and other open-air spaces which invite the greater public freely in. What they add to the city is a sense of liveability for a diversity of people: they offer a physical space in which every urbanite is invited to observe and engage with a microcosm of the city. The value of the latter is expanded upon by authors like Jurgen Habermas, who presents public spaces as geographies of the public sphere, the environment in which society is formed (Schmidt and Németh 2010). Public spaces not only allow for a gathering of a diversity of people, theoretically with no restrictions, but are also a site for simultaneous exploration and consensus-making: individuals' values are put into question when they are physically faced with the sociological Other who might deviate from their conception of normativity. In tandem with Habermas' other theory, that of communicative action, the hope is that this increase in chance collisions with Others will translate into the formation of a consensus which is inclusive of the diversity of people who inhabit cities. However idyllic, there is an important critique to this conceptualisation of democratic interaction in public spaces. It assumes not only that a singular and monolithic public exists and that those within it are on equal footing and capable of negotiating in order to reach a consensus, but that this consensus is a desirable thing to begin with. In comparing it with Rancière's definition of politics, there is all of the emphasis on debate and quality but with none of the recognition of the uneven power dynamics which underpin most sociopolitical systems. The fact is that there exists a multiplicity of interests within any one public—interests which will necessarily be at odds with one another (Fraser 1990). This plural public sphere, far from being a step away from democratic processes as Habermas seems to imply, is arguably both closer to the reality of the world and also a more equitable way to respond to people's demands and needs. It is therefore clearly important to consider public space and the social dynamics within it from the point of view of it being a space for political contestation and conflict.

In his exploration of the political economy of public spaces, Harvey (2006) walks us through a prose poem by Charles Baudelaire: in it, two lovers sit at a café in Paris overlooking a then-newly built Hausmannian grand boulevard. Both observe a man and his children, dressed in rags, who observe the café and its bourgeois occupants in turn. While one lover expresses a wish that the boulevard would be more controlled so as to ban less 'desirable' populations, the other feels the sense of difference as a reminder of the plurality of classes which necessarily exists in urban centres. This, for Harvey, is a thoughtful example of the class conflict which shapes interactions in public spaces. If one accepts that access to them is entirely unrestricted, then people whose socio-geographic spheres are otherwise entirely separate will only be able to confront the

material realities created by uneven development there. The city, in short, is a reflection of class struggle, and public spaces are not just spatial entities, but rather processes and products of sociopolitical activity. The plurality of public interests which Habermas' theory did not allow for take the centre stage, and arguably create conditions for the formation of politics: in Baudelaire's poem, the man, by virtue of his rags, stood out on the grand boulevard and attracted one lover's ire, but also implicitly challenged the bourgeois occupation of the space and drew the other lover's attention to the uneven development of the city.

This reading of public space is immediately problematic within the framework of a post-political mode of urban governance. To that end, many urban policies and plans have served to lessen the ability of those othered by growth-oriented governance to occupy public space in a way which challenges the authority of urban entrepreneurs. Haussmann and his boulevards provide an emblematic example—as Harvey himself points out, contemporary planners such as Robert Moses have been great students of his—of the strategies which are used to do so. The grand boulevards of Paris, first, were a site for spectacle. Far from the revolutionary meaning of the term used by the likes of Guy Debord, this spectacle was one of imperialist and commercial power: the boulevards were lined with architectural displays of opulence and glittering storefronts whose primary aim was to pacify onlookers. Where public spaces are made for unregulated and conflictual interaction, commercial spaces are coded as being for passive consumption (Mitchell 2016). The hegemonic nature of these spaces was further enforced by the second notable feature of Haussmann's boulevards, a tight system of security. Commercial spaces, while publicly accessible, are importantly privately owned and managed. Owners had every vested interest and right to regulate the patronage of their stores so as to best create an environment which encouraged commercial consumption, employing whatever security measures they saw fit to do so. Beyond that, Haussmann's grand boulevards were designed explicitly with the intent to quash dissent, wide enough both to prevent the building of barricades and to allow for the passage of troops. With this understanding of public space and its role in the neoliberal project, it is important to examine urban development plans with a keen eye for calls towards public space privatisation, and to note whether they coexist with aspects which repress dissent either through minute liberalisations or depoliticization.

While showcasing the erosion of democratic processes in the city is an inarguably important tool for analysing urban development plans in the next chapter, it is also important not to reify the post-political state by lending it more power than it has. Haussmann's grand boulevards have hardly stifled politics in Paris if the city's reputation for protest is anything to go by—there is always room for contestation. It must be noted that this post-political model of urban governance is not a permanent and entrenched state of being; rather, it is a tendency, and one which can grow and diminish with time. To conclude this chapter, then, I offer one last tentative comparison between Paris and New York City. The Second Empire, through its *embourgeoisement* of the west of Paris necessarily created its other and antagonist, i.e. the ghettoization of an increasingly dissatisfied working class. The kinds of sentiments expressed by the latter within the

public and third spaces that were afforded to them—usually within the areas of the city coded as being for them by their neglect and lack of regulation—spilled over into the events leading into the creation of the Paris Commune. If one were to look to the modern day for inspiration, the Occupy movement which was ignited in 2011 in New York City would not be without its merit. The transformation of Zuccotti Park from a space for consumption to a space for political contestation and debate is a radical one, not least because of the fact that it took place at the foot of one of the most powerful financial capitals in the world. Use of the site as a public forum for debate was contentious, drawing the ire of nearby residents as well as municipal bodies and the owners of the park itself. Though the Occupiers were able to resist several attempts at being cleared out—they were in turns marked as disruptive, criminal, or health hazards—they were eventually evicted via several judicial rulings. The latter importantly used conflicting rationales in different cases: in one instance, the court decided that unfettered access was antithetical to the concept of a private space, thus relieving the owners of the public responsibility which is generally associated with POPS. In another, however, the courts supported the owners' assertion that the form of political assembly put forth by the Occupiers was improper in the space by citing the code of conduct in public parks established in another case (Cao 2017). Devastating as such a contradictory set of rulings might be, it is also an opportunity for further contestation. The demonstrations by the Occupy movement can serve to highlight both the ways in which our public space and space for debate are being strategically eroded, as well as the fact that this process of dispossession is not without procedural errors which can be challenged. Politics, after all, are eternal.

Methodological approach

The Analysis chapter is an application of the theoretical approach elaborated upon above in order to bring to the surface the politics and ideologies that are present in tech-driven development plans. The plans that were chosen stem from a personal interest in the growing number of voices supporting the integration of high-tech solutions into urban development, and the subsequently growing importance of tech corporations in urban governance circles. This analysis draws on the methods used by Carr and Hesse (2020) to explore the post-political conditions which were produced in the process of Toronto's waterfront revitalisation. They demonstrate that multiple levels of governments and private corporations depoliticised the Smart technology which was at the centre of this plan by presenting it as a value-neutral entity. This allowed public discourse to be focused entirely on the technological aspects of this plan, which sidestepped important concerns about the sociopolitical impact of this style of development and governance. This analysis also draws heavily from that of Stoner (2021), who uses the framework of repressive desublimation to examine why environmental policies often seem to fail. They argue that this tactic is used to take away the emancipatory elements of policies which would otherwise weaken the neoliberal project by, effectively, depriving them of their fangs. Environmentalist desires are desublimated by directing individuals towards consumer-based green solutions which only entrench us further into environmentally exploitative forms of development. Similarly to this analysis, I will argue that the popular desire for socially-liberal policies and technological innovation is used to sell high-tech development which has no just elements built into it but is rather a means to provide consumers to tech corporations.

Four plans have been chosen to explore this topic, each meant to represent different scales of development, governance, and political context. The first is that of Toronto's waterfront revitalisation plan, taken on by Waterfront Toronto in partnership with Sidewalk Labs. Considering that Carr and Hesse (2020) have already provided an exploration of post-political conditions in this case, I will be using it as a motivating case study to demonstrate the manner in which the rest of the analyses will be conducted. This chapter will therefore include a summary of Carr and Hesse's (2020) findings and arguments, as well as an application of Stoner's (2021) methodological approach to this same case. The Analysis chapter following will apply the same analytical approach to three more plans. I will be drawing nominally from the official publications that those proposing these plans have put out. This includes: official web pages and proposals, press releases, interviews, and statements on social media. Furthermore, in order to glean an idea of the public discourse surrounding these plans, I will be consulting news publications, blog posts, opinion pieces, and web pages created by citizen and community groups which address these plans.

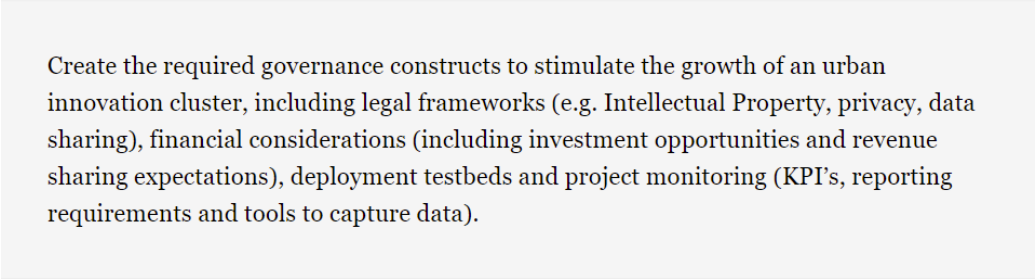
In addition to the motivating case study of Toronto's waterfront revitalisation, I have collected three more case studies which are meant to touch on the variety of political contexts in which discourse may be repressed, and the different ways in which the tactics explored in the previous chapter can manifest. The first is another Smart City proposal meant to contrast the massive and heavily mediatised proposal in Toronto: the Barrio Smart initiative in a small town in the state of Puebla whose Smart conversion was part of a push to rebrand it for touristic consumption. Smart Cities are no longer the shiniest toy on the shelf; the concept of the city as a computer has been circling around in a very real way since the mid-2000s. They are, however, increasingly being used as tools to reorganise urban development. Though it is impossible to distill a clear and singular definition of what makes a city Smart, for the sake of this analysis it is understood that Smart Cities are built upon a technological infrastructure which is meant to track and quantify key performance indicators which may then be optimised in a systematic and data-driven way (Ramaprasad, Sánchez-Ortiz, and Syn 2017). Though the material nature of this technology varies, it is the ideology of Smart Cities, which will be discussed below, that is of interest in this analysis, in particular when considering the ways in which Smart City technology reshapes not only the infrastructure but the governance structure as well.

The two other plans touch on slightly newer cases which are peddling a slightly newer technology: blockchain and cryptocurrency. Due to the very recent nature of these policies, the plans available for this analysis are few and not exceptionally well-developed. However, despite its less-than-stellar reputation, the crypto craze does not seem to be dying down, and if it is to enter the municipal realm, it bears a serious examination. Blockchain, the technology behind cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin or Ethereum, was first introduced in the Nakamoto (2008) Bitcoin White Paper, which explains that this technology is a means of essentially creating an electronic ledger of transactions which is immutable and secure. This is ostensibly a move away from centralised financial institutions which is meant to give individuals greater liberty to move their assets around. Cryptocurrencies are obtained when individuals use their computers to 'mine' for coins, which simply means verifying that the transactions on those ledgers are noted correctly. This technology has been introduced in two very different ways by two very different urban governments: the city of Berkeley, which aimed to use blockchain as a way to fundraise their Democratic resistance to the Trump administration, and the city of Miami, whose Republican mayor is seeking to introduce cryptocurrency into municipal transactions as a way to spur the growing interest in his city from tech companies. The stark political contrasts in these cases make them an interesting example of the lengths to which technology can be used to depoliticize governance decisions, and it will be curious to see the ways in which this unfolds in the future.

Motivating case study: Waterfront Toronto

The city of Toronto has slated its Quayside district, which accounts for about 12 acres of land bordering on Lake Ontario, for revitalisation. The development has been put in the hands of Waterfront Toronto, a corporation which was created by the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario, and the Government of Canada in order to administrate a series of revitalisation projects along Toronto's waterfront. In 2017, Waterfront Toronto sent out a request for proposal (RFP) for the Quayside district. Within just four days, it was announced that a subsidiary of Alphabet Inc., Sidewalk Labs, would commit $50 million to drafting a plan for Quayside's development. They immediately touted the construction of a Smart City "from the internet up," cheered on the city of Toronto's forward-thinking aspirations, and got to work. In the summer of 2019, Sidewalk Labs released their Master Innovation and Development Plan (MIDP), a hefty 1,500-page document outlining their $1.3 billion vision for Quayside. Entitled "Toronto Tomorrow: A New Approach for Inclusive Growth," the draft details the ways in which they plan to fulfil the five priority outcomes that they themselves have singled out: job creation and economic development; housing affordability; sustainability and climate-positive development; new mobility; and urban innovation. The sheer magnitude of this document makes it nearly impossible to distill all of its proposals into a digestible format—a lack of public legibility which was repeatedly noted by opponents of the development. Thankfully, Carr and Hesse (2020) have already completed this Herculean task, detailing not only the contents of the MIDP but also the political context that it evolved within. Their analysis of this plan and the post-political processes which it exposed will be synthesised below and, much like Stoner (2021), serve as models for the analyses of the three following plans.

The central issue of democratic process arose almost as soon as Waterfront Toronto put out its RFP and touched on two main elements: the role of Sidewalk Labs, a private body, in a public project, and the way in which it sold its ideas to Torontonians. Per Carr and Hesse's analysis, the depoliticization of this process was immediately obvious. Beyond a vision for infrastructure, the RFP put out by Waterfront Toronto equally called for the governance constructs necessary to execute the broad goals it had put out in its Port Lands Planning Framework (see snapshot of RFP below).

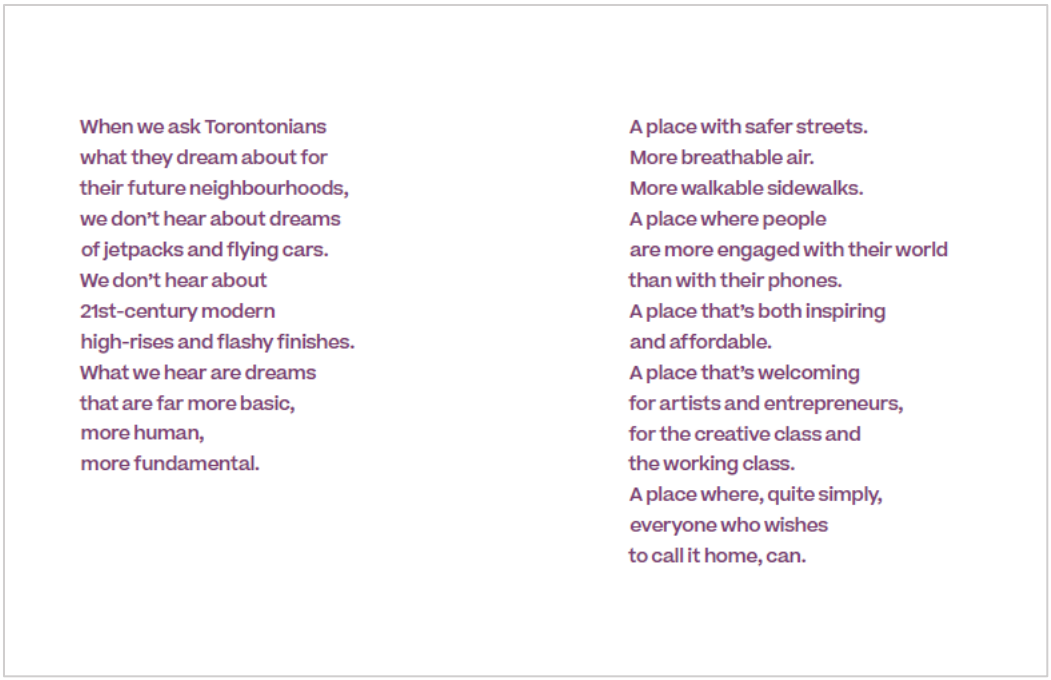

Create the required governance constructs to stimulate the growth of an urban innovation cluster, including legal frameworks (e.g. Intellectual Property, privacy, data sharing), financial considerations (including investment opportunities and revenue sharing expectations), deployment testbeds and project monitoring (KPI's, reporting requirements and tools to capture data).

Source: Waterfront Toronto

The rather alarming suggestion of outsourcing public governance to a private firm largely flew under the general radar until the release of the MIDP, in which this gross overreach became impossible to ignore. Data privacy, which became one of the most contentious topics of discussion in this project, is illustrative of the issue: Smart Cities, by their very nature, require an almost ubiquitous collection of public data, and the implications of this have been raised by proponents and opponents of the model alike. Though Sidewalk Labs dedicated a significant portion of their MIDP to assurances that their proposal was for aggregated and depersonalised data collection and would serve to optimize garbage collection rather than stage a remake of The Minority Report, this does not mask the fact that the City of Toronto does not currently have any protections in place to hold them to this. The argument seems cyclical: Sidewalk Labs are asked to both propose a product and give themselves the regulations that it must abide by—they are, in short, judge, jury, and executioner. The fact that this project unrolled with a total lack of public sector leadership speaks not only to the willingness of private firms to directly translate their business model, a marketable predictive algorithm, into municipal governance, but also to the concerted effort from multiple levels of government to obscure debate surrounding valid concerns for fear of seeming hostile to the wealth of investment the tech sector seems keen on pouring into urban development. The total lack of transparency on the part of Waterfront Toronto—a real estate corporation with no obligation to be open to the public, it should be noted—surrounding their selection process have prompted questions as to the lobbying that Sidewalk Labs might have applied in order to be granted the mandate (Carr and Hesse 2020). Eyebrows were further raised when their selection led to an effusive welcome to the municipal stage from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, surrounded by Toronto Mayor John Tory, and Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, as well as the CEOs of Waterfront Toronto, Alphabet Inc., and Sidewalk Labs. The Prime Minister expressed a desire for this collaboration to be the first of many in Canadian cities, a sentiment echoed in the MIDP which repeatedly mentions the goal of making this model of urbanism replicable and exportable. The consensus around the value of this project, then, seemed to be firm, at least between government officials and CEOs. Discourse on the ground, however, was anything but harmonious.

It is at this point that it is important to reflect back on the concepts elaborated upon in the literature review above. In this case, depoliticization is facilitated by the stepping-back of government actors who are seeking tech sector investment, and that same tech sector filling that policy vacuum by giving themselves their own rules and regulations for running the city they build. The revitalization of Toronto's waterfront is a prime example of post-political conditions in urban planning—that does not mean, however, that politics were non-existent. A significant level of public opposition arose as this project developed, and though its impact will be further elaborated on in the Discussion chapter below, the ways in which Sidewalk Labs and Waterfront Toronto

dealt with the public is an equally important example of the repressive tactics which may be used to quash dissent. Prior to the release of the MIDP, Sidewalk Labs was mandated to invest part of its $50 million into public outreach in an attempt to paint the process as democratic. In particular, the open house at The 307, their innovation hub, generated significant excitement: walking through the vast floorspace which was littered with all of the glittering visions and technologies that Sidewalk Labs had intended for the future Quayside seemed a far cry from what one usually associates with public outreach. However, the conversations this open house invited touched exclusively on the ways in which this neighbourhood of the future would be built, rather than on the more nuanced questions surrounding the underlying norms this development engendered. Focusing in on infrastructural and technical questions is a common way to depoliticize what should otherwise be a far more contentious and, of course, political process—the rebuilding of New York City post-2001, mentioned in the Context chapter above, is another example of such a tactic. The glamorous nature of the innovations presented by Sidewalk Labs, however, can also be argued to be a further tool to neutralize the public opinion. Much like the glittering commercial boulevards put into place by Haussmann, there is something about spectacles like these that works to pacify the masses. Marcuse's theory explains much of this: the open house sought to desublimate a higher instinct, that of a desire to evolve urban development in order to better overall quality of life, into the satisfaction of a baser desire by providing something electric, tactile, colourful, evocative, and new to consume which could turn the attention away from the larger questions of surveillance and cost that might otherwise arise. The MIDP functions in much of the same way. Beyond it being utterly indigestible due to its length, it is also a document that is careful to layer impressive renderings and aspirational platitudes worthy of a millennial Pinterest board densely enough that one might forget to ask how precisely the creative class and working class could both thrive in a city automated enough to render the latter obsolete, or whether there is something ominous about Sidewalk Labs proposing "to provide optional support financing critical infrastructure, such as upfront debt service, to help ensure that the city and waterfront can invest holistically in systems that unlock the potential for future development" (Sidewalk Labs 2019, 21).



Source: Sidewalk Labs, MIDP Volume 0, p. 4

Similarly, commitments to sustainability through electrification or mass timber, or even housing affordability may satisfy the desire of the general public to endorse a socially conscious project, to the point that they might forget to ask how green a city which relies on energetically-expensive data centres might be, or why only 5% of the housing proposed in their plan would be deeply affordable in Toronto, and only 15% affordable by the City's standards (Danilak 2017, Keesmaat 2019). The combination of shining innovations and progressive language are used to set this revitalisation project apart as being a departure from current modes of development despite the very normalized growth rationale that seems to inform it in its entirety. This embeds this development further into the neoliberal project by falsely presenting it as an alternative to more dispossessive processes, thus masking the possibility of a radical development plan which might deviate from a consumerist ethos and effectively flattening any debate surrounding the future of the waterfront.

The tactics used by Waterfront Toronto, Sidewalk Labs, and the governmental bodies involved in this project demonstrated a massively coordinated effort to create the illusion of consensus surrounding this development and to pacify public opinion which might otherwise take issue with the political implications that would follow it. This is a process which will be argued to have occurred at different scales and under different conditions in the next three plan analyses, though the common trend of espousing repressive tactics to promote growth-centred policies will be hard to miss. In this case, however, to the misfortune of Sidewalk Labs, these tactics did not work to stem the growing wave of public outrage that had begun to percolate from the beginning.

Community organisations and citizen groups collected their concerns under the name of the #BlockSidewalk movement. Their oppositional discourse was circulated widely enough to lead Sidewalk Labs to cancel their participation in this project in May 2020, and this re-politicization will be expanded upon further in the Discussion chapter.

Analysis

The following analysis is meant to apply the theoretical concepts expanded upon above to current plans for urban development in order to draw out the tactics that governments and private entities are using to promote growth despite the dispossessive processes that underlie it. The importance in doing so is twofold: first, it shatters the mirage of good intentions that are highlighted in every plan and clearly lays out who is meant to benefit from this plan, and who is meant to pay for it. Second, exposing these tactics is the initial step towards being able to propose modes of resistance and alternative forms of development which could centre redistributive justice and sustainability rather than uneven accumulation of wealth and exploitation. This analysis has focused on tech-driven development plans due to their current popularity in governance circles. In light of the current pandemic, cities are desperate for a new form of economic revitalisation and the tech sector, which already espouses work-from-home and get-rich-quick attitudes, seems to be a perfect match. Newly-resigned Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo even tapped former Google CEO and tech billionaire Eric Schmidt to chair the Building Back Better Commission, whose sole mission seems to be convincing New Yorkers that their only way out of the misery brought on by COVID-19 lies somewhere in the world wide web (Klein 2020). While this is one of the grander gestures that can be observed, many governments—particularly at the municipal scale—are busy penning love letters to the tech sector. While Klein's (2020) analysis of thig tendency immediately names these future tech hubs to be dystopias in the making, many of these high-tech plans do not come across as nefarious. In fact, between the glossy liberalism, pastel renderings, and rounded sans serif typefaces, these plans might at first seem like a more human-focused version of capitalism. It is this disconnect between the friendly face of these plans and the dispossessive growth-driven processes that underlie them which has motivated this analysis: if tech is the future of our cities, then what does the future look like?

Smart Cities

Barrio Smart Initiative in San Andres

Smart City initiatives are not reserved for large urban centres: increasingly, plans for optimizing daily life through technological means are touching smaller municipalities. In 2017, the governor of Puebla, Mexico, José Antonio Gali Fayad from the conservative National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional,* or PAN) launched the

Barrio Smart Initiative which sought to create a Smart City corridor across the 217 municipalities in the state. This initiative boasts a new vision for urban life in Puebla, one which is rendered efficient through the use of Big Data and whose design centres the citizens which it is meant to serve (Barrio Smart Puebla 2018). It is an outgrowth of the Alianza Smart Latam (ASL), a network which links agents dedicated to modernizing Latin American cities in accordance with the goals set out by the United Nations' New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The network spans wide: governments, enterprises, universities and research centres, social and civil advocacy groups, international bodies, and media are all invited to promote the implementation of Smart values which will presumably boost local quality of life. Social equity, per their own model, is at the very centre of this initiative (see ASL's model of development below).

Source: Alianza Smart Latam

Virtual forums invited people to exchange on the question of the transition to Smart Cities, though none seem available now. ASL's current list of partners, which includes the state of Puebla, is impressive; beyond several more state and municipal governments, this network includes businesses such as the world's largest airliner manufacturer Airbus and the tech giant Huawei, several Mexican universities and Smart City research institutes, and a handful of media distributors (Alianza Smart Latam 2020). The latter have exalted the Barrio Smart initiative, noting the investment that would be generated and the exciting promise of modernization which seemed to be overtaking

Mexico, raising it up to be an important player on the international scene ("Puebla's 'smart barrio'" 2018).

The district of San Andres in Cholula, Puebla was set to become the first of the Smart Cities built as a part of this initiative. As of 2018, that title has been taken by the city of Atlixco, Puebla—the first Smart City in all of Latin America. However, in late November 2017, residents of San Andres were informed that the plaza at the city centre would be remodelled, though the connection to the Barrio Smart initiative was not mentioned at first. This plaza is an important civic and economic destination: like many colonial towns it is at the foot of a church, Santa Maria Tonantzintla. The unique mixture of 17th century baroque with elements which speak to the area's indigenous presence are a point of pride for locals, and a source of keen interest for tourists who are routinely relayed through the plaza by bus (Wattenbarger 2018). Construction began by the replacement of the original cobblestone with smooth pavement slabs; this was to allow for smoother transport and the later installation of a bike lane and traffic counter, according to those present. This project had already inspired doubt in many residents, who felt sidelined by the immediacy of the project and worried that the church, which had been damaged in an earlier earthquake, would not be able to withstand the shock of the nearby heavy machinery. On December 12th, 2017 the mayor announced that the town had been selected to take part in the Barrio Smart initiative, to the surprise of many of those in San Andres; though the article insinuated that this had been done at the request of townspeople, the sentiment in the city reflected otherwise. The final insult came on January 11th, 2018, when construction crews knocked over a clock tower and bridge adjacent to the plaza that had been considered an integral part of the space (Bretón de la Fuente and Mastretta 2018b). This sparked outrage from local residents, many of whom were in disbelief when faced with a project which had boasted a commitment to equity and participation, and yet had pointedly failed to consult with them and permanently altered a beloved landscape. Plans were only presented a few days after the demolition during a public meeting with members of the municipal government as well as the lead architect for the project and included a significant remodelling of the entire plaza to better accommodate tourist visits. Discussions during the hearing focused mainly on technical issues such as drainage and programming questions, eschewing conversations about the acceptability or even necessity of integrating Smart technologies in San Andres. Highly mediatized visits of the mayor featured him detailing the benefits of this modernizing move, with the cameras deftly ignoring the residents who had come to protest the plan which they had not been consulted about. This stonewalling on the part of governmental bodies and media outlets provoked a wave of organising through the city which led to the cancellation of the project before any significant construction could take place. This resistance will be detailed further in the Discussion chapter (Bretón de la Fuente and Mastretta 2018a).

On the basis of the case study of the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront, a few points of interest can be extracted from this case. The presentation of sweeping plans for modernization which supposedly centre equity loom large over the residents of those towns which will be affected. Although they never materialised in San Andres, Smart technologies in redevelopment plans can be used to centre discussions around technical aspects such as the placement of bicycle traffic counters. Doing so eschews larger and more difficult conversations which could be had surrounding the top-down nature of this project, or the question of achieving equity in a project which very pointedly centres tourism rather than residents. Progressive language, demonstrated here namely in the use of the UN's New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals to inform the ASL's Smart philosophy, further serves to gratify the emotions of those who align themselves with liberalized policies, ultimately discouraging research into how truly progressive those might be. Much like the revitalisation of Toronto's waterfront, this embeds the development further into the neoliberal project by falsely framing it as an alternative to more dispossessive processes. However, it in interesting to note that the governmental body at the helm of this initiative is not progressive but rather openly espouses conservative politics, a tension which will be discussed in the next chapter.

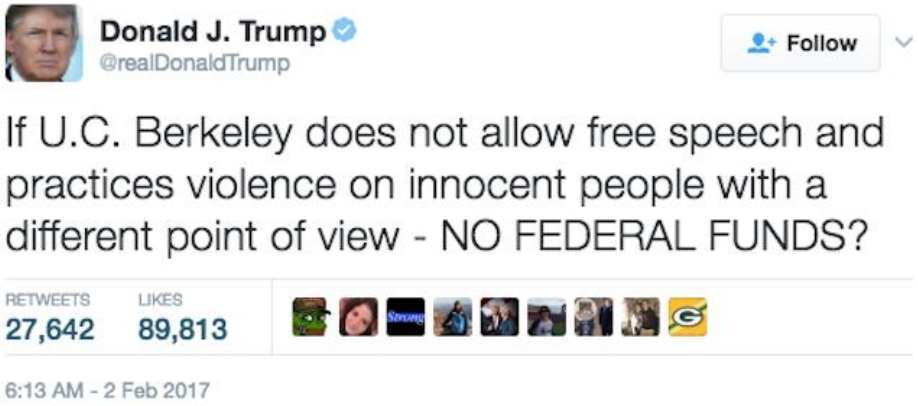
References to the UN as well as all of the other large governmental bodies, industries, academic and research institutions, and media distributors is also an important element in fostering post-political conditions. Loudly publicizing their support for this initiative creates the illusion of a large consensus surrounding the proliferation of these Smart Cities which otherwise drowns out any dissent which might come from smaller bodies, be they independent media outlets or local residents. The role of these large institutions becomes to legitimate a top-down development process in the name of equity and technological innovation. The mayor largely did not engage with public discourse, and whatever engagement was allowed focused entirely on technical issues, yet again sidestepping political discussions surrounding the desire of residents to transition into living in a Smart City and all of the implications that that might have. Perhaps most striking, however, is the confidence with which governmental actors ignored citizen demands for information and consideration—in the case above, Waterfront Toronto made efforts at creating the illusion of participation through the mandated public engagement it tasked Sidewalk Labs with, and the MIDP was released as a draft document prior to construction, to be amended based on popular response. The frustrations with its illegibility were even addressed in a Note to the Reader which sought to recognise and soothe negative public opinion. Perhaps due to the differing scales of the projects and size of the municipalities, the governmental bodies involved in the San Andres Smart City project felt that residents would be less powerful to bring their contestation into a more public light, whereas the sheer magnitude of Toronto's revitalization meant that the world's eyes were fixed on Sidewalk Labs and the ways in

which they responded to Torontonians. This question of scale will be an important one to discuss, particularly in the Discussion chapter below which will address the community organisation which eventually pressured the local government enough to result in the cancellation of this project ("Frenan construcción de Smart City" 2018).

Municipalities & blockchain

Berkeley & the Initial Community Offering

In December 2017, the U.S. Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which, among other things, lowered corporate taxes from 35% to 21%. This, along with the Trump administration's cuts to Section 8 and animosity towards the so-called sanctuary cities, caused immediate alarm among several municipal administrations (Scruggs 2017). The new bill alone presented a severe threat to housing affordability initiatives: corporations previously had the incentive to fund these by purchasing Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) which they could later write off in their taxes. With corporate taxes lowered, however, LIHTC lost much of their appeal, and it was estimated that this would result in the loss of approximately 235,000 units of affordable housing over 10 years (Novogradac 2017). The city of Berkeley, a progressive Californian hub which proudly carries its title as the birthplace of 60s counterculture, found itself at stark risk of losing important funding due to these political measures—particularly when then-U.S. President Trump directly threatened the city administration after the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) cancelled a speech from Milo Yiannopoulos due to protests from students who felt that their tuition would be better spent not funding a fascist (see Tweet below).



Source: Donald Trump's now-defunct Twitter

Facing such uncertainty, the city of Berkeley sought to distance its funding stream from the federal government. In 2018, Councilmember Ben Bartlett and Mayor Jesse Arreguín proposed an alternative financing model which would rely on municipal debt

issuance to fund affordable housing initiatives and homelessness resources. Though this is not uncommon, there was a catch: this debt would go crypto. As Bartlett put it, "The resistance requires a coin" (Holder 2018). Hollywood-worthy slogans aside, the proposed policy would open an Initial Community Offering, or ICO (a play on the fundraising term Initial Coin Offering, which circulates in the cryptocurrency world). The ICO would function similarly to an Initial Public Offering (IPO) in that it would offer bonds of municipal debt for purchase in order to raise capital for the city's projects. Additionally, the Berkeley ICO would allow community members to directly invest in their city since the debt issuance would have a low enough minimum price to allow regular residents to purchase bonds, an activity usually reserved for corporations and individuals who are able to invest large amounts of capital. These bonds are referred to as micro-municipal bonds, or micro-munis, and cities like Denver, Colorado and Cambridge, Massachusetts have both been successful in padding the city's coffers via this method.

The cryptocurrency aspect of this proposed policy would be two-fold: first, the debt would be issued using blockchain code developed by a UC Berkeley lab and a private partner. Under normal circumstances, the sale of municipal bonds is overseen by underwriters, consultants, and counsel—a 2012 study found that municipalities across the U.S. spent just under $4 billion USD annually on bond issuance costs alone (Joffe 2016). Using blockchain code which acts as a secure and immutable ledger to keep track of the bonds would allow the city of Berkeley to cut out these middlemen and eliminate the administrative costs which would be associated with this fundraising initiative. Second, investors would be able to collect their payment either in U.S. dollars or in the form of a Berkeley-specific 'token,' a digital voucher which could be used among local businesses or even donated. This token would in essence be a local form of cryptocurrency, although the lack of regulation and legal grey-area surrounding these has earned this aspect of the proposal a rather cold reception from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) (Venn et al. 2018). As of 2021, Berkeley City Council is still investigating the possibilities of the proposed policy and have indicated that they are expecting a report from Councilmember Bartlett and his team outlining the steps that would need to be taken for a pilot project. This would include an RFP and a list of the public and private partners that would be involved in writing the code for the blockchain (Berkeley City Council 2021, 84). An earlier feasibility report produced on the subject raised several questions, sourced both from the general public as well as members of the City Council. They have centred entirely on the technical aspects of issuing bonds which are so accessible and thus easily dispersed: would they geographically limit bond purchases, and if so, how? How much administrative work would this take on the city's part? Who would create the code for the blockchain and how would they ensure its security and privacy? How would the Berkeley token comply to SEC standards? What kind of secondary bond market will exist? The answers to these

remain to be seen once Councilmember Bartlett and his team release their report at the end of summer (Bartlett and Williams-Ridley 2019).

Despite the validity of the questions raised by City Council, there is a distinct lack of debate surrounding the repercussions such a policy would have on Berkeley's governance and urban development. As this proposed policy is read through the lens provided by the theoretical frameworks expanded upon in the Context chapter above, two main themes emerge: the politics of debt financing, and the framing of blockchain as a neutral instrument. First, the question of micro-munis. The political context that this policy came out in had an undeniable influence on the way in which it was sold to City Council and to the public. The way in which Bartlett presented it in particular lends the whole operation a liberal gloss, painting these bonds as a bold and brave action against the fervent conservatism and outright aggression of the Trump administration. This can undoubtedly appeal to the sentiments of some Berkeley residents, from the most run-of-the-mill democrat to those nostalgic hippie types who had fallen in love with the city when they visited it on Joan Didion's pages. And they are correct, to the extent that the federal government could not be looked to for financial support and that the city, as cities often are, was left to fend for itself. Debt financing is hardly a revolutionary tool, having been used to fund major infrastructural projects for over a century. However, modern practices of debt issuance take a distinctly neoliberal turn. As per the discussion on financialization, cities are not merely passive recipients of market pressures but also capable of creating financial instruments themselves in order to compete on the global market (Weber 2010). Funding municipal infrastructural projects by issuing debt which is bought by private entities looking to diversify their portfolios puts the risk of failure entirely on the municipality while shifting the profit to private entities. The latter also rely on rising property prices in order to guarantee investor returns, thus marking this debt issuance as an explicitly pro-growth policy. Berkeley's proposed blockchain municipal bond policy uses progressive language and the appeal of new technology in order to desublimate the desires of those who support affordable housing initiatives. Councilmember Bartlett and his team are positioning this policy as being in opposition to the current regime, despite the fact that any tool which relies on rising property prices to function is not only bound to exacerbate the housing crisis but is in fact perfectly in line with the overarching neoliberal project. In sum, the economic logic that fed the bill to lower corporate tax can be argued to be the same one that lies behind Berkeley's blockchain municipal bond issuance.

The use of blockchain technology and cryptocurrency in this policy is also an effective tool for depoliticization, as it presents this technology as a neutral instrument. The discussion surrounding micro-munis as a fundraising tool was already largely technical, focusing mainly on regulation and security. However, the use of blockchain as a ledger and pay-outs in the form of cryptocurrency have only added to this by raising difficult questions about coding and SEC compliance that are easy to get buried under.

These conversations effectively sidestep the above questions of rising property values and the commodification of the city which might raise affordability concerns among Berkeley residents. However, it also further draws away from the fact that blockchain technology and the cryptocurrencies it has spawned do not exist separate from politics. Cryptocurrency came about as a pushback against centralised banking and the financial institutions which strictly regulate and control it—at its core, its value is dependent on this contrarian sentiment and little else. Although it has been touted by some as a tool to democratise finance, a sentiment one may find glimmers of in the Berkeley proposal, cryptocurrency is distributed unevenly and has a deeply spatial component. About ⅔ to ¾ of crypto activity and wealth is concentrated among just a handful of companies in Russia, Georgia, and China, the kind of clustering which finance specialists are so reviled for (Roubini 2018). Much like the deregulatory policies governments put in place, then, cryptocurrency follows the same neoliberal logic that ends up promoting severely uneven wealth accumulation. Beyond the norms it promotes, blockchain technology has serious real-world political consequences which seem to either elude the Berkeley City Council or be outright rejected. For example, their extensive feasibility report, which noted myriad important questions about the minutiae of micro-muni transactions, dismissed environmental sustainability as being "Not applicable," while Councilmember Bartlett's team noted that his pilot project had "No adverse effects to the environment" (Bartlett 2018, Bartlett and Williams-Ridley 2019). The socio-environmental impacts of blockchain are vast and not nearly recognised enough and will be expanded upon in the discussion of Miami's initiative. Suffice it to say, however, that the technology's massive energy consumption and uneven flow of investment makes its effects on the environment more than applicable, despite dismissal from the Berkeley City Council. This is a valuable example, then, of the length to which technology can be used to create a pro-social veneer: in Berkeley, a policy was explicitly framed as being left-leaning (notably, for the sake of creating affordable housing), all the while espousing a technology that realises right-wing ideologies by promoting decentralisation, as well as proposing a financing model which relies on the same speculative property value growth which has driven the current housing crisis.

Miami & the Bitcoin City

In January 2021, the Miami City Commission voted 4-1 in favour of Mayor Francis Suarez's proposal to use cryptocurrency—per some reports, Bitcoin specifically—to pay city workers who opted into the scheme, as well as to accept it for municipal fee and tax payments from residents and businesses. This is ostensibly not a new move: Ohio launched a Bitcoin tax portal in 2018, though it was later suspended in 2019 over legal issues since the portal had been set up by a company that had not gone through a competitive selection process (Pierog 2021). Mayor Suarez has equally campaigned to invest city treasury in Bitcoin stock and has hosted two cryptocurrency-themed

conferences in the past six months in order to steer Miami towards the title of Bitcoin City.

> *"So we're looking at … creating a regulatory framework that makes us the easiest place in the United States to do business if you're doing it in cryptocurrencies. […] I want the creative and the innovative class to come here and create high-paying jobs for my residents."*
>
> *Mayor Suarez (Perry 2021)*

Investing the treasury into Bitcoin stock would take the form of a P3, wherein private investors would absorb some of the risk by putting in a larger sum than the city in return for getting their funds out first and leaving any remnant funds for the city (Huang 2021). The Miami City Commission has equally agreed to consult with those responsible for modifying Wyoming's financial regulatory framework, which has put out 13 comprehensive laws that allow cryptocurrency to be treated like any other financial asset and managed without the usual regulatory barriers (Mejdrich 2019). Unlike the Berkeley case, this is not in response to funding withdrawal—rather, it's a bid for prosperity. Reports are circulating currently of a post-COVID exodus of corporations from former tech hubs like San Francisco, Seattle, and New York City, all places with relatively progressive governments which, after years of local protest, have become increasingly antagonistic to the start-ups and fast money that have eaten away at their affordability. Hostility towards big tech projects like Amazon's HQ2 in Queens, New York have dispersed those firms into Austin, Texas, Boulder, Colorado, and, as will be analysed here, Miami, Florida. Mayor Suarez has been all too happy to welcome them in—after all, tech is predicted to be one of the most lucrative industries post-COVID, and thus one of the most important to seduce for any politician aiming to make their city grow and prosper (Hart 2021). Already, big names like Elon Musk's Boring Company and Delian Asparouhov's Varda Space have indicated that the appeal of a Republican mayor with an entrepreneurial attitude and lax tax laws can spur a move towards the Sunshine State. The discourse surrounding this proposed policy seems to be nothing but positive—tech firms are delighted about feeling wanted; local Floridian entrepreneurs feel like their innovative spirit, once ignored in favour of every hipster in the Bay Area, is finally being recognised; and the mayor seems to be enjoying cultivating his charismatic cool-guy personal by winking encouragements at potential investors over Twitter. What is absent amid all of this enthusiasm, however, is any debate surrounding the desirability of becoming the Bitcoin City. If all of these tech firms are fleeing the progressive cities which once housed them, it seems odd that no questions have been raised as to the possibility that there might be a reason those same cities are now becoming hostile. A closer look at this supposed tech exodus and the relationship that those firms have with local governments might speak to the future that Miami is

building through these policies and add relief to a discursive space which has until now remained fairly flat.

To begin with, it is not entirely fair to say that there is a tech exodus happening: although the idea has been circulated furiously by many firms and investors, the latest Silicon Valley Index report has indicated that many companies are either staying put in San Francisco, or just moving elsewhere in California, like Google's megadevelopment in San Jose. Despite popular political sentiment turning slightly against them, these firms have little financial reason to leave. Even in the midst of a global pandemic that devastated many industries, tech firms reported a 37% rise in market capitalisation in Silicon Valley alone, and company stock rose accordingly—Google was up by 28%, Facebook by 30%, Apple by 77%, and Tesla by a staggering 712% (Joint Venture 2021). Reports of an exodus mostly refer to employees of those same companies switching residences due to the now-remote nature of their jobs and the absurdly high living costs of the cities that house their employers. And it is perhaps the latter issue that should be given more attention in Mayor Suarez's proposal, or in the Miami City Commission's vote to approve it. When interviewed, one tech entrepreneur specifically cited the hostility towards Amazon in Queens as being the reason he chose to relocate to Miami instead (Bowles 2021).

Rather than being a blind endorsement of Miami, this statement prompts the question of why residents in Queens were so resistant to what would have been an enormous influx of investment. Perhaps examining what happened in Seattle when Amazon built its first headquarters there will provide some clarity. Seattle is famously an extremely unaffordable city, and any discussion of its housing market would be incomplete if it did not mention the tech boom in the city, and the presence of Amazon in particular. Between 2010-2017, Amazon has injected $38 billion and 45,000 jobs into Seattle, which has coincided with an 83.4% increase in new home prices and a 67% rise in rents (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2020). A minimum wage worker in Seattle would need to work 93 hours per week to afford a standard studio in King County, compared to 67 hours for one in the state of Washington in general. Amazon's presence in Seattle showcases that having massive tech investment come into a city does not guarantee that it will be distributed evenly. This is especially true of situations where regulations will get relaxed in order to allow easier capital flow and thus encourage wealth to crowd towards a specific city, like Mayor Suarez is promising to do. Cryptocurrency is not some great democratic equalizer, nor does it prove right the libertarian dream that anyone can get rich, if only they can embody the image of the maverick investor who is too savvy to be bound by financial regulatory bodies—much like any kind of investment scheme, it simply favours the already wealthy. If this has been true in Seattle, and it has been true in San Francisco, then it is worth extrapolating these effects to Miami to predict the kind of urban development this policy will engender and who it will affect.

First, in order to gain an appreciation for the economic landscape this policy will operate within, it must be recognised that class in the U.S. is strongly related to race. Amazon's presence in Seattle disproportionately affected Black residents since a legacy of segregationist laws have ensured that they have less access to wealth accumulation and property ownership, leaving them more vulnerable to pressures of the market. Miami is much more racially diverse than either Seattle or San Francisco, but it still presents the classic story of an unequal wealth distribution which lies along racial lines: redlining practices from the early 20th century have ensured a spatial racial segregation which exists to this day and can be traced through a valuable research project on ArcGIS' StoryMaps by Bachin (2020). However, ethnic enclaves are now rising in property value due to speculators eyeing them for redevelopment. The neighbourhood of Little Haiti—which is predominantly Black, has a high immigrant population, and is inhabited by 82% renters—is being rebranded under the aegis of the Magic City Innovation District revitalization project. Bachin (2020) estimate that it will displace approximately 3,000 households. This gentrification is equally being motivated by climate change. Miami's beaches used to be exclusive and wealthy districts, while poorer and racialized neighbourhoods were built further from the shore; however, rising sea levels are making the latter much more appealing for investors as those once-coveted seaside properties are starting to, quite literally, sink. These are the conditions and inequities which are at risk of being exacerbated the way that they were in other cities which saw a large influx of tech investment. These same inequities were the reasons Queens residents cited when they argued that they did not want Amazon's HQ2 to make the borough their home and, in the process, price them out of theirs. Marketing Miami as the perfect place for tech firms looking for looser corporate laws risks engendering very real and violent changes that could hurt the most vulnerable part of Miami's population. The fact that there is a total absence of this possible reality in the public discourse in favour of a focus on Mayor Suarez's show of his bromance with tech billionaires should alarm anyone who has ever cared about equitable urban development. How many cities must crumble under the weight of investment-funded gentrification before we pause to reflect on the validity of urban growth as a norm in governance? This form of depoliticization takes on a new gravity when considering the intersection of the tech industry's energy consumption and Miami's vulnerability to climate change. Bitcoin has been shown to be an incredibly energetically expensive cryptocurrency; though blockchain technology is hardly homogenous in its energy consumption, Bitcoin mining was estimated to consume similar levels of electricity to the country of Austria, a number that can only grow as its popularity does (De Vries 2018). Arguments have already been made that blockchain technology can be used to mitigate climate change by, for example, more efficiently tracking carbon offset credits, but these can be easily dismissed as a newer, greener manifestation of Naomi Klein's disaster capitalism thesis—that is, that monopoly capitalism both exacerbates climate crises as well as uses them as opportunities to grow the neoliberal economy (Howson

2020, Klein 2007). To sell the city to a sector whose product is so reliant on massive energy consumption while sea levels continue to rise and Miami's infrastructure is swallowed up makes the mayor's good-humoured Tweeting on the subject seem blatantly tone-deaf.

The spectacle surrounding this policy, however, must be taken equally seriously. That social media is an important form of political communication now cannot be denied, but it must also be recognised that Mayor Suarez's chummy attitude with tech magnates and the large promotional crypto conferences he hosts are a tactic in and of themselves. From the beginning, his office has played up the young, exciting, and disruptive nature of his policy proposal, framing it with the same marketable language that Richard Florida uses in his Creative Cities schemes. The argument cannot be made, however, that this evocative style of communication is used to desublimate any kind of desires among his voter base the way that it could be in the case of Berkeley. Whereas the latter used an explicitly neoliberal policy to present itself as progressive and a counteraction to the neoliberal project which had engendered housing unaffordability to begin with, Mayor Suarez is unabashedly pro-capitalism and pro-growth. The policy has been presented in line with classic trickle-down economic logic by which attracting large tech firms would somehow translate into smaller local entrepreneurs finding better success as well by virtue of being in a creative cluster. The discourse, in this case, is not one-dimensional by virtue of minute liberalizations being presented as a radical alternative, thus flattening political nuance; rather, growth is simply depoliticized to the point of being assumed to be the natural goal to strive for, and none of the negative externalities are even remotely considered.

Discussion

Analysing the plans in the chapter above has served the purpose of exposing the underlying neoliberal ideologies and political processes which are present in tech-driven urban development plans. It has also been possible to bring to light the measures which are taken by these plans' proponents to simultaneously desublimate popular desires for more socially and environmentally conscious development into an adherence to consumptive and exploitative actions, as well as use new technology to depoliticise these plans and obscure their oftentimes troubling sociopolitical implications in favour of focusing on more hard technical aspects. Having dissected these phenomena, it becomes possible to answer the question that was asked at the very beginning of the Analysis chapter: if tech is the future of our cities, then what does that future look like? The following chapter will attempt to draw out the common ideological tendencies observed in the Analysis, extrapolate their material implications for urban development and the life of those who inhabit the city, and offer insight on the faults in the neoliberal project on the basis of the examples of resistance to the Smart City plans analysed above.

The city of tomorrow

There is no denying that technological innovation plays an important part in urban—and, really, human—development, and though the topic of this paper might seem to point to the contrary, I am hardly a luddite. Human history has been a history of innovation, and though that is a statement that sounds like it has been ripped straight out of a motivational business seminar, it is a fact that our ability to develop new technologies has had a great potential to better our lives. From *Homo habilis* developing stone tools in order to butcher animals to the massive infrastructural feat of building a functional modern metropolis, human quality of life has overall, and especially in this North American context, skyrocketed with the advent of new technology. However, technological advancement means nothing if it is not accompanied by redistributive action, a story that we have seen played out in increasingly disturbing ways as our modes of production have grown in scale. Marcuse's critique of technologically advanced capitalist society addresses this very fact: despite the social necessity of labour decreasing with every technological innovation, this has hardly resulted in the kind of leisurely lifestyle that academic Bertrand Russell dreamt of. Rather, technology largely alienates a greater and greater portion of the population—what is stopping Smart Cities and blockchain from recreating if not amplifying the current state of uneven development that we live in? To present these technologies as being neutral entities is to ignore the conditions that they function within and reproduce as well as the repressive politics which are baked into them as a result. It is worthwhile, then, to imagine this city of tomorrow as it is presented by proponents of Smart Cities and urban blockchain initiatives and see what lies beyond the idyllic promises and good branding.

First, Smart Cities. These technologies are dependent on a broad collection of data that emerges from citizens' day to day life, something which cannot be opted out of, and which immediately brings about concerns about privacy and consent. In short, Smart Cities represent a deep dive into the waters of surveillance capitalism. Coined by Zuboff (2019), surveillance capitalism refers to the reliance of the current economic system upon commodified personal data. Under this system, individuals are reprogrammed from being citizens to being consumers as well as producers of advertisement, in which their behavioural patterns are harvested in order to feed into predictive algorithms which can then influence those same behavioural patterns. While Smart City plans argue that an omniscient data collection is merely a way to optimise urban functions and to collect infrastructural metrics, this becomes difficult to believe when it is private bodies like Alphabet Inc. which are consistently tasked with creating their own governance structures in these Smart plans, leaving them accountable to no one. And it must be noted that these companies have given us little reason to trust that they would not abuse this power. The unregulated space of the Internet, though ideal for free and open democratic engagement, left a vacuum which was quickly filled by the likes of Google and Facebook, who have been endlessly critiqued for their closeness with advertisers and laissez-faire attitudes regarding data privacy. The age of surveillance capitalism means that while power has largely been contingent on the ownership of the means of production, there is a new emphasis on owning the means of information production and, by extension, the production of meaning. Ubiquitous data collection at this most intimate and granular level of everyday urban life combined with the ability to do with it what one wishes due to a total rollback of public leadership seems almost too good to be true for those tech companies showing their interest in building Smart Cities. Vague assurances that these companies will do no harm seem grossly insufficient when the future that is promised increasingly starts to look like some pastiche of Blade Runner 2049 and John Carpenter's They Live.

Urban blockchain initiatives represent a different potential shift in urban governance structures, though the underlying neoliberal logic remains the same. As was noted in the Analysis chapter, these technologies have a distinct ideological origin, and their adoption into municipal politics would represent a shift towards those ideologies which cannot be ignored. Hinging on dreams of decentralisation and deregulation, blockchain technology and its associated cryptocurrencies seek to move away from the large body of regulators and agglomerated firms which have until now sat at the top of the financial world. This attitude is not particularly new—cyber-libertarianism has dominated much of the digital elite since the 1990s, when the idea of the Internet as a Wild West frontier land which was too different and novel to be regulated by analog laws first emerged (Chenou 2014). To insert these technologies into municipal politics is to implicitly endorse the right-wing ideologies which these same technologies espouse, and if one accepts that argument, then the issue of who

stands to benefit from these policies immediately comes to the forefront. The fact of the matter is, both Miami and Berkeley are considering policies which promote technologies that incentivise people who already have a vested interest in decentralisation to pour all of their available funds and energy into promoting them. Under this light, endorsing urban blockchain initiatives seem like less of a political decision than a marketing one. These are policies that would engender further uneven wealth accumulation and widen the wealth gap which already exists both at the urban and global scale. Cities buying into the crypto craze would likely have the opposite effect of adopting modes of development which are redistributive and just. It is also worth addressing the fact that a totally deregulated financial world is not only undesirable for its sociopolitical implications but would also present a significant risk to the coffers of already financially distressed municipalities. Although proponents of these technologies would have you believe that blockchain is the balm to heal all wounds, a critical examination of the reality of things reveals that many of their promises fail to be kept (Golumbia 2020). While it is not in my habit to defend major financial institutions, the strict regulations that they do enforce are meant to ensure that those who engage with markets can do so with the reasonable expectation that they and every other player are following common sense rules that provide a cushion of security to investments. Pump and dump schemes and other frauds are heavily penalised by formal financial institutions; however, no regulations to prevent such anti-social behaviour exist in the world of cryptocurrency. In fact, pump and dump schemes are a favourite among many crypto magnates. This volatility of transaction, and by extension of value, makes this a curious form of financing to engage in for a municipality whose public-facing role rather favours security. Coding blockchain and mining for cryptocurrency are also incredibly computationally exhausting and complicated tasks; while formal financial institutions have mechanisms in place to aid parties in recovering funds that have been wrongly transferred, no such thing exists in the blockchain realm. If a municipal government miswrote a line of code and accidentally sent off millions into the ether, there would simply be no way to recover these funds (Golumbia 2016). Simply put, cities engaging in blockchain initiatives seems to achieve two goals: first, to ensure that there is a regular inflow of investment into cryptocurrencies so that those who already have a vested interest in it may continue to accumulate wealth from it; and second, to put municipal coffers which are meant to fund all of the infrastructure citizens rely on at inordinate risk of fraud, volatility, and computational error.

The future city that these technologies seem to be building is bleak indeed. At the higher academic scale, a further embeddedness into the neoliberal project sounds like a terrifying fate—variations on the words dispossession and alienation feature in this paper dozens of times, and a high-tech dystopia would only multiply the need for their use. I have argued that these technologies are both a tool of realising neoliberal ideologies as well as further embedding urban governance in the neoliberal model by

obstructing dissenting public discourse. The proliferation of these technologies can only serve to accelerate the dispossessive processes that had been reviewed in the literature review. However, beyond theory, it is important to contextualise this hypothetical city in this specific moment in time. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought two main issues to the popular attention: the widening wealth gap and the climate crisis. While post-political conditions manufacture and depend on the apathy of the majority of individuals, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the deepening political polarisation and precarity that exists in urban centres and beyond (Swyngedouw 2011). After the particularly vicious events of the 2008 financial crisis, there seems to have been nonstop talk of the erosion of the middle class and the deepening poverty that is engulfing a growing number of people. Municipalities adopting policies and plans which only serve to strengthen the power of major private companies to accumulate wealth can only contribute to this rapid uneven development, leaving questions as to the viability of such a model. How much can the 99% possibly be driven into misery before the system cannot reproduce itself anymore? Poverty is also not just a question of economics or morality—it is a question of our collective survival. Uneven development is strongly tied to the climate crisis, from the unsustainable exploitation of nature and labour in vulnerable areas to the colonial values which seep into the majority of production operations. Beyond the fact that computation-heavy operations like Smart Cities and blockchain are hugely energetically expensive, their promotion of the neoliberal project is in the long term linked to the strengthening of a system which is destroying the only planet we have to live on. These policies take on a very real gravity when one considers the urgency of the climate crisis that we are in, and the relative tameness of the green solutions that they peddle for political clout. The city of tomorrow is unfortunately only that—because while tomorrow is a given, the day after increasingly seems like it is not.

Conclusion

This paper has been a critical examination of the effect of the neoliberal ideology in urban governance and development and the tactics used to manufacture a consent surrounding the necessity of urban growth. An analysis of post-politics in a Smart City plan proposal in Toronto, Canada by Carr and Hesse (2020) was then used as a motivational case study to inform the methodological approach that the rest of the analyses would use. Additionally, a case study of the failure of green development by Stoner (2021) was also used as methodological grounding for exploring the concept of repressive desublimation. A Smart City plan in San Andres, Mexico and two urban blockchain initiatives in Berkeley, California and Miami, Florida were subsequently analysed. The discussion that followed attempted to bridge together these plans and draw out trends in urban governance and development. In particular, I focused on the tendency towards hallmarks of neoliberal ideology such as privatisation, marketization, and decentralisation, which made an appearance in all of these case studies. To conclude, I will reiterate the summary of all of these chapters and my findings. Following that, I will end this paper on a future-oriented note by providing an overview of the ways in which resistance can be found—and in fact has been—through examples of organising in public space in San Andres, Toronto, and San Francisco.

This paper begins with a literature review which explores the neoliberal ideologies that inform these tech-driven plans. Urban governance in North America has been deeply permeated by neoliberal ideologies and this is reflected in development trends which aim to maximise the exchange value of land, often at the cost of the quality of life of the average resident. Leaning into neoliberalism is painted as both desirable for a small group of urban elites who stand to profit from this process, as well as a necessary move on the part of urban governments who are increasingly embedded in the highly competitive global market. The dispossessive nature of this process is illustrated particularly in the phenomenon of the privatisation of public space, which serves as a tangible example of what the sociopolitical impacts of neoliberalism look like beyond theory and on the streets.

Faced with the alienating nature of this process, the next chapter argues that urban governments and their private partners attempt to manufacture consent surrounding the neoliberal model of urban governance and the development trends which emerge from it. I present two tactics which serve the aim of social control: first, the use of elements of repressive desublimation; and second, the creation of post-political conditions. Repressive desublimation is a theory developed by Herbert Marcuse which refers to the way in which urban governments and their private partners gratify the pro-social desires of citizens by inserting small liberalisations in growth-oriented plans and policies, thus embedding the city further into the neoliberal project under the cover of centre-left sentiment. On the other hand, creating post-political

conditions refers to these same urban governments and their private partners stifling dissent surrounding their plans and policies by centring discourse around technical and infrastructural questions. This tactic effectively allows them to sidestep any deeper questions about the sociopolitical impacts of these plans and the neoliberal ideologies that underlie them. This trend toward political coercion is then contrasted with the example of public space in order to highlight the fact that these tactics are merely a process and not a static state, and thus can be resisted. Public space is presented as having democratic potential due to its ability to house discourse between a variety of communities, as well as act as a site for revolutionary action. I end by arguing that the privatisation of public space discussed in the previous chapter is thus all the more an urgent issue to address, since it is both a product as well as a tool for reinforcement of the neoliberal project.

Following the literature review and theoretical approach chapters, I apply the arguments established above to four tech-driven plans in order to illustrate the ideological underbelly of each one and the tactics used to camouflage their dispossessive potential. The methodological approach draws on the first of these plans, a Smart City redevelopment scheme for Toronto's Quayside. Carr and Hesse (2020) provide their account of the manufacturing of post-political conditions in this motivating case study which will inform the analysis of the three other plans I have chosen. Furthermore, Stoner's (2021) exploration of repressive desublimation in green development plans is also drawn on as a methodological approach to be applied in the rest of my analyses.

The analysis chapter thus takes on three more plans, all of which touch on plans which centre technologies that have been enjoying some popularity: Smart City developments, and urban blockchain initiatives. The first is the Barrio Smart initiative in the town of San Andres in Puebla, Mexico, a Smart City plan which is meant to complement the analysis of Toronto's Quayside summarised in the previous chapter. The two urban blockchain initiatives are in Berkeley, California, where the City Council is reviewing a proposal to fundraise through the use of blockchain-coded municipal bonds, and Miami, Florida, where the mayor is courting tech companies by proposing that municipal funds start being converted into cryptocurrency. These cases present evidence of repressive desublimation in the manner in which injecting technological innovation into plans serves to turn the attention away from the alienating impacts they engender. Further, the promotion of post-political conditions is picked out in the degree to which urban governments and their private partners will collude to flatten discourse and obstruct dissent. Although the range of political backgrounds, scales of governance and operation, and types of policy vary in all of these plans, the tendency towards public leadership rollback and neoliberal ideology are highlighted.

Lastly, the discussion chapter ties together the theoretical frameworks as well as the plan analyses to answer the initial question of what the city being built by these ideologies will look like. The sociopolitical impacts of neoliberal governance are argued to be exacerbated by the technological optimisation proposed by these plans. Underlying values and ideologies which have been actively endorsed by urban governments and their private partners are extrapolated into the future in order to paint a picture of what these plans would represent for a city and its residents if taken to the extreme. Issues of surveillance, the widening wealth gap, and the climate crisis are linked directly to the current model of development and used to argue that the latter is unsustainable and must be resisted

Space for resistance

Forecasting the end of the world is hardly a satisfactory way to conclude this analysis and discussion of urban politics. Beyond its pessimism, this approach escapes precisely what Rancière found special and useful about politics: they are an eternal process. Resigning ourselves to the inescapability of the neoliberal project only serves to reify it and ignores the very real modes of resistance which exist, and what their impacts reveal about the fragility of the broader capitalist system that this ideology operates within. It is no easy task to move beyond this mindset; it is difficult to envision the end of capitalism because it is difficult to trace its origins and to thus imagine a world outside of those conditions. How far back can we see examples of commodities and labour, those pillars of economic development considered almost synonymous with modern capitalism? However, what makes a system a recognisably capitalist one is not so much the existence of factors such as commodities or labour—it is how people relate to them, and through the perpetuation of the neoliberal project, how they have overtaken an ever-broadening range of our daily lives. Understanding this means downgrading the conditions that we live within from being an absolute truth to being a construct, one which can be rejected. The city of tomorrow imagined above is undesirable precisely because it believes the lie of neoliberalism's internal logic: that it is all-penetrating and self-reproducing and ruthlessly effective. If that were the case, the future would look bleak indeed. But extrapolating the urban plans I analysed to a dystopian scale is not merely meant to reflect the pessimism that many disaffected people might feel. It is, nominally, pointing a finger at the blatant blind spot in the neoliberal project.

Neoliberalism does not exist within a vacuum, and as an ideology, it is simply not the material world that we live in—rather, it operates within it. That means that neoliberal structures are forced to interact with all of the friction that exists on the ground and that hinders the smooth evolution of the free market. When this neoliberal apparatus then produces repression and perpetuates violence, it is bound to create tension among those whom it is actively disenfranchising. In his book *Rebel Cities*, David Harvey gives the example of the 2011 London riots, which had begun after protests decrying the police killing of Mark Duggan. He was struck by then-Prime Minister David Cameron's use of the word 'feral' to describe the looters, stating that they merely "mimic on the

streets of London what corporate capital is doing to planet earth" (Harvey 2012, 156). His argument is that when there is violence enacted by the state when it puts forward decades of austerity measures and policies of racial discrimination, among others, it is only natural for that violence to be reflected at the population level. Despite the best efforts of those invested in the perpetuation of the growth machine to convince us that these conditions of monopoly capitalism are a collective benefit, the real-world impact of dispossessive policies is impossible to ignore. The fragility of the neoliberal project thus lies in the ease with which this illusion surrounding growth is shattered: all it takes is one economic downturn, or a housing crisis, or a global pandemic, and it is suddenly painfully apparent that this system has never and will never serve everybody.

This fragility translates to the current neoliberal model of urban governance as well. Within the scope of the information presented in the Context and Analysis chapters, this tendency for crisis can be exploited by opponents of tech-driven urban development plans and made visible using public space. Due to their sheer newness, both of the urban blockchain initiatives analysed currently have not amassed enough power or popularity to trigger the kind of dissent that can be pointed to as a guide. However, the Smart City plans in Toronto and San Andres both failed to be realised despite the best efforts of governments, institutions, and media largely due to the strategic organising of local citizens and their use of the democratising force of public space. In the case of San Andres, the public space of note is the central plaza in front of the church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla. Like many colonial towns, the town had been built from the church out, and its central position is reflective of its significance in the local culture. It is the site for weekly processions and where much of social life happens after masses. The integration of Indigenous motifs in its architecture also makes it a particular source of pride for the ancestry of the residents of San Andres. This plaza is also importantly where the initial demolitions began when the Barrio Smart initiative began as the beloved clock tower was demolished and cobblestones were replaced, threatening the structural integrity of the church and suddenly barring access to the site for a number of weeks. The residents of San Andres repeatedly attempted to communicate with their mayor and the lead architect for the project by organising meetings on that now-refurbished plaza, the former of which failed to show up while the latter dismissed their concerns as being provincial and myopic. The importance of this public space cannot be understated: its violation and temporary inaccessibility spurred residents into immediate action since it infringed on those important human and social values that a market-driven ideology cannot account for. The plaza also presented the ideal space for residents to meet one another and put pressure on the local administration to rethink the project, a pressure whose visibility allowed its popularisation and legitimisation in local news. Although the mayor chose not to engage with his residents' demands, the citizen assemblies attracted the attention of many concerned individuals who were eager to present possible solutions to their dilemma. After several months of meetings, residents filed a legal action that marked the church of Santa Maria Tonantzintla as a heritage building which must be preserved, effectively halting a majority of the surrounding work which had begun. Finally, the

mayor was forced to listen, and the Barrio Smart initiative has ended its development in San Andres.

While public space played a crucial role in organising against the Smart City plan that had been slated for San Andres, the example of the demise of Sidewalk Labs' plan in Toronto demonstrates the importance of creating visible dissent on the most freely accessible of spaces: the Internet. To argue that the Internet is a public space and that it is freely accessible is contentious, and many would point to the huge barriers to entry that exist for those who cannot afford or are not presented the option of having rapid broadband Internet. However, the discursive potential that, say, a Twitter account has can be argued to mimic that of the ancient agoras in that, barring any active effort to exclude certain communities, it is technically an open space in which one may express their dissenting views and be exposed to the classes of people that would otherwise not be present in their immediate social circles. Harking back to Harvey's analysis of Baudelaire, the impact of the bourgeois couple seeing the pauper would be the same had the setting been a café in Paris or coming across a GoFundMe where someone is in desperate need of aid to pay their exorbitant medical bills. The ability to go viral online further makes the Internet a fantastic tool for dissent in that it has great potential for visibility—as much as the London riots could not be ignored, neither can viral new hashtags which bring to light the latest great injustice in the world. Opponents of Sidewalk Labs and Waterfront Toronto's plans for the Quayside used just this potential in organising the movement which would become #BlockSidewalk. The latter grew out of the outrage of a group of about 30 Torontonians, most of them well-educated and familiar with policy or the tech sector, who had all expressed serious doubts about the viability and desirability of the plan proposed in the MIDP. This group later coalesced with dozens of community organisations as well as individual residents to form a powerful online presence which smartly sought to present their arguments against this development when the governments and private bodies behind it refused to hear them out. The cosmic size of Sidewalk Labs' proposed project meant that, as much as all eyes were turned towards their MIDP, they were equally discerning of the growing dissent against them. #BlockSidewalk's visibility put an important pressure on Waterfront Toronto to confront the issues that had existed in their P3 all along, and the eventual mounting controversy seemed to present too big of a capital risk for Sidewalk Labs, who decided to abandon the project in May 2020, citing vague COVID-19 concerns. Harnessing the discursive and revolutionary potential of public space, then, is not only important but can extend to more modern definitions of public space. This is particularly true of tech-driven development, where the majority of discourse is happening online and thus depends on opponents to these plans creating intelligent ways of organising with local community groups and residents to promote their dissent.

I would like to present a last example of dissent via the, one which takes place in the city that is emblematic of tech-driven gentrification: San Francisco. The aim is to both demonstrate the power inherent in overtaking implicitly private space and turning it back into an urban commons, as well as expressing caution as to the viability of such visible dissent. The Mission District in San Francisco is a traditionally low-income,

majority Latinx neighbourhood which has been hit particularly hard by the waves of gentrification which have accompanied the development of the tech sector in the city (Maharawal 2017). In 2014, a video went viral of an altercation at the Mission Playground, in which several tech employees attempted to kick local youths off of the basketball court by asserting it had been reserved it through an app. The youths responded that the court had always been used for seven-on-seven pickup games, invalidating any of the authority that the tech employees felt their reservation had. This example hits at the core of what tech-driven development attempts to do. The technologies that it promotes exist to mediate our day-to-day interactions and to reduce the friction present in those in order to allow for a smoother transaction and capital flow. The app which allowed those tech employees to reserve the Mission Playground basketball court overcame any need to consult with community members or any of the youth that had previously been using that court. Erasing that friction of interaction, for all its want of efficiency, is actually quite clumsy. It ignores the informal norms and locally-imposed rules which have historically developed and evolved in the area, and its imposition does not guarantee cooperation from those who have otherwise been occupying that space. In the case of this basketball court, this technology was rejected by local youth who had already established their own self-organising system and were not willing to have some unknown digital entity sweep that away in its entirety, particularly when it meant that the threat of gentrification would extend from their homes all the way to their parks. This action was an important resistance to a high-tech attempt to implicitly privatise a public space and is representative of the ways in which there is no way that these tech-driven developments will not be met by a resistance. Politics are, as has been established, an eternal process and thus it is important to keep critically responding to the plans which we are given and to not stop engaging with both the material fabric of the city as well as with those people surrounding us in order to remain aware of how development is affecting our neighbours.

However, the example of protests in the Mission District also highlights the problematic aspect of using highly visible public spaces to express dissent. In the same year as that video of the Mission Playground went viral, a 28-year-old college student, Alejandro Nieto, was shot by police in Bernal Heights Park where he had been enjoying the view of the city, simply because someone had coded his identity as a Latino man as being inherently dangerous and requiring police intervention. The hyper-visibility of a body in a public space can be very dangerous for some marginalised identities and expressing dissent in this manner comes with a very real threat to personal safety for many. It is not exactly fair to ask those who are already most victimised by the colonial and violent ideology of the neoliberal model of governance to put themselves in harm's way for a chance at future change. Dissent, then, necessitates the sobering realisation that the second half of politics is made up of policing and organising should be accompanied by a compassionate and intelligent recognition of this fact. Protest tactics which protect those who are already at risk of being on the receiving end of state violence must therefore be explored, expanded upon, and embraced if resistance to the neoliberal project is to be worthwhile.

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