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CITY AND SEGREGATION SHAKEN BY CAPITALISM

CRITIQUE OF THE IDEALIST APPROACHES[1]

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Siempre ha sido difícil definir qué es una ciudad y ahora lo es más porque el auge de los negocios inmobiliarios la ha tenido sometida a una transformación incesante, incluyendo sus áreas periurbanas. Con ello, también la segregación ha adquirido un estado de mutación constante y, de hecho, ya no parece estabilizarse, como en el pasado, en patrones espaciales reconocibles. Esto ha estado sucediendo en las ciudades chilenas, como en las de muchos otros países. Resulta comprensible, así, la tentación de sustituir las definiciones físico-geográficas y planimétricas, tanto de ciudad como de la segregación, por otras que enfatizan los procesos. ¿Quiere decir, entonces, que la dimensión físico-espacial de la ciudad carece de importancia como, implícita o explícitamente, argumentan los economistas neoliberales y los urbanistas apegados a enfoques estructural-deterministas? Es cierto que la pandemia del COVID19 hace evidentes las flaquezas de estos enfoques que desconsideran lo espacial, pero eso no resta relevancia al examen de su armado teórico, el que se abordará aquí con base en una revisión crítica de la literatura especializada y en testimonios de especialistas recogidos por un estudio sobre segregación en tres ciudades chilenas, del cual este artículo es resultado. Concluiremos estas páginas planteando la necesidad de reforzar la investigación empírica de la ciudad y la segregación, lo mismo que nuestra atención a sus dimensiones subjetivas.

Palabras clave: neoliberalismo, estructuralismo, idealismo, urbanismo

It has always been difficult to define what a city is and now even more so as the boom in real-estate business has subjected it and its peri-urban areas to constant transformation. With this, segregation has also acquired a state of constant mutation and in fact, no longer seems to stabilize itself, as it did in the past, into recognizable spatial patterns. This has been happening in Chilean cities, just as it has in many other countries.Thus, the temptation of substituting physical-geographical and planimetric definitions, both of city and segregation, for others that emphasize processes, is understandable. Does this mean to say then, that the physical-spatial dimension of the city implicitly or explicitly lacks importance as neoliberal economists and urbanist devotees of structural-determinist approaches argue? It is true that the COVID-19 pandemic makes the feebleness of these approaches, which ignore the spatial aspect, patently clear, but this does not make it any less relevant to examine their theoretical setup, which we will do based on a critical review of the specialized literature and testimonies of specialists collected in a research project on segregation in three Chilean cities that we recently finished. We conclude these pages in the need to reinforce empirical research of the city and segregation, just as our attention to their subjective dimensions.

Keywords: neoliberalism, structuralism, idealism, urbanism

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I. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN HARD TO DEFINE WHAT A CITY IS AND TODAY EVEN MORE SO

The qualities of the city seem undeniable. Louis Wirth, in his famous article of 1934, mentioned that it has "been a melting pot of races, peoples and cultures, and the most favorable breeding ground of new biological and cultural hybrids… it has brought together people from the ends of the earth because they are different (Wirth, 2005, p.6, own translation)

However, despite the richness it has contributed, or maybe because of it, it has always been difficult to outline exactly what a city is. Wirth himself tried out a composed definition: entity that is big, dense and diverse enough (2005), conjecturing on the relations among these dimensions. He suggested, in the most substantial, that the increase in size and density would produce contacts that, despite being face to face, were "impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental" (Wirth 2005, p.7).

The contribution of Wirth's article has mainly been in these hypotheses or conjectures on "urban way of life", more than in his definition of city, which was somewhat fruitless. The three qualities are difficult to explain. When is an entity big, dense and heterogenous enough to deserve being named a city?

As a definition, Wirth's was added and, without a doubt, contributed to a kind of advocacy for the meeting in diversity that runs through the history of urbanism since Aristotle himself in *Politics*. In comparison, the qualities of size and density have been less convincing, as they have been given negative effects that heterogeneity has not. Perhaps the most common position in the academic and professional tradition of urbanism has been the casting of different evils on the "excessive" size of cities; and something similar has been done with density. Wirth's hypotheses were added, undoubtedly, to that intellectual tradition we could catalog as anti-urban, which Capel describes (2001), and that includes, among many others, the architects Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, as Fishman (1982) shows.

In the end, with regard to the definition of city, we have been stuck for so long at the same starting point: with a statement, somewhat philosophical and poetical, or what a city is. This situation was fine while we could use "evident" physical-material definitions based on the country-city dichotomy and in the existence of an easy to recognize physical silhouette or border, that separated the city from the countryside.

When the cities of the capitalist industrialization "exploded", especially the largest ones, encroaching the surrounding countryside, a significant geographical morphological or physical change was produced. Cities stopping being a dense and continuous space, like they had been for thousands of years (Geddes, 1997). In the conclusions of a comparative study of eleven "global urban regions" on different continents, Hack (2000) stated that the prevailing morphology was the drop in density, the "poli-nucleated" proliferation of settlements that produce a disperse development with a decreasing level of "compactness" of the respective urban region, and the spread of commercial and work hubs in the areas around these cities (p. 184-187), which we now call peri-urban. The loss of the urban silhouette and the growth and expansion of the city, especially towards its international airport, were also courses seen by that research (Simmonds & Hack, 2000).

After that study, cities have accelerated their transformation, including the appearance of new hubs everywhere and, at the same time, the pattern of segregation has shown permanent instability and change. It is more difficult today than before to empirically define what a city is, be it in general terms or in terms of concrete cities. Likewise, it is more difficult to identify their residential or socio-spatial segregation pattern.

Countryside dwellings in villages or in rural hamlets affected by the negative forms of spatial segregation, namely, by the social homogeneity of the space, could become "inclusionary housing" or "social integration" dwellings just by the construction of middle-class gated communities, services and stores, including shopping centers, next to them. The general meaning of peri-urban and their current "parts", even if these are not modified, is changing with the growth of the real-estate sector and capitalist urban development.

Among the most popular notions presented to capture the morphology of new cities after the neoliberal economic reform of the 1980s, is the *cittá difusa* of Francesco Indovina (1990), the "metropolis unbound" of Robert Geddes (1997) and the ideas that arose around the so-called "Los Angeles School". Despite the variety of approaches, the prevailing idea that cities of globalization do not have a downtown anymore and that "urban peripheries dominate what is left of downtown" stand out, among the notions that emerge from that School, along with the idea that all cities will tend to follow this global urban pattern (Dear, 2018 p. xxi).

But the recognition of spatial patterns was soon overcome by new and more radical physical mutations; among them, the one we could call "back to the city" and the ensuing revitalization of traditional downtowns: the "great inversion" according to Ehrenhalt (2012).

The transformation of cities then, has become more intense after these morphological proposals, especially after the worldwide crisis of 2008 and after land rent has become so important within the "crises of realization" of capitalism.

In fact, Chilean cities show a noticeable boom on their fringes and are now in undeniable rupture in their traditional segregation pattern, including its reduction in many districts of each city. A great dynamism and variety of land uses have taken over peri-urban areas, just as they do inside the city.

To account for this reality, it would be a good idea to rescue the concept of macro-zone used decades ago by architects and urbanists in Chile, said José, geographer, academic and a long-standing researcher in regional studies, who we interviewed.[6] The method to identify a city, he says, has to cover both its morphological and functional dimension. However, on commenting the proposal there is in Brazil to treat the Sao Paulo coast as an enormous functional region that includes Rio de Janiero, he mentions:

> "There we face another problem, the problem of scale. A macro phenomenon at that scale, thinking that the city is inserted in that region… you reach the functional again."

Summarizing, the morphological representations of the city and of segregation are less useful than before as knowledge resources. They are not enough to describe the cities that we experience. To overcome them, without discarding the spatial form altogether, seems to be a key challenge for urban research, or the challenge of how to throw out the bath water without the baby.

II. URBAN TRANSFORMATION FAVORS APPROACHES THAT DISREGARD THE CITY

What is being foreseen for the future is a persistent transformation of cities and, therefore, the morphological or physical-geographical definitions of city and of segregation seem to lose theoretical relevance and practical usefulness, even for short periods. This loss of value is picked up by those who today have maybe the most influential approaches in the field of urbanism: the neoliberal, coming from the neoclassical school of economics, and the structural-determinist schemas, that arise in part from Marxism.

From the antipodes of the ideological spectrum, both approaches propose us to set aside geography and the urban form. We will discuss them and conclude in the need of recovering the importance of "the spatial" and of incorporating the experience and subjectivities in the definition of what the city and the social segregation of the space are.

The neoliberal city

The discussion on whether the city has an "optimal size", typical among neoclassical economists (for example, Heilbrun, 1987 and Cardoso, 2018) copies an atomist, utilitarian notion of the city where space (crowding, distance, congestion) appears as a secondary dimension associated to advantages and disadvantages, to economies and diseconomies of crowding, to positive and negative externalities. The fact that these effects are called "externalities", tells on the individualist ontology and epistemology of these economists. In the end, they renounce the optimal size calculation as a result of measuring technique issues, and because the city changes too much, they argue (Richardson, 1973; Heilbrun, 1987). It is not possible to reach the "balance situation", which as Thomas Schelling critically warns (1978, p.27), economists unjustifiably value per se.

Neoclassical economists do not see or cannot take charge of public goods or problems associated with their management, which is not a minor issue, considering, as Crane & Manville (2008) argue, that these public goods can be seen as the essence of a city from an economic point of view. They consider them as impossible to quantify, often sustaining that what is best is doing nothing to manage them. They also end up applying economic theory forcibly to land markets, on reducing the economic particularity of the urban (the public goods) to the idea of "externalities" or of "spatial distortions" (Glaeser, 1993).

From this point of view, the city is built as a sum of individuals that interact in the markets. Public policy should aim to be "space neutral" (Glaeser, 1993, p.vii). In fact, the "spatial distortions" caused by policies lacking said neutrality, together with the externalities, would be the causes behind why urban markets do not work well and why social and private costs do not coincide (Glaeser, 1993, p.2).

Beyond the markedly liberal approach these arguments copy, lies a devaluation of the spatial. The imperfections of land markets do not receive greater attention, except for the "externalities", and on facing these, inaction tends to be recommended, as we said before. Neoliberals understand the city as the sum of its parts, which is how they also understand, in essence, the economy and the society: as a sum of firms or companies and as a sum of rational and selfish individuals. Sahlins (2011), in his work "The Western Illusion of Human Nature", criticizes this "western contempt for humanity" which turns greed into a virtue (p.21).

6 In order to protect the anonymity of our interviewees, we have changed their names.

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The tendency to apply conceptual and heuristic tools of neoclassical economics to such imperfect and peculiar markets as that of land is justified, all things considered, in that what is truly important would be the individuals and the rational firms in their competitive dynamic, and not the places. Glaeser (2011) argues that the reasons that lead a city to be successful have much more to do with their human capital than their infrastructure.

The empire of *homus economicus* and of the invisible hand of the market, the latter being the most notable result of the interaction between these rational beings,**7**lead to disregarding the "systemic" realities that make up the city, realities that we could sum up in two key concepts: the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin, 1968) and the "neighborhood effect" (Sampson, 2012).

The "tragedy of the commons", notion proposed by the zoologist and biologist Garrett Hardin (1968), lies in that a sum of individuals acting rationally produce or can produce a collective irrationality, which he calls tragedy. The "tragedy of the commons", studied by Hardin, was poorly resolved by neoliberal economists. From the example Hardin makes about an over-grazed common pasture, damaged by private cattle grazers, these economists highlighted the fact that this was about a common or public property and came to the extraordinary conclusion that Hardin's article demonstrated that the "tragedy of the commons" would be resolved by defining clear rights of private property (as in Goodman & Stroup, 1991).**8** On the contrary, Hardin thought that more State presence is needed, speaking even of a Leviathan that could place collective rationality there where it is decimated by the game of individual interests (1968). As a common good, the city can be compared to Hardin's pastures.

In general, neoliberal economists accept there are externalities, but they tend to highlight that little can be done to "internalize the externalities". They argue two things: that it is too hard and almost impossible to quantify them; and that the cure (the policy or norm) often ends up being worse than the disease. Inaction or resignation when facing these externalities tends to be the attitude of authorities guided by economists from this line. The fact that this way out, not acting, does not greatly affect them, speaks of how secondary the systemic dimension of the city and the environment is for them.

On the other hand, the "neighborhood effect", an undeniable truth among epidemiologists and an empirical and theoretical reality that is well-supported by social research (Sampson, 2012), tends to be opposed by economists and other social scientists. The claim of "selection bias", they raise against the "neighborhood effect", in general, and against the negative effects of segregation, in particular, copy, ultimately, a devaluation, even an abandonment, of the geographical and spatial dimension of the city. Glaeser (2011) expresses this in a Manichean dichotomy: Cities do not make people poorer, but rather they attract the needy (p. 5). The argument is that spatial segregation is a consequence of unemployment and not one of its causes.

On the other hand, urban sociologists influenced by the tradition of urban epidemiologists, as is the case of the sociologist Robert Sampson (2012), argue that spatial segregation can aggravate poverty and favor social disintegration.

All things considered, the worshippers of *homo economicus* have a kind of "methodological individualism" (using Diez-Roux's expression, 1998), which leads them to replace the systemic realities that constitute cities for ideal realities that are coherently summarized in an abstract idea of the "economic system". The historian Fernand Braudel (1986), on introducing his work of a historic review of economic life, laconically says: "the economy, in itself, clearly does not exist (1986, p.5, own translation)

In the extreme, neoliberalism offers us the utopia of a kind of "personal city" that we can build around ourselves, which today has unbeatable conditions with digital communication and is regaining strength with the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a way to neutralize geography, placate friction of the space, and hand-in-hand avoid social face-to-face contact.

Herbert George Wells, in a futurist story published as early as 1900 and analyzed in Fishman (1987), imagined an era where modern communication technologies would make it possible for everyone to build their own city. One person on a hill, we could surmise, turning to these fantastic communication technologies, could organize a personal city based on their contact with other people, without needing the copresence and even less a crowd of human beings which has characterized cities over history.

The famous *Broadacre City* of Frank Lloyd Wright is another urban utopia, or more accurately, anti-urban utopia, which

7 The idealized character of the "invisible hand" deserves to be highlighted. Adam Smith used the expression, "invisible hand", just once in an economic sense, and solely as a metaphor without real importance in his theory of competition, or so argues Kennedy (2007); and Stiglize, the Economic Noble Prize Winner from 2001, says that "the reason that the invisible hand often seems invisible is that it is often not there" (Stiglitz, 2017, own translation).

8 The work of Goodman & Sprout was translated and published in Chile by Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo with the title of "Ecología de vanguardia: una agenda para el futuro".

follows a similar inspiration to Wells (Wright, 1932). Fishman (1987) analyzes both "foresights" (p. 186-189) and summarizes them in the idea of a *technoburb* that, in fact, would be starting when he published his book, thanks to new technologies: "Compared even to the traditional suburb, it at first appears impossible to comprehend. It has no clear boundaries; it includes discordant rural, urban and suburban elements" (p. 203).

However, despite the enthusiasm that takes over Fishman, what these utopian visions do not resolve is the key issue of face-to-face relations. As Fishman himself points out: "By detaching itself physically, socially and economically from the city, the *technoburb* is profoundly antiurban, as suburbia never had been" (p. 199).

Wright, meanwhile, leaves the issue up in the air, when he signs off on his futurist vision of Broadacre City, as Fishman (1987) summarizes: "The old cities would not completely disappear, but would lose both their financial and their industrial functions, surviving simply because of an inherent human love for crowds" (p.187).

Neoliberals, at a level of public policy and coherent with their poor conceptualization of the city, reject the "support to places" trait of traditional urban planning and offer to replace it with the "support to people". Public policy has to help the poor, not the poor cities, says Glaeser (2011). Beyond the validity of the arguments they wield against the support to places (mainly, the de-focalization of social investment), neoliberals do not understand, and even less value, public goods that largely structure the city.

In the context of Covid-19, it is presumable that Broadacre city recovers popularity among the wealthy urban classes.

The city of the structuralists

From certain leftist currents, we are offered a spatially abstract approach of the city, thus establishing a point in common with the approach of neoliberals. The cities, physically, would not have more importance when compared to the capitalist urbanization processes that overcome them and fill the planet. The city backs away when facing "urban society", that tends towards the global.

This is an original hypothesis of Henri Lefebvre (1970):" … urban society cannot be constructed on the ruins of the classical city alone. In the West, this city has already begun to fragment. This fragmentation (explosion – implosion) may appear to be a precursor of urban society" (Lefebvre, 1970, p.66, own tranlation)

Castells (1974, 1988) turns this hypothesis into the starting point of his critique on urban sociology and, in particular, on the Chicago School and its members. He accuses them of assigning the social problems that take place in the city, to the city itself, when they should have been assigned to industrial capitalism.

Starting from the concepts of "urban society" and of urbanization as a process, both of Lefebvre in *The Urban Revolution* (1970), Castells (1974) stated: "… at the end of the process, the generalized urbanization, caused by industry, rebuilds the city at a higher level: in this way, the urban surpassed the city…" (p.109, own translation). And taking the difference that Lefebvre made in *The Right to the City* (1978) between the diffusion of the urban phenomenon and the crisis of the city, as the basis, Castells (1974) comments: "The urban diffusion is fairly balanced to the loss of the ecological and cultural particularism of the city. In this way, the process of urbanization and autonomy of the 'urban' cultural model appear as two paradoxically contradictory processes." (p.21, own translation)

Brenner and Schmid (2016) provide a theoretical schema nurtured from these sources. Basing themselves on Lefebvre (1970), they state that "the study of urban forms must be replaced by research of urbanization processes on all spatial scales" (p.332, own translation). – to be fair, it would be more accurate to state that Lefebvre (1970) proposed complementing the study of urban forms with that of urbanization and not to replace it, as he did in his studies of daily life.

On the other hand, Brenner and Schmid (2016) rescue from the work of Castells (1974) "his emphasis on the intrinsically theoretical character of the urban" (p. 318) and thus base their "thesis of planetary urbanization" on the following reflection: "The urban is not a predetermined reality, condition or form, nor is it self-evident; its specificity can only be defined in theoretical terms, through an interpretation of its fundamental properties, expressions or dynamics … The urban is not a universal form, but rather a historic process." (p.331).

But, is it that the same can (and must) be said about all empirical phenomena, that is, that its knowledge requires theoretically identifying or defining it? This is valid for a tree and for an urban neighborhood. We cannot study them if do not have a concept of a tree or a neighborhood. Something else is that these prior concepts, that let us identify trees and neighborhoods, albeit tentatively, are not going to be enrichened and up to a certain degree modified by the empirical study of one and the other.

It is worth remembering here the words of Bachelard (2000):

> "The richness of a scientific concept is measured by its power to distort" (…) "it will be the task therefore to distort the primitive concepts, study the conditions

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PÁG. 8 - 17
ISSN 0717 - 3997 / 0718 - 3607

> to apply these concepts and above all include the conditions to apply a concept in the sense itself of the concept." (p. 73 – own translation).

The road is that of a work, both theoretical and empirical, of "dialectizing the experience", says Bachelard (p. 19 – own translation).

In addition, the "only" in Brenner and Schmid's (2016) quote above could be interpreted actually, as that it does not need to be defined empirically. Given that these (urban) crowds "are constantly formed, expanded, contract and transformed" (Brenner & Schmid, p. 333), it seems difficult to directly connect them, or univocally explain them, starting from the analysis of urbanization processes. However, caution is reasonable: "The planetary urban universe of today reveals a wide variety of differentiated and polarized situations, conditions and disputes that require a contextually specific, but theoretically reflexive research." (Brenner & Schmid, p. 334).

It seems clear, in any case, that this current of thought presents a hierarchy or superiority of the theoretical over the empirical; a preeminence of the urbanization process over the urban form, which contrasts the epistemology of Bachelard and, in general, that emanating from the "philosophy of internal relations" (Ollman, 1976).

The spatial forms, secondary for structuralists, would allow us to hardly recognize the forces and processes of capitalist urbanization – in the same way as, maybe and with such luck, we can recognize the essence of a phenomenon on its superficial layer. Thus, the concepts are not distorted by the empirical, but rather are (perhaps) discovered as profound or essential substances behind these irregular or chaotic forms or surfaces.

Brenner and Schmid (2016) emphasize, quoting Wachsmuth (2014), that "the entrenched formations of socio-spatial organization are radically reorganized to produce new urbanization landscapes whose limits remain blurry, volatile and confusing and, therefore, are particularly subject to whimsical forms of narration, representation and visualization" (2016, p.330). At the end of the day, it would be in the field of the theoretical where the true knowledge of what these urban landscapes and fragments hide would be reached.

Following this perspective, the "global" capitalist economic system stimulates planetary urbanization processes that have "burst" the city, leaving it as a memory from the past and, in the end, in academic terms, as a sort of relic of urbanists and architects. Alberto, interviewed by our team, also a geographer, academic and researcher on urban planning issues, actually mentioned, that

> "… the city has been the fetish, to give it a name, of urbanists, of those who study. But this fetish no longer works to explain the phenomenon of current urbanization. I prefer to talk more of urbanization rather than of city…"

An intermediate stage in the structuralists' conceptualizations of the city were the works of some critical urbanists, among which the Welsh geographer, Michael Dear stand out; and in Latin America, Carlos de Mattos. When neoliberal capitalism made cities morphologically "explode", we were offered, in the context of the so-called "Los Angeles School", a model of the big city with no downtown, without boundaries, "where the urban was no longer contained in the cities, but rather spreads in a disarticulated way throughout the territory", as Green and De Abrantes (2018, p.214) say, summarizing the approach proposed by Michael Dear (2002). In fact, for De Mattos (1999), and for Dear (2002), Los Angeles, California, represents the most accomplished city model under current capitalism.

In this variant of structuralism, the relations between the social and the spatial tend to be understood as a reflection of the former on the latter. That of reflection is a vision that soon demonstrated being apparent. We mention it because the reflection adheres to what seems to be part of structuralism, namely, that the substantial reality would be behind the empirical facts, and these, either directly reflect it or tend to hide it.

This way of understanding the social-spatial relation is an offshoot of the central critique that Castells aimed at urban sociology, at the Chicago School and at Lefebvre himself in passing, and what led him to reduce the urban to industrialization. Sayer (1995) criticized it as "class reductionism" or "the tendency to assume that everything that existed within capitalist social formations was uniquely capitalist, instead of living this as an open question". (1995, p.186).

In "the urban question", Castells (1974) argued that, although

> "the spatial forms can accentuate or modify certain behavioral systems by the interaction of social components combined in them, there is no independence of their effect and, as a result, there is no systematic link of the different urban contexts to the lifestyles" (p.133, own translation).

Thus, and beyond how confusing this passage may be, the author denies the spatial as a category of analysis, withdrawing from it, all causal power over the social.

In Castells' (1988) tirade against urban sociology on lacking their own object of study (there would be no "urban behaviors" or "city attitudes" (p. 512-513, own translation), the author sets the following question:

> "Is the space a blank page on which social action is expressed with no other mediation other than the events of each situation? Are there, on the contrary, certain regularities in this dialectic process that consist of a social action forming a context and receiving (at the same time) the influence of the already built forms?" (p.500-501, own translation).

And he answers: "In our opinion, there would be an urban specificity in the case of a coincidence between the spatial and the social units…" (Castells 1988, p.515, own translation).

Thus, for Castells, either the relationship between the social and spatial is one of reflection or the space lacks all heuristic importance to know the essences. Ultimately, Castells was systematic in removing importance from space in social and urban life, which structuralists still persevere today.

Lefebvre said that Castells does not understand space: "He sets aside space"; "his is still a simplistic Marxist schema" (quoted by Merrifield, 2002 p. 91-2). In the end, the criticism of Lefebvre (1970) to these ways of understanding the role of the urban in the evolution of capitalism is direct:

> "The confusion between the industrial (practice and theory, whether capitalist or socialist) and the urban ends up by subordinating one to the other in a hierarchy of actions, considering the urban as an effect, a result or a means. This confusion has serious consequences, for it leads to the production of a pseudoconcept of the urban, namely, urbanism, the application of industrial rationality, and the evacuation of urban rationality." (p.33)

On the same issue, Sayer (1992) argues:

> "Where social theories go beyond the analysis of structures and mechanisms to the postulation of their possible effects (perhaps on assuming a hypothetical closed system), the abstraction from space may produce serious errors. Perhaps the most famous example of the difference that space makes is the case of the (aspatial) perfect competition model which becomes a model of spatial monopolies as soon as the abstraction from space is dropped. (…). Even though concrete studies may not be interested in spatial form per se, it must be taken into account if the contingencies of the concrete and the differences they make to outcomes are to be understood." (p.150).

Lefebvre (2013) allows us to close our critical analysis of structuralism: "There is no direct, immediate or immediately understood relationship, therefore, transparent, between the means of production (the society considered) and its space. What there is, are lags: the ideologies intersperse, the illusions get in the way" (p.57, own translation).

III. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, today we are facing idealist notions about the urban, of the "self-driven essence" type, to which, according to Tilly (2000) social scientists often turn when they want to explain social phenomena. The "economic system" for neoliberals and "global capitalism" for structuralists are examples of "self-propelling essences", essences that empirical facts could not alter, but rather just reflect with different degrees of clarity.

There would be nothing specific in the city that these self-propelling structures could not explain, and the path of urban research would be that of discovering and revealing said latent realities in the superficial marks they leave behind, for example, in their "territorial impacts". These are, mainly, impermeable approaches to empirical facts. They have in common, a metaphysic perspective, a waiver of the empirical or at least its devaluation in promotion of the structures or systems, that at first glance, or so it is said, are not easy to capture.

Far-sighted ideas of this kind have always been around, and they have persistently been in conflict with the work of science. These are the ideas of the pre-scientists that Bachelard (2000) studied, of the metaphysical thinkers that Marx criticized in The Poverty of Philosophy (1987)[9] and quite often, those of the current worshippers of "post-truth" (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2018).

Bachelard (2000) highlights that "the myth of the interior is one of the most difficult fundamental processes of unconscious thinking to exorcise", adding: "In no other way does the alchemist dream about the power of his gold dissolved in mercury" (p.120, own translation). Science is different from revelation, theology and spirituality, says Stephen Gould (1997), evolution biologist, science historian and political activist, in that it offers an understanding of reality through knowledge obtained by research and empirical experimentation.

Overcoming the idealism of the approaches we have analyzed, calls upon us to understand the city and its processes, the

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segregation among them, from the experience and, in particular, from the subjective.

From the experience, we must pay attention to how essential geographical inequalities, the residential segregation, on the intraurban scale, are for the dynamics of capitalism. These are not a simple reflection of social inequalities. "Uneven geographical development is not a mere sidebar to how capitalism works, but fundamental for its reproduction", says Harvey Havey (2012, p.177, own translation) for whom:

> "If geographical differences between territories and countries did not exist, then they would be created by both differential investment strategies and the quest for spatial monopoly power given by the uniqueness of location and of environmental and cultural qualities. The idea that capitalism promotes geographical homogeneity is totally wrong. It thrives on heterogeneity and difference … (p. 176, own translation)

Territorial differences, made clear by the great distances of medieval trade routes, were key in the search for monopoly conditions by the merchants that built capitalism. Braudel (1986) says about this period that, "the longer these chains were, the more they escape common rules and controls and the more clearly the capitalist process emerges" (p.23). This "dynamic of capitalism" (the name of Braudel's book) comprises, ultimately, corrupted or distorted forms of market economics insofar as they weaken free competition and transparency. Capitalism and market economics are, therefore, not synonyms, as neoliberals pretend them to be and how, and not seldomly, structuralism concedes.

In fact, the fabrication and capitalization of "rent gaps" (Smith, 1987), the *quid* of the real-estate industry, equivalent to building inequalities *in situ* to maximize profits of the land. Gentrification as a business consists of this. Promoters buy land at a working-class price and resell it, built, at a middle or upper class price. The reduction of the segregation that this "gentrifying" capitalism favors, rich move closer to less rich people, tends to revert with the displacement of the original residents, caused by the rise in price of everything, but the displacement is usually neither a quick nor unavoidable result (Sabatini Rasse, Cáceres, Robles & Trebilcock, 2017).

From this horizon, we agree with Harvey (2014) that

> The independent manner in which the geographical landscape evolves plays a key role in crisis formation. Without uneven geographical development and its contradictions, capital would long ago have ossified and fallen into disarray. This is a key means by which capital periodically reinvents itself" (p.84).

Overcoming idealist approaches is also done from the subjective. On passing from the classic mechanic to the modern physics of Relativity and Quanta, the subject became part of the object or world that it studies and transforms. Perhaps us urbanists require a similar epistemological jump to understand and act more effectively on the city.

Aside from their abstraction of the space, or perhaps because of it, neoliberals and structuralists put forward the urban as a transcendental or metaphysical reality. Perhaps we should listen to suggestions like those of Raymond Williams (2001) again, who on closing his work *The Country and the City*, recommends us to get off this path and take that epistemological jump:

> What is really significant is not so much the old village or the old urban neighborhood, but the perception and statement of a world in which one is not necessarily a foreigner or an agent, but rather where one can be a member, a discoverer, a source of shared life. (…) what we must observe, in the country and the city alike, are the real social processes of alienation, separation, externality and abstraction. And we must do so, not just on the critical plane, in the necessary history of rural and urban capitalism, but substantially, confirming the experiences that many millions of people discover and rediscover, most of the time under pressure (…) (p.367, own translation).

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