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- J.K. Fisker, L. Chiappini, L. Pugalis, A. Bruzzese (eds.), *The Production of Alternative Urban Spaces. An International Dialogue*. Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2019.

The central argument of *The Production of Alternative Urban Spaces* is summarised in the conclusive chapter by Jens Kaae Fisker and Letizia Chiappini: “in order for urban studies to stay politically relevant it needs to embrace multiple constitutive outsides of the urban” (p. 238). The four editors of the book – the team is completed by Lee Pugalis and Antonella Bruzzese – thus engage with one of the great debates of contemporary urban theory, namely the one among proponents of urbanisation as an all-encompassing movement crucial to the present development of global capitalism – and above all Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid (“Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?”, *City*, 19, 2015, n. 2/3, pp. 151-182) with their theses on planetary urbanisation – and those that suggest that there is an ‘outside’ to the urban, particularly Ananya Roy’s application (“What is Urban about Critical Urban Theory?”, *Urban Geography*, 37, 2016, n. 6, pp. 810-823) to urban studies of the concept of constitutive outside. Fisker and his colleagues explicitly position themselves on the latter side (see pp. 6-7 and 238-240), and take this stance to engage with the production of local alternatives to dominant urban orders.

The book develops an ‘international dialogue’ by building on a number of cases organised in 11 empirical chapters, plus an introductory chapter that sets out the editors’ conceptualisation of ‘alternative’, ‘urban’ and ‘space’, and a conclusive one that reflects on four topics: i) strategic *versus* tactical approaches to building alternatives, the role of ii) interstices and iii) temporalities in subverting dominant orders, and iv) the meaning of constitutive outsides for urban studies. The case studies are organised thematically in three sections: alternative urban economies, alternative spaces of dwelling and alternative spaces of public life – a quite loose organisation, as some examples may well fall in two or three categories when seen from different perspectives.

Because of this organisation, and the internal variety of the three sections, the book offers a very wide selection of topics:

- the first section is made up of two chapters on alternative means of food production, exchange and consumption (Pia Heike Johansen and Hannibal Hof on co-ops in Denmark; Christine Mady on various activities organised by an NGO in Beirut), and two on new forms of urban workspaces (Carolina Pacchi on coworking in Milan and Berlin; Letizia Chiappini and Petter Törnberg on makerspaces in Milan);
- the second sections looks at alternative spaces of dwelling (Samir Shalabi and Lee Pugalis on spatial practices by refugees in Cairo; Ester Yeboah Danso-Wiredu, Jens Kaae Fisker and Lee Pugalis on the production of urban space in

- a slum in Accra; Preetika Sharma on the role of interstitial spaces for the life of *kothis* in Chandigarh) and social movements for the right to housing (Vitor Peiteado Fernandez on the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca in Spain);
- the third and final section spans from the role of cultural and artistic intervention in reclaiming public space (Fausto Di Quarto on musical events in Belo Horizonte), the aftermaths of large demonstrations (Basak Tanulku and Jens Kaae Fisker on alternative spaces produced after the Gezi protests in Istanbul) and citizen-led regeneration (Silvia Gullino, Cristina Cerully, Heidi Seetzen and Carolina Pacchi on civic crowdfunding in London and Milan).

To add to this heterogeneity, the authors of the chapters mobilise a quite wide set of theoretical perspectives, from the Right to the City to Foucauldian and Deleuzian approaches to power and territorialisation, from theorisations of interstitiality to Lefebvrian conceptions of the production of space, to name just a few. This variety offers to the reader a vast number of ideas and suggestions, but, inevitably, it also makes hard at times grasping the common thread of the 13 chapters – the introductory and conclusive chapter make an excellent work in helping the reader in this regard.

This variety helps the reader abstracting and reflecting at a quite general conceptual level on what is an ‘alternative’ in contemporary urban space. As anticipated, the editors argue for the necessity to focus on constitutive outsides, where the seeds for a structural change should be sought. I am afraid, however, that if this was the goal, the selection of cases was often contradictory. Take Chiappini and Törnberg’s insights on makerspaces, which, the authors acknowledge, ‘are – like virtually everyone – part of the capitalist economic system’ (p. 85). Indeed, these and similar spaces (like the coworking presented by Pacchi) can offer some ‘fixes’ to the precarity of ‘creative’ workers, and, by countering these workers’ isolation, build some path to, say, unionisation: but this is not an inherent nature of these ‘new’ spaces; rather, the simple effect of spatial proximity. Or take Shalabi and Pugalís’ focus on ‘hyperlocal’ coping/defiant spatial practices by refugees. The authors argue for the importance of an ‘agency outside of movements’ (p. 108) and ‘small assertion[s] of one’s right to the city’ (p. 109); but do not present any path for these practices to structurally transform the urban space: are certain populations condemned to a, not really easy, life of active resistance?

More, Danso-Wiredu and her colleagues show an intricacy of relations between the state and ‘informal’ actors in the production of space in the Old Fadama slum. Among their examples, they mention shared rooms, which allow some to afford a shelter, but which is in fact an hyper-exploitative arrangement that allows to extract rent even from those who cannot access the ‘formal’ market. In this sense, rather than a space of alternative, Old Fadama seems an ‘ordinary’ one (cf. Robinson J., *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2006), where the capitalist framework is particularly fragmented

among formal/informal, state/non-state, for-profit/no-profit actors. The chapter by Tanulku and Fisker is particularly original in its exploration of local ripple effects of big protests in a progressive and a more conservative neighbourhood. But again, their cases show the birth and death of a squat, which then gave life to cafés and co-ops in a gentrifying neighbourhood; and an urban garden afterwards institutionalised and normalised – ‘once the municipality made it a garden, the land became secured. Now it becomes ours’ stated the local governor in an interview (p. 203). As a last example of this thread, take the chapter by Gullino and her colleagues on civic crowdfunding (with fund matching by local authorities), whose main difference from traditional forms of local participation is the funding dimension – people can participate by simply pledging money. The cases presented, in fact, show the same issues existing when public policy is enacted through grants, that is, a shift from a political decision on the geography of investment toward competition among communities with different economic and political capital – a question the author are well aware of (p. 224).

Unsurprisingly, the chapter that more concretely glimpses at the construction of a constitutive outside is Fernández’s analysis of an organised social movement, the Spanish PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages), and of its capacity to transcend the local scale and become a national political actor.

In summary, the cases presented in *The Production of Alternative Urban Spaces* are above all ordinary space, which seem to be complementary, more than alternative, to the capitalist system. This is particularly evident when the alternatives are technical innovations (crowdfunding, coworking, makers’ paraphernalia...), which reproduce by different means the same processes of other means of collaboration or competition. In other words, if I was to write the conclusions of this book, I would have to conclude that *these cases* give strength to those who suggest that there is no outside to the present capitalist urbanisation; that, against such an all-encompassing totality, local alternatives are almost always destined to not scale up, or even to create new niches to be afterwards exploited. The question then remains open as to whether the problem is the selection of cases, or on their interpretation. I would argue for the latter and problematise the very idea that urban studies can only be relevant if they can focus on constitutive outsides, or at least with the declination made in the book on the primacy of the local scale for the production of such constitutive outsides. I have argued elsewhere that only by abandoning the comfort of the local can any true alternative be envisioned and built (Tulumello S., “From Capitalist-urbanisation as Politics-of-refuge to Planning as Planetary-politics-of-care”, *Planning Theory and Practice*, 20, 2019, n. 1, pp. 126-128): so I would conclude by suggesting that if urban studies are to stay relevant, they need to transcend the local and engage with the global scale of the present urban, ecological, social and political challenges.

(Simone Tulumello)