The constitutive outside of planetary urbanization: A post-foundational reading

Nikolai Roskamm
University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, Germany

Abstract
This text intervenes in the recent debate on planetary urbanization theory. It brings together a post-foundational reading of Henri Lefebvre’s social theory with the spatially theoretical notion of a ‘constitutive outside’. Initially, I reconstruct Lefebvre’s approach to totality (as a necessary reference point that never can be fully achieved) and show how it develops the planetary figure of total urbanization. Furthermore, I explore the nature of the constitutive outside that plays an important role not only in recent discussions on the planetary approach but is a key play on words in post-structuralist political theory. In my conclusion, I suggest considering the constitutive outside as an important area for further empirical urban research and as onto-theoretical core for a planetary urbanization approach in urban studies and planning theory.

Keywords
Planetary urbanization, post-foundational theory, constitutive outside, urban ontologies, urban theory, spectral analysis, hauntology, Henri Lefebvre, Ananya Roy.

Introduction
A recent attempt for providing a specific critical urban theory against the neoliberal and positivist mainstream of technocratic market-orientated discourses is the intervention called planetary urbanization. Referring to Henri Lefebvre’s idea of a more-than-global and ubiquitous form of becoming urban, Neil Brenner (2014a, 2016) Christian Schmid (Brenner/Schmid, 2014; 2015) and other scholars set a counter-image to the practices of “cityism” (Davidson and Iveson, 2016; Millington, 2016) and its post-political consideration of the triumph city (Peck, 2016). This stream of thought understands planetary urbanization as a dominant condition of globalized society. It aims to offer “a spatial analytics of power” (Brenner, 2018: 584) and to assemble the critique of orthodox and neoliberal urban ideologies with a critical view by referring to the post-Marxist philosophy of Lefebvre, tottering between empirical observation and a theoretical model of totality.
However, the planetary urbanization approach itself has initialized a critical debate. In urban studies, a highly controversial discussion is ongoing about the concept. The critics accuse the planetary thesis to constitute a totalizing and generalizing exclusion of different things: non-urban and rural places, different claims in critical theory, other positions at all (Derickson, 2018; Jazeel, 2018). Most of the reproaches address the relation between planetary urbanization theory and its alleged excluded outside, particularly referring to and rejecting Brenner’s thesis of an “urban theory without an outside” (Brenner, 2014b: 14).

Generally, the question about the outside became a main concern and a driving force within the vivid debate on planetary urbanization theory (McLean, 2018; Merrifield, 2013; Oswin, 2018; Pratt, 2018; Ruddick et al., 2018). Kristina Grange and Michael Gunder, for example, propose to think about “an ontology of the urban”; planetary urbanization – this is a result of their analysis – “fails in recognizing the non-urban outside” (2018: 1) and “risks providing a depoliticising approach” (2018: 13). Michelle Buckley and Kenda Strauss set out “to dismantle and reconstruct the urban as a ‘category of theory’” (2016: 619). Interested in “searching for urban theory’s constitutive ‘outsides’” (2016: 623) they indicate that Lefebvre’s concept of planetary urbanization is a “hypothesis within his broader discussion of ‘the urban phenomenon’ in all its complex logics” (2016: 619). Ananya Roy eventually chose planetary urbanization as a starting point to think about the constitutive outside (and vice versa). Her objective is to connect feminist and post-structuralist approaches with planning theory and urban studies (2016: 4).

My intervention takes place within the context of these contributions and proposes a post-foundational reading. Post-foundational thinking\(^2\) represents an understanding that starts from the premise that last reasons are not possible in the last instance (see Marchart, 2007, 2018; Roskamm, 2017; Landau, 2019). Premises of such an approach is that no foundation exists on which social and political orders can be built on: no God, no biological law or genetic code, no market and no relations of production that necessarily determine the way of the world. Political post-foundational thinking starts with exactly that prerequisite. However, this kind of thought claims not that reason is not exiting at all. Rather, the post-foundational idea is that last reasons mutate into abysses that are permanently challenged by dimension of absence and contingency (Laclau, 2012: 119). Forces of conflict and contingency determine the course of history. Contingency means that social and historical formations and processes could generally be different. Nothing is determined by itself. Because anything and everything could be different, there are always alternatives. The power to show such alternatives is the object of ongoing struggle. Because all social processes are generally contingent, every social process is entrenched in conflicts.

In my paper, I bring together post-foundational political thoughts with urban theory and its concept of planetary urbanization; a possible bridge between both, this is my thesis, is the notion of the constitutive outside.

To elaborate this thesis, I suggest in my first step (1) a reading of Lefebvre’s writings of the late 1950s and early 1960s.\(^3\) Lefebvre sets in his social theory the category of totality as a must and, at the same time, as an impossibility. Accordingly, he
addresses something beyond the whole as the necessary rest. I will show, how and why these are post-foundational keynotes. The emergence of the planetary in Lefebvre’s writing is topic of my second chapter (2). In Lefebvre’s theory, the urban as total and planetary phenomena originates on his post-foundational saturated social theory. Regarding the current debates, my suggestion is that the planetary-urbanization-approach needs a protection against totalizing closures. I will discuss how post-foundational theory is able to deliver it. This discussion leads to the idea of the constitutive outside. In my third step (3), I propose therefore a deepening view into the concept, with a short excursion in its history and its constitution by authors as Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler and Ernesto Laclau. The excursion shows that the constitutive outside is a spatialized form of post-foundational thinking. Subsequently I suggest in my fourth section (4) an urban theory, which not only accommodates the outside, but understands it as literal constitutive. I introduce the outside – transformed into a post-foundational explanation of the urban condition – as constitutive force of planetary urbanization. In the conclusion (5), I work once again on my post-foundational setting. I aim to steady the urban with focusing on the outside as its unsettling foundation. Arriving at this point, I come back to a reflection about some shortcomings in the current planetary-urbanization debate.

**Totality – necessary and impossible**

Lefebvre’s urban theory originates in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At this time, Lefebvre was on a battle with French Communist Party, which excluded him in 1957 (Merrifield, 2006; Wark, 2011). The collateral dispute provoked a very intensive creative period in Lefebvre’s career. In *Problèmes actuels du marxisme* [1958] (1971) – the book which caused his expulsion from the party, until today, has not been translated into English – and in the second volume of *Critique of Everyday Live* [1961] (2002), he introduces the theoretical framework of his thinking, which turns to urban questions and the production of space, quite in his later work. In these two key writings, we can find a coherent version of Lefebvre’s post-Marxist theory as well as the post-foundational ground of the planetary urbanization thought.

According to Lefebvre, every serious theoretical reflection needs the notion of totality. Theory needs totality as reference point. Without the idea of totality, every thought (and the world as well) crumbles into particularities that lack any meaning or power. Thinking of totality is necessary for providing reasoning, providing possible directions of thought and action. Without thinking totality, each consideration loses the capability of having a destination and tends to take (and to leave) things as they are. This is crucial, especially for political action. Each political movement that considers only particularities will stop seeing the bigger picture. Only with the imagination of a totality (an alternative totality), a true political demand or claim becomes possible. The same counts for the sciences and their quest for knowledge: “Without this initial option – *the will for totality* – there can be no action and no attempt to achieve knowledge” (Lefebvre 2002: 187). The sole focus on particularities destroys
the search for recognition from inside. Without addressing totality, research inclines
to pure acceptance and repetition of the given.

Lefebvre’s theory is cognizant that efforts for totality need a perspective,
which knows that – in the last instance – totality is not possible. To claim for totality
without regarding its impossibility is nothing but dogmatism. However, both are nec-
esary: the pursuit for totality as the consideration of the impossibility of its fulfilment.
Lefebvre here challenges a social ontology. Urge and drive to totality are the very
forces of putting the social in motion to constitute society. Moreover, the drive is not
only a drive; it is a fight, a permanent and sharp, unstoppable struggle for meaning
and truth. The fight is unstoppable because the target (totality) is not possible to be
achieved. It is dogmatism to set one’s own totality as the only truth. To face this im-
passe, Lefebvre proposes the notion of immanent failure: ‘The moment it becomes
totalized is also the moment when its immanent failure is revealed. The structure con-
tains within itself the seeds of its own negation: the beginning of destructuring” (2002:
182). Failure and negativity become ontological elements in this thinking; they deter-
mine the reality of being and prevent history for coming to an end. “Only when a to-
tality has been achieved does it become apparent that it is not a totality at all” (2002:
184).

Consequently, Lefebvre searches to escape dogmatism in the contemporary
Marxism of the 1950s, which appears particularly in the form of economism. Lefebvre
considers dogmatism as a feature of contemporary Marxism, but also as a general
problematic. The whole world (again a planetary approach, so to speak) is haunted by
different shades of dogmatism. Dogmatism exists, as Lefebvre puts it, less in “asser-
tions without evidence”, but in cases of asserting something without the capability to
prove it (1971: 33). In many cases, even a supposed absolute proven assertion mas-
querades itself as absolute truth and leads to an inertia of thought. Precisely the faith
for the possibility of perfect evidence and reasoning in final terms creates dogmatic
positions. An allegation without any relation to the condition of relativity is impossi-
ble; no statement is able to bring ultimate proof (1971: 30).

Written in 1958, these remarks are post-foundational theory as its best. The
similarities are not only in the shared insistence on the impossibilities of last reasons,
but also in the claim to constantly deal with, and challenge categories such as totality
or evidence. Far from stating that everything is random and arbitrary, Lefebvre’s aim
is to re-enact categories of totality in order to fight the permanent struggle to explain
why the last reason and the final totality are not possible and what follows from this
lack of finality.

In his 1958 book, Lefebvre approaches with another post-foundational inter-
vention the idea of materialism and matter (matière). His conception is to define mat-
ter as a variable: “The matter is a sort of x (something unknown) that we have to set
(or to refuse) in our assertions” (1971: 105). Matter becomes an infinite (and infinity-
destroying) thing, a theoretical chameleon, and a subversive wildcard.

“The notion of matter, considered as dialectic targeted x, determines
every insight and knowledge. Every limited, approximate and relative
finding (finite in his nature and already on the way to its abolition, already negated through the infinite progress of thinking), is related to that dialectic x” (1971: 106).

With the conception of matter as necessarily unknown x, Lefebvre opens his post-Marxist theory for a psychoanalytic perspective and anticipates a central play on words of post-structuralism. Lefebvre’s variable x is quasi-constructed and designed as the “objet petit a”, which Jacques Lacan puts at the very centre of his psychoanalytic social theory in his 1960s seminars. Lacan (see also Blum and Nast, 1996; Hillier and Gunder 2004; Gregory, 1995; Pohl, 2018) relates his “objet petit a” with “the function of the remnant” (Lacan, 2014: 213), an irreducible rest as residual waste of every subjective process and outside of any possible objectivity. The “objet petit a” is an object “affected by desire” (2014: 25), it is the impossible real, the unreachable target of lust and becomes the very force of social action (Marchart, 2013: 295). It constitutes the space of the social with its unattainable nature. If the “objet petit a” would be accessible, the social process would stop (Marchart, 2013: 320).

The similarity to Lefebvre’s variable x is obvious. Lacan’s “objet petit a” relates to the whole in the same way as Lefebvre’s x; as well as its disappearance when it reaches the supposed completeness. Lefebvre’s x and Lacan’s a both follow the logic of an impossible object and are both built on paradox grounds, oscillating between totality and relativity, targeting completeness and absoluteness within particularities, going through infiniteness, impossibility and unattainability. Lacan deals with the remaining rest of the subject, Lefebvre intervenes into the abundant rest of systems and structures (of every system and every structure). Both lines of thought gather in the construction of the rest as subversion of totality and impetus of social activity. Both concepts coalesce in the question of matter. Lefebvre proclaims his x as matter itself, Lacan attributes the “objet petit a” a material nature, although a haunted form of materiality which always sways back and forth between presence and absence. Lefebvre’s x (matter) is not only similar with Lacan’s a, but it is finally a variant of the basic and constitutive idea of post-foundational thinking.

Lefebvre’s late 1950s social theory of totality and materiality is an early version of French theory and its narratives allied with scholars as Althusser, Lévis-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari or Rancière. Lefebvre’s partly caustic criticism (see Schmid, 2010: 287) against the first mentioned do not contradict this appraisal, I guess. Lefebvre develops in his writings a highly elaborated variant of the code that takes as a basis in poststructuralist and/or post-foundational thought.

**Emerging the planetary**

Lefebvre extends the ideas of materiality and total phenomena in the course of his ‘urban turn’ in the late 1960s. The city is an appropriate object for both. In *Right to the City*, Lefebvre is completely clear about this intention: His aim is to bring back the city to the level of philosophy, as “project of synthesis and totality” (1996a: 86). The city, this is what Lefebvre tells us, is only understandable and accessible as total phenomenon, as phenomenon of totality. Lefebvre puts his urban theory in a straight line
with the social theory of his early writings – only philosophical thinking would offer an access to totality. This is why that sort of thoughts is necessary to grasp the city and the urban beyond analytical fragmentation in any particularities. Indeed, the urban can never be present in its entirety, but precisely this feature makes the urban a privileged object of philosophical consideration. “More than any another object, it [the urban] possesses a very complex quality of totality in act and potential the object of research gradually uncovered, and which will be either slowly or never exhausted” (1996a: 153). Because the urban as object of research never allows a complete and definite grasp, its consideration necessarily needs a pluralist set of perspectives and insist on any uniform and homogeneous approach.

In *The Urban Revolution*, his second main book about the city, Lefebvre draws the famous planetary line from 0 % to 100 % urbanization (2003: 7). The urbanized society is Lefebvre’s renewed model of a total phenomenon. He adds “this total and planetary revolution - economic, demographic, psychic, cultural, etc., is today par excellence the impossible-possible (that is, possibility, necessity and impossibility)!” (1996b: 187).

Lefebvre transforms the empirical finding – growing cities worldwide, global urbanization – to a theoretical instrument, with the aim to attack orthodox empirical urban geographies and urban planning approaches. With his hypothesis, Lefebvre designates a historical formation and creates a new concept of society that he calls the total urbanized society. Lefebvre’s approach reminds of Bruno Latour’s notion of panorama (2005: 183), another concept wrestling with totality. A panoramic theory has to provide evidence that a specific aspect of that theory is of universal relevance (Marcloth, 2013: 394). This universal relevance is exactly the planetary dimension of Lefebvre’s theory of total urbanization. The notion of a completely urbanized society, as Lefebvre (2003: 5) stresses, corresponds with a “theoretical need” and is both hypothesis and definition of the urban; it would be not merely a pedagogical exercise but “conceptual formulation”. Starting from an empirical diagnosis, but intentionally exceeding the latter, Lefebvre designs a 360 degree-mimesis of urban space.

To accuse planetary urbanization theorists as alleged “master of the universe” (Derickson, 2018) or to have “a universal urbanistic perspective” (Grange and Gunder, 2018: 3) is insofar eligible at first sight – the universe plays an important role in the respective field of interest. However, in my view, these critiques miss the crucial point. Lefebvre – as many thinkers in social theory; feminist, queer, post-colonial and radical thinkers of all genders included – tries to create a specific universal view on society and history. This is to avoid insular particularities. Lefebvre is aware of the dangers of such universal attempts. His awareness or caution lies within the post-foundational approach, which starts with an impossibility: We cannot capture the planetary universe just as we cannot capture any last foundation. Maybe, this is the point that Brenner and Schmid have not clarified enough in their writings. The planetary thought needs a strong dose of counter-dogmatism, a clearer concept of contingency. This is what post-foundational theory is offering. With a post-foundational framework, we can focus on the planetary in our thinking as an analytical tool, which connects Marxian or post-Marxian thought with a post-structuralist mindset. The
same counts for the reproach to promote a “‘god-trick-like’ standpoint” (McLean, 2018: 547).

Of course, planetary urbanization theory is playing with different forms of God tricks. Planetary urbanization theory – understood as a Lefebvrian project – is political philosophy and social ontology in a tradition of a post-religious search for explanation. If God is dead, we need other forms of his gimmickry. The planetary approach stays in that line. Again, the post-foundational framework can help. To play God tricks, it is important to clarify one’s own relation to final instances such as Truth, God or Nature. It is helpful (or maybe necessary) to define the impossibility of final reasons as post-foundational foundation. Planetary urbanization theory with a dose of anti-dogmatic post-foundational exercises – this is my thesis – can minimize the risk of becoming a “kind of intellectual imperialism” (Buckley and Strauss, 2016: 631).

**Theorizing the constitutive outside**

The main point of recent critiques on planetary urbanization theory is its relation to different forms of multiple outsides: the outside of the urban world; the outside of urban studies and planetary urbanization theory; the outside of academia; the outside of particular research contexts; the outside of the urban; the outside of the city. Brenner’s formerly explicit claim for an urban theory without an outside has evoked resistance against the exclusion of these outsides. The aim of the above-mentioned critiques is to re-include those outsides into urban theory. My proposal is to go one-step further. I suggest not only to re-integrate the excluded outsides, but to perform an entire volte-face. I propose to transform “urban theory without an outside” into an urban theory that places the outside itself centre-stage. In this chapter, I therefore place the outside at the core of planetary urbanization theory.

The idea of the constitutive outside emerged from thinking about space within the 1950s and 1960s in phenomenology and linguistic sciences. Particularly, Jacques Derrida reflects the notion of the constitutive outside in his work. Outside and inside, this is Derrida’s thesis, reproduce the relation between talking and writing. The ex-territoriality of writing is constitutive for the inside of language (i.e., of signed meaning, of presence). The outside maintains a general relation to the inside while that relation itself is not outside; the meaning of the outside is always present, captured outside the outside (into the inside) and vice versa (1997: 35). Henry Staten explains that Derrida “takes the outside to be necessary to the constitution of a phenomenon in its as-such, a condition of the possibility of the inside” (1986: 16). That makes the outside constitutive. Staten states that the constitutive outside has nothing to do with coincidence but is characterized by absolute and indefinite necessity. The constitutive outside becomes “the deconstructive alternative to the fundamental philosophical concept of form or essence” (1986: 23). For Staten, the constitutive outside constitutes space, time, society, being. It is an ontological constitution, albeit constituted as a self-deconstructive ontology.
Similarly, Judith Butler deploys the figure of constitutive outside. She writes about “unthinkable, abject, unliveable bodies” form “the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside” (2011: X). Indeed, this is a focused assemblage of many of our post-foundational keywords: exclusion, haunting, spectres, impossibilities. Butler’s constitutive outside addresses subjects (i.e., bodies), which reside outside of conformity. She extends (or diminishes, as the case might be) her argument from the general question of being to the constitution of subject.

“In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, “inside” the subject as its own founding repudiation” (2011: Xiii).

Butler relates her outside with a reflection on materiality and matter. She is close to the Lefebvrian x (matter) when she writes, “to have the concept of matter is to lose the exteriority that the concept is supposed to secure” (2011: 6). Butler is fighting the same struggle as Lefebvre, when she explains: “a constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless internal to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity” (2011: 13). Again, we have strong relations between inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, in and out. What is at stake is an immanent and permanent failure of any system: “It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity” (Butler, 2011: 13). Butler studies the spatial condition of “outside” in different constellations as “outside the law”11 (2004: 51); “outside of reason”, “outside of civilization”, “outside the bounds of rationality” (2004: 72) and “outside of itself” (1997a: 14). She stresses – with an almost planetary thought – that exactly what is excluded “from the symbolic universe [...] binds that universe together through its exclusion” (1997b: 180).

Butler’s main reference in her thinking on the constitutive outside is, beyond Derrida, the spatial-political model of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau provides us with a detailed elaboration of the notion of constitutive outside in his spatialized political theory. The recurring premise in Laclau’s work is that the reason for development of social movement could not be found internal of a system (any system as society, relations of production) but only outside of them. Laclau introduces an outside that is destination and driving force for any social constitution. Starting point is that an outside constitutes every system of meaning, every discourse, identity, structure. Every social system has the outside as its general precondition. Following Laclau any of these discourses, identities, systems, or societies are not able to stabilize completely because they are all referenced to that “radical outside” (1990: 18).

On the one hand, every system (every inside) pushes for approaching the constitutive outside (1990: 35); on the other hand, it is impossible for the inside to become one with the outside. The constitutive outside is responsible for the urge of systems of meaning for stabilizing. It sparks two opposite forces, both of them responsible for every social and historic action. The outside is firstly aim of every social iden-
tification – even if it is impossible to achieve that aim completely. Secondly, the outside only enables the efforts to reach the impossible target. The double-movement – triggering of efforts, making it impossible – is the source of all social activity and of society itself (see also Laclau, 2012: 111).

Derrida, Laclau and Butler are post-foundational thinkers of the constitutive outside. The constitutive outside is a spatialized form of post-foundational thinking. Every inside has an outward-directed inner core, a constitutive outside of itself. The outside is the negation of the inside. It negates – this is the post-foundational clue – every hypothesis of a positive constitution from within itself. It is anti-thesis to any essentialist idea of the city and its fundamental claims for internal origins and proper grounding. The constitutive outside is a weird category of non-inclusion and non-identity, a consequent and radical spatial extension of Lefebvre’s social (anti-)ontology, an ontology without an onto. That theory delivers a possible access to the problematique of the planetary approach. The model of constitutive outside can stop planetary urbanization to arrive at its endpoint; it prevents it from being attained. The constitutive outside is the necessary supplement to the theoretical and empirical setting of planetary urbanization and saves it with a post-foundational turnaround from dogmatic closures that the critiques of the recent debate suppose.

Thinking the outside as constitutive changes almost everything in planetary urbanization discussion. All the things that Brenner and Schmid were accused to exclude, can now move into the centre of attention and action. The constitutive outsides of planetary urbanization – the non-urban, rural peasants, feminist/queer theories, non-human agents – enter the stage. This framing opens new opportunities for urban studies, planning theory and empirical urban research. The constitutive outside has many empirical forms and representations. To explore these different forms – symbolic and real – is not only a promising task for a Lefebvre-based critical urban theory, but is probably its (post-)foundational condition.12

The constitutive outside of planetary urbanization

Let us put it to a test. A possible constitutive outside of planetary urbanization is the residue. This brings us back to Lefebvre. As we have seen in the first section, in Lefebvre’s theory, the residue (the rest, the supplement, the x) impedes to perfect the system (i.e., the residue hinders a complete closure, preserves from the end of history). We can find the residue also in a more empirical form in Lefebvre’s writings, particularly in his urban writings. Lefebvre’s idea is to have a “spectral analysis of the city” (1996a: 139). According to him, the city is a favourite place for spectres and ghosts. Lefebvre claims that “before our eyes, under our gaze, we have the spectre of the city, that of urban society and perhaps simply of society” (1996a: 142). Spectres reside in the uncountable residues of urbanization, the material and/or discursive pledges of former and coming urbanity. The urban residue – similarities to the remaining rest x are non-random – is the materialized spectre (or vice versa, the ghost is the un-materialized residue).
Lefebvre’s spectral analysis is close to Derrida’s idea of “hauntology” (1994: 10), a “theory of spectres” (1994: 152; see also Gibson-Graham 1996, 250) considering the “mode of haunting” (1994: 126). Hauntology is concerned with the question of being, but it postpones being – opposite to its bourgeois relative of ontology – shifts it from a question of presence to a question of absence. The constitution of being through absent things is hauntology’s core. Hauntology reminds us – this is again a post-foundational intervention – that ontology is haunted by its own absent reason and helps to provide “the absence of a last foundation to its presence” (Marchart, 2013: 86; Landau and Roskamm, 2018). Spectres are the structuring element of hauntology. Ghosts are liquid beings with absent bodies as their very identification. They settle down in their own absence, representing a corporealization of ideas, anxiety and spirit. Ghosts produce a certain kind of space via forms of disappearing, making way for the unknown and unknowable.

Years before Derrida explains the idea of hauntology, Lefebvre links his spectral analysis with the question of “presence-absence” (1996a: 144) and allocates the approach into the city. From a post-foundational perspective, the proposal of an urban spectral analysis and its residues is probably the most thrilling point in Lefebvre’s urban theory. The character of the ghost opens an access to a critique of ideology in urbanism – to its unacknowledged doctrine, to the spirit of modern urban planning and urban design. The spectral analysis of the “swarming city […] where in a full day the spectre walks and speaks” (Baudelaire, 1867), is a suggestion how social theory and (anti)ontology can contaminate the empiric approach of critical urban studies, avoiding exercises in metaphysics. Both objects of Lefebvre’s spectral analysis – spectres and residues – are constitutive outsides of urbanity and urbanization. They are outside of the capitalist city production, outside of master and local plans, outside of regular areas of urbanism (see DeBoeck, 2012; Gordon, 2008; Pile, 2005).

A similar and likewise Lefebvre-based constitutive outside is the urban void. The urban is settled – of course, this is not only a Lefebvrian thesis – by its ruptures, abysses, fissures and chasms. According to Lefebvre, urban voids are spaces of possibility, which constitute the true essence of urbanity. Within its urban voids, the city becomes the medium of change, the place for metamorphosis and encounter, the dramatic space, which mingles the symbolic with the real (Lefebvre, 1975: 27). The voids represent the fragmented, alienated social. They are the spatial form of a constantly recurring incoherence, symbols of the impossibility for any closure of society in the city (Lefebvre, 1996a: 156). At the same time, urban voids are spaces of hope, places of overcoming alienation, spots of revolution and self-fulfillment. In urban studies and urban design, that way of thinking is very popular in the last decades. Voids in the urban capitalist reality as squatting (Vasudevan, 2017), ruins (Dobraszczyk, 2017) or temporary uses (Madanipour, 2017) bring together geographical, social and political meanings in a notion of absence and unsettlement (Landau et al, forthcoming). They are outside of regular urbanization and city production with buildings, infrastructure, new blocks etc. They are constitutive in terms of creating another urbanity with blocking and disagreeing to the urban management of capitalist urbanization.13
More recently and explicitly, Ananya Roy proposes the rural as constitutive outside of urban processes and as starting point for her research about planetary urbanization. In her version, firstly, the Indian rural acts as empirical field that constitutes the urban with being beyond (2016). Interestingly, Roy uses the constitutive outside for both, for identifying an object of research (i.e., Indian rurality) and for making her theoretical point. She insists that the constitutive outside opens the door for “understanding feminist and post-structuralist practices of deconstruction” (2016: 4). For Roy, “the rural, like the urban, is not a morphological description but rather an inscription of specific regulations and logics of territory, land, and property” (2016: 8). Approaching the complex conditions of rural India is a way for her understanding of rapid processes of urbanization taking place. Moreover, Roy proposes the megacity as “the ‘constitutive outside’ of contemporary urban studies” (2011b: 224). According to Roy, the megacity is the opponent of the global city. The latter constitutes the heart of economic and political power, while the former emerges by informal and untamable acts of the people. Roy specifies her proposal and suggests four concepts as access points into an understanding of the megacity – peripheries, urban informality, zones of exception, and gray spaces. Roy designates each of these concepts as constitutive outsides respectively as “outside that by being inside introduces a ‘radical undecidability’ to the analysis of urbanism” (2011b: 235).

In Roy’s recent work, another form of constitutive outside becomes known; even it is here not addressed with this name. She speaks of “deep historical spatial logics of the ‘ghetto’, the ‘plantation’, the ‘colony’ and the ‘reservation’” (Heynen, 2016: 840; see also Mbembe, 2017). These are appropriate examples of the constitutive outside: former colonies, slavery and exploitation. Africa and the black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993) are geographical and constitutive outsides of the white man’s successes in Europe and North America. If we consider urbanization as a main project of modernity, the coherence between black history and a first period of planetary urbanization is obvious. Roy proposes to start with the plantation (2019: 13), what might be another historic constitutive outside of the urban. She refers to Katherine McKittrick who proposes the plantation “as a location that might open up a discussion of black life within the context of contemporary global cities and futures”, as a historical constitution of the lands of no one (McKittrick 2013: 6). The plantation is place and system both deeply outside and inside of white man identification and domination. Again, a picture of universality is at stake, the panorama of planetary plantation. Addressing the plantation is, as McKittrick puts it, “a route to noticing how the normalization of body counts and city deaths in fact disclose the ways our present systems of urban planning and its attendant modes of city life” (2003: 15). This is a planetary urbanization theory that puts the constitutive outside in its center.

Another version is Nicolas de Genova’s (2015) concept of the ‘migrant metropolis’. Genova proposes the migrant metropolis as object of critical analysis and connects the issues of migration and urbanization as “socio-political facts of global scope” (2015: 10). He refers to Lefebvre’s hypothesis of the “global/urban society” and connects it with the image of an “alien metropolis” (2015: 3) where we can find
“a systemic kind of alienation, one of pronounced exploitation and protracted estrangement, for the migrants themselves” (2015: 9). For Genova, the migrant metropolis “has emerged as a crucial spatial form for reformulating the relationship of the human species to the space of the planet” (2015: 10). He combines the planetary with migration as constitutive outside of the metropolis and creates a negative ontological argument: The metropolis is built on the permanent production of exclusion and otherness. Probably, the approach is even more precise if we consider another object of Genova’s research, the Mediterranean Sea, and connect it with the idea of the European City (Frantz, 2008). The mass grave of the Mediterranean Sea (Garelli, Sciurba and Tazzioli, 2017) is something, what constitutes the inside of the migrant metropolis. It is a form of “reconfiguration of the ideal of the city as a place of freedom” (Roy, 2019: 15). The concept of planetary urbanization, and particularly the focus of the condition of constitutive outsides, leads to a very different view, particularly on the European city, which has been epitomized for centuries as an urban type full of density, heterogeneity, and diversity, breeding both bourgeois lifestyle and political emancipation. The global or planetary dimension and the integration of the averted side of the urban trajectory postpones the focus of urban studies from classical categories as integration, consensus and diversity to the spheres of demise, uncertainty and unsettlement (Frank et al, forthcoming). It is based on the declaration that an understanding of present conditions and the status quo of the European city is only possible if we take its constitutive outsides in consideration.

This short consideration on some possible constitutive outsides of planetary urbanization already indicate the potential of the concept, I guess. Planetary urbanization is a totality that has (and needs) a constitutive outside. This could be the entry-point for urban studies: to search and find theses outsides, to make them productive for understanding planetary urbanization.

On the one hand, it opens wide opportunities for empirical work: urban voids, urban ruptures, urban fissures are residues accessible to urban research. The specters of urbanity lurk in these residues; they haunt historical formations such as the plantation or the ghetto. Focusing on the many constitutive outsides of planetary urbanization provides a theoretical framing for a long-standing tradition in urban studies and offers an overarching response according to existing (or future) research and advocacy coalitions with, for instance, radical-blackness and or post-/decolonizing theories. On the other hand, thinking the constitutive outside in planetary urbanization theory delivers a possible theoretical progress. It offers a way into the dilemma of urban theory. Urban theory needs an idea what the city, the urban or urbanization ‘is’. That is the question of urban ontologies (Landau and Roskamm, 2018). Critical thinking in urban studies is understandably suspicious of that issue, susceptible for meta-philosophical idealism (controversially discussed by critical theory for decades). However, the question of being (i.e., of urban ontologies) returns – this is the dilemma – repeatedly. Urban theory cannot continue to escape from the question what urbanity ‘is’, no matter whether it ‘is’ a process or a thing. This is why Lefebvre is so contemporary – he offers a way for approaching that dilemma.
The constitutive outside goes in line with Lefebvre’s social theory and his proposal for advancing a planetary concept. It creates a (however unstable) bridge between recent urban theory and post-foundational political thought. Finally, the idea of the constitutive outside stands for abolishing the distinction between empirical and theoretical approaches. The empirical (in)side of the constitutive outside is haunted by theoretical harassments; the theoretical point is not graspable without its empirical materiality. The one side contaminates the other, and ultimately, both exist ‘in only this contaminated interdependence.

Conclusion

In their analysis, Grange and Gunder suggest that the arguments for planetary urbanization “lay the grounds for a potential pernicious ideological position for a universal ‘urbanism’ that inherently negates – that is it also depoliticises – the range of diversity and difference external to, and/or within, urbanisation” (2018: 5). If we consider Brenner’s and Schmid’s not-Lefebvrian claim for an “urban theory without an outside”, this interpretation could probably be right. Even if it was not Brenner’s and Schmid’s intention to deny anything beyond urban processes or to expel anybody from critical theory, their claim provoked the interpretation of planetary urbanization as an exclusive concept.

However, the post-foundational view to that concept is maybe able to have a different interpretation. Interestingly, post-foundational thought always leads back to its own foundations, to the sources of its own thoughts and to the question of who or what is “one’s own”. It was not a coincidence that this contribution went back to the source of planetary urbanization theory, to Henri Lefebvre and his urban writings of the 1970s, and, and even further back, to his social theory of the 1950s and 1960s. Surprisingly (or not), we find here an elaborated post-foundational theory, which prepares the planetary idea as an unsettling approach to the urban. With the recourse to the early Lefebvre, it becomes apparent that the original figure of planetary urbanization has no aim to exclude voices of people who do not live in cities and it does not claim autocracy at any theoretical horizon. It is by no means about a single hegemonic framework, but about a thought model that deals with the urge and the impossibility of thinking totality. Totality becomes at all times pressed by something outside of itself that is the constitutive outside.

With regarding the outside as constitutive, planetary urbanization theory is mindful of its post-foundational DNA. Such reading does not banish or displace any outsides but puts them at the centre of events and thought. The concept gains access to the critique and understanding of the urbanized universe, which has perhaps become a decisive characteristic of the world we live in it. The post-foundational reading of planetary urbanization opens a way beyond a purely empirical and limited view of the urban. In doing so, it shows an alternative to the predominant neo-liberal positivist technocratic urban concept of our time.
Post-foundational thought leads back to the own problematique. This reveals some crucial shortcomings in the recent planetary urbanization debate. First, it becomes clear that the planetary urbanization figure is not an urban theory without an outside. As a Lefebvrian approach, planetary urbanization theory embraces the outside as constitutive and establishes the connection from urban theory to post-structuralist knowledge approaches. Second, the post-foundational reading is useful to understand the play of double exclusion, residing in the heated debate. Some of the critiques point to the exclusion of the outside by Brenner and Schmid, while performing their own acts of exclusion. Both exclusions are exercises in foundationalism, I guess. On the one hand, an urban theory without an outside proposes a theory as pure inside and seals the consideration of the constitutive thing (i.e., the outside). On the other hand, the exclusion of a distinct urban theory position such as the planetary urbanization approach is not a search for common grounds in critical theory, but rather the enhancement of its own position. It works on the grounding of itself via exclusion of the other. ‘It is not our claim and therefore we abort the relation’, this is what we can read in planetary urbanization discussion almost literally.16

Post-foundational political thought draws attention to its own positioning, to its own specters that create its own identity. This is why the planetary urbanization debate is so relevant for urban studies. It remembers that it is necessary to address one’s own constitution, to resume old debates on what critical (urban) theory can or should ‘be’, or if it is possible at all. This is finally a point which planning theory can take along. The self-reflexive (maybe self-deconstructive) spectral analysis of planning as a tool of planetary urbanization is perhaps what can finally inspire (or encourage) planning theory. Urban theory needs to disentangle its own relationship to the urban.

A promising way for that endeavour is what Buckley and Strauss name as “de-stabilizing the urban as a category of theory” (2016: 619). At this point, post-foundational political thought has shown its potential. A post-foundational reading of planetary urbanization can follow Roy in her claim for being “attentive to historical difference as a fundamental constituting process of global political economy and deconstruction as a methodology of generalization and theorization” (2016: 10). Post-foundational political thoughts open the door for that urban theory and offer a way to extend critical urban studies (based in a tradition of the critique of political economy) with the concept of deconstruction (based in a tradition of French theory) – an extension, which is already inherent in Lefebvrian theory. The constitutive outside (de)substantiates the image. It is maybe the missing part for bringing together both traditions in the panorama of planetary urbanization.

Searching for its constitutive outsides is a possible reference point for urban studies and planning theory. It means to explore unsettling global urban phenomena and, at the same time, to unsettle traditional concepts of the city. It creates the urban as an obscure, instable, and disturbing object of planetary possibility and impossibility. This lens shows the way for a renaissance of thinking the city as a thing beyond neoliberal citytism – not as an essential or even biological body or mindset, but as haunted and haunting uncertainty, plunged in a post-foundational sea of radical contingency.
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Author biography

Nikolai Roskamm is Professor for planning theory, history of urbanism and urban design at Erfurt University of applied Sciences. He is member of the editorial collective of Journal for critical urban studies sub\urban (www.zeitschrift-suburban.de).

References


Notes
1 I submitted a first version of this paper to *IJURR*, which was rejected. The current version I submitted to *Planning Theory* with the same result. Because I guess, the paper could be none-
theless interesting for the planetary-urbanization debate and for bringing together post-foundational thoughts with urban theory, I have decided to publish it on my own homepage in a slightly modified version.

2 Pioneer of post-foundational political thinking is Austrian philosopher Oliver Marchart, who introduced the term 12 years ago (Marchart 2007). Post-foundational thinking has however a multiple base in political and social theory. Marchart’s approach is to collect pieces of such thinking in theoretical key writings of the last 200 years or so. This is sometimes hard to understand: The explicit notion “post-foundationalism” is relatively new; elements of that thinking can be retraced a long way backward. In urban studies, the term “post-foundational” became popular in recent times (i.e. Karaliotas/Swyngedouw, 2019; Penny, 2019; Knierbein/Viderman, 2018; Swyngedouw, 2017; Beveridge/Koch, 2017; Wilson/Swyngedouw, 2014). In the German-speaking discussion, I have introduced the post-foundational idea in length with my research project Die unbesetzte Stadt. Postfundamentalistisches Denken und das urbanistische Feld (2012-2014) and with my same-named monography (Roskamm 2017).

3 A possible distinction of the comprehensive work on Lefebvre is (a) the postmodern appropriations led by Edward Soja (1989; 1996), (b) the urban political-economic renderings centered on David Harvey (1988; 2001) and (c) a third constellation of Lefebvre readings, which tries to avoid the mistakes of the previous ones (Kipfer et al., 2008: 3). My aim is to launch an independent (and maybe irritating) contribution to that third wave.

4 Already in the first volume of Critique of Everyday Live [1947] (1991), Lefebvre is thinking about the city and urbanity. Here, he connects considerations about the city of modernity with reports on the Nazi camps in a quite unsettling way (see Roskamm, 2017 and forthcoming). However, Lefebvre’s ultimate urban turn takes place in the late 1960s with The Right to the City, The Urban Revolution and other writings.

5 Goonewardena (2018) discusses the topic “planetary urbanization and totality” in an interesting paper, focusing to Adorno and Sartre, which by the way both have theoretical connections to post-foundational political thoughts, too. In Goonewardena’s paper such connections are however not an issue, and the early work of Lefebvre – what is on focus in my approach to the notion of totality – is not discussed.

6 This is also an early and excellent description of the “post-political condition” (Žižek, 2010; Rancière, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2009; Michel and Roskamm, 2013).

7 Lefebvre accuses not Marx himself of dogmatism; rather, he assures that the latter had never worked with simplistic or schematic hypotheses. The conception of Marx, this is Lefebvre’s persuasion, has always considered deviancies and divergences of social processes.

8 To state the absence of feminist theory in the Lefebvrian writing – what Mclean does as well – is certainly correct. In my view, this does not necessarily discount the originality of Lefebvre’s social ontology; moreover, his theory is compatible with many feminist, queer and post-colonial approaches, particularly in its post-foundational approach. Nevertheless, the ignorance of the French thinker to specific fields of theory is conspicuous.

9 Brenner abandoned the exclusion of the outside recently. He explains his drawback as follows: “It might be replaced with any among the following options, or perhaps others—“urban theory without an inside”; “urban theory without an inside/outside dualism”; “urban theory
without city-centrism”; or, perhaps, “urban theory without methodological territorialism.” May the debate continue: the spatialities of urbanization continue to mutate” (Brenner, 2018: 577). However, none of these proposals stresses the outside as constitutive.

10 Ernesto Laclau (1990) has elaborated on the notion of constitutive outside as spatial core of his spatialized political theory (see Roskamm, 2015: 391)

11 This is the topic auf Agamben’s State of exception (2005).

12 Particularly for planning theory, the debate is highly important, I guess. Not because it makes things easier. Theoretical interventions are not necessarily lightening planning problems but might exacerbate it (to be honest: this is most likely the case). A post-foundational reading of planetary urbanization delivers not one coherent new way of planning but a possible panorama-view, which sheds light on the context in which planning takes place. Particularly, thinking the outside is important for and in planning theory. Planning is in most cases a form of inside – inside the system, inside a municipality, inside the project of modernization. If we follow the idea of the constitutive outside, planning-as-inside-of-planetary-urbanization has many constituting outsides of different forms and kinds; planning theory could be a preferred zone to explore these constitutions of insides and outsides.

13 In his influential paper about the post-political city, Eric Swyngedouw describes the urban as fundamental fragmented and designs the constitution of an alternative version: “Within the tensions, inconsistencies and exclusions forged through these kaleidoscopic yet incoherent transformations, all manner of frictions, cracks, fissures, gaps, and ‘vacant’ spaces arise” (2007: 71). Lefebvre’s residues and voids are present in this picture. Swyngedouw adds in his manifesto “it is indeed precisely in these in-between spaces (...) where new forms of urbanity come to life” (2007: 74).

14 This image has its equivalent in Ancient Greece, if we think about the constitutive excluded forces in the Greek polis as slaves, women, and stranger (Osborne, 2010).

15 The rejection of thinking “the city” in many contributions of critical urban studies traces back to David Harvey’s distinction between “the city” as thing and “the urban” as process. Harvey supports the process and argues, “processes are more fundamental than things” (2000: 29). He creates an ontological advantage of the process of urbanization in contrast to the thing called city. His argument is against the traditional view “that the city is a thing that can be engineered successfully in such a way as to control, contain, modify or enhance social processes” (2000: 29). Harvey’s analysis is on the one hand completely correct, as it concerns a critique of orthodox urbanism and its history (and present) of “social engineering” (Kuchenbuch, 2015). Harvey’s claim (and its continuation in Brenner’s and Schmid’s approach) however neglects, on the other hand, recent considerations about the thing in different areas of theory (Roskamm 2019). Things are, that could be a riposte to Harvey, quite fundamental and legitimately object of actual considerations in social ontology.

16 Not to be misunderstood: Sometimes, it might be important to exclude something or somebody. To distance oneself from, for example, fascist, homophobic or xenophobic positions is crucial. However, in an internal debate of critical theory, to exclude the pendant and to quit vociferously one’s intellectual entourage has a strong flavor of foundationalism.