Chapter 8

Sleepwalking in the Modern City: Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud in the World of Dreams

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There were a hundred thousand slopes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream.

Charles Dickens describing a suburb of London in 1848

The reform of consciousness consists *entirely* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in *explaining* its own actions to it.

Karl Marx, in a letter to Arnold Ruge, 1843

A dream is an answer to a question we haven't learnt how to ask.

Scully reminding Mulder of an observation he'd made in an earlier episode of the *X Files*, 1997

Never mind Charles, Karl, Dana, and Fox. In his novel *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino imagines a meeting between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan. In the course of their conversations, Marco Polo conjures up images of many fabulous and incredible cities. At one point, however, the Great Khan challenges Marco Polo. He has begun to notice that these cities have begun to resemble one another. The Khan's mind now sets out on its own journey. Interrupting Marco Polo, the Khan begins to describe a wondrous city. And he wonders whether it exists. But it appears the Khan had not been paying attention, for it seems that Marco Polo had been telling the Khan about precisely that city. Intrigued, or perhaps in disbelief, the Khan asks Marco Polo the name of the city:

"It has neither name nor place. I shall repeat the reason why I was describing it to you: from the number of imaginable cities we must exclude those whose elements are assembled without a connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse. With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that

conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."

"I have neither desires nor fears," the Khan declared, "and my dreams are composed either by my mind or by chance."

"Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours" (Calvino 1972; 37–8).

As with cities, so it is with dreams. Marco Polo's analysis is clear: the randomness of cities – their absurd or deceitful realities – has an inner meaning, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse, in the same ways as dreams. Underlying the production of cities are the hidden workings of desire and fear. In other words, cities are desire and fear made concrete, but in deceitful, disguised, displaced ways. It is the same with dreams. Kublai Khan cannot accept this interpretation, either of dreams, or of the city. And, surely, dreams and cities have nothing to do with one another. Dreams are illusions, unreal. Cities are very real, the work of the conscious mind, not the random, absurd juxtaposition of astonishing images. But this chapter sides with Marco Polo. And not only Marco Polo. With Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud too. Out of these elements, it might be possible to discover the deceitful discourses, to uncover the hidden desires and fears, to dream again of/about the city. Let's start with Walter B.

Dreaming the Modern City

Much has been said about Benjamin's use of dream analysis to interpret modernity and the city – the best commentators are Buck-Morss 1989; Gilloch 1996 and Weigel 1996, and this chapter follows determinedly in their wake. However, rather than simply trail these analyses, I would like to demonstrate how Benjamin's ideas about dreams and his theory of revolution are provocatively combined in one of his best known (and loved) works, *One Way Street* (written between August 1925 and September 1926: Benjamin 1985).

We should start at the beginning. The title of *One Way Street* refers to the "street" that his lover, Asja Lacis, had driven through him. The title is already a metaphor, one which evokes a one-way flow of ideas through Benjamin and through the city. But towards what? The work is filled with shorter and longer pieces of writing: each piece is an anecdote or metaphor, hewn from the natural history of modernity; each observation has its own heading, each heading is drawn from a detailed observation of the modern city. These fragments are bizarre, absurd, juxtaposed in odd, puzzling ways, their meaning not immediately apparent – and, when it is apparent, it becomes curious for being so obvious. The effect is deliberate. By juxtaposing these fragments in this way, Benjamin is attempting to bring seemingly unrelated things into a dialectical relationship. Through this process of dialectical imaging, Benjamin is seeking to use the tension between fragments to break them out of their isolation, their stasis. In this way, objects would be placed back in the flow of history, as if the dust had been shaken off them. The effect is almost city-like. Or, maybe, dreamlike. Marco Polo would be proud.

Let's take a closer look at the opening shots in Benjamin's analysis of the modern city (and it is important to remember that the pieces are named after features found in cities, since many of the pieces are seemingly not about cities). The first one is titled Filling Station. In it, Benjamin effectively introduces the work. It begins by talking about how the present is constructed out of facts, but facts that sterilize literary activity. The task of the critic, then, is to detonate this state of letters. In part, this is to be achieved through the use of opinions, which give writing both influence and the capacity to act. Such writing acts not in universal ways but through its specific, careful, accurate, and effective application – much as one applies oil to a complex machine (hence the title of the fragment). It can be easily surmised, then, that *One Way Street* is the drop-by-drop application of criticism to "the vast apparatus of social existence" (1985: 45). Through this process, the work can become a significant literary work. Another lesson to draw is this: these fragments are not assembled without connecting threads, without a perspective. These fragments are a rebus. Locked in the puzzle are the desires and fears of the modern city. Let us proceed down the street.

The next observation is headed Breakfast Room. Benjamin begins:

> A popular tradition warns against recounting dreams on an empty stomach. In this state, though awake, one remains under the sway of the dream. For washing brings only the surface of the body and the visible motor functions into the light, while in the deeper strata, even during the morning ablution, the grey penumbra of dream persists and, indeed, in the solitude of the first waking hour (1985: 45–6).

You might balk at this claim, but it is possible to glimpse Benjamin's understanding of modernity, cities and revolutionary practice in this tiny fragment of a fragment. Like a railroad station whose lines lead in many directions, so too we can tease out many themes from this apparently simple point of departure: the breakfast room.

In one direction, we can see that there is a tale about dreaming. Benjamin continues:

> The narration of dreams brings calamity, because a person still half in league with the dream world betrays it in his words and must incur its revenge. Expressed in more modern terms: he betrays himself (1985: 46).

In a nutshell, it can be said that Benjamin is describing the alienation experienced by people in modernity. They betray themselves by articulating their dreams and the revenge that is wreaked on them is that they have to exist in the dreamworld of modernity. And from which they cannot awake:

> He has outgrown the protection of dreaming naïveté, and in laying clumsy hands on his dream visions he surrenders himself . . . The fasting man tells his dream as if he were talking in his sleep (1985: 46).

The "moderns" – after betraying their (innermost) dreams – are doomed to walk in a gray, alienated dreamworld as if in their sleep. The problem is that they have no way of knowing that they are still half in league with the world of dreams. It is, therefore, the (revolutionary) task of the critic to shock the dreamers awake: to act as an alarm

Figure 8.1 *Heavenly Dinner* (© Sygma-Keystone-Paris 1989)

clock, to make the hammer strike the bell. For Benjamin, the desires and fears of the sleepwalker in the modern city have to be materialized, but this is not as easy as it might be. The modern individual is perfectly capable of articulating a whole series of needs and wants, fears, and anxieties. Indeed, the endless production of commodities taps directly into the conscious wishes of modern individuals. Unfortunately, though commodities seemingly embody people's wishes, they remain unconnected to the desires and fears that surround them. It is as if the moderns are talking in their sleep: talking, asking, wishing, but unaware of the meaning of the words. In this sense, commodities become fetishes: they are worshipped, but no one knows why, nor what they stand for.

One might think that the late nineteenth-century city was terrible enough to wake anyone from their slumbers. But Simmel's analysis of the modern city and its effects on human psychology (1903) suggests exactly the opposite to be true. From Simmel, Benjamin learns that the urbanite becomes indifferent to the shocks of city life and blasé about the sheer number of – absurd and surprising, dreadful and exciting – things that cities bring into close proximity. Despite the clarion calls of injustice and inequality, then, the modern individual is indifferent. Worse, citydwellers become subject to the revenge of dreams, for once they learn indifference, their desires and fears become a secret discourse in which everything conceals something else. Though they can speak their wishes, the moderns have no way to make them real. The modern world becomes a never-ending cycle of dreamlike figures, none of which

ever fulfills their promise. Fashions come and go, ever more rapidly, in ever more absurd forms. Buildings are put up and torn down, their façades become make-up in a clown's parade of architectural forms. Just admit it: nothing's shocking.

In Benjamin's analysis, "dreaming" has two apparently contradictory meanings. It describes, on one hand, a state of sleeping and, on the other, a state of waking. Both asleep and awake, however, the mind dreams. So, Benjamin searches in the idea of the dream for a resource of (revolutionary) hope. He finds it in the possibility that the dreamer might awake: in a real way, dreams must anticipate a waking. Analytically, then, Benjamin was concerned to discover and interpret dreams, both past and present. He sought these in artifacts – especially old-fashioned objects (that embodied redundant dreams) – and in the sites that housed, or contained, dream-artifacts. It is worth looking in a little more detail at the dreamhouses of modernity, since this is where the dreamwork in the production of modern urban spaces is most apparent.

For Benjamin, the dream is most vivid at the point of waking. In practice, this means that Benjamin was most interested in those parts of the city that were being torn down or being altered, since it was as if people were waking up from the dreams that these spaces embodied. Such places included, famously, the once-fashionable arcades of Paris. But also the temporary structures put up for the great exhibitions of London and Paris. However, Benjamin also found modern dreams in museums (which contained artifacts – dreams – from the past) and railroad stations (where there were dreams of travel). He uncovered dreams of previous generations in the ruins of the city: in their castles and churches. Like an archeologist, he dug deeper and deeper into the historical layers of the city, to find the persistence of its dreams. Benjamin was searching for a memory. He was attempting to travel in time – *and space* – to recover the long history of a society's desires and fears. Through the labyrinths of the city's streets, through the journeys undertaken, Benjamin would piece by piece, piece together the unconscious strivings of social and urban imagination.

Benjamin was optimistic. If he could bring the pieces into tension, through "dialectical imaging," by putting the pieces side by side, Benjamin thought it would be possible to induce a shock that would wake up the moderns. In *One Way Street* this revolutionary task manifests itself in the juxtaposition of ideas within observations, but also in the juxtaposition of observations. Here, we see the world of dreams (significantly he recounts his dreams) and the world of waking (his analysis of the dreamlike connections between things) in direct relation to one another. The Breakfast Room, for example, becomes a space which contains two apparently unconnected ideas: the premodern folk-tale and an interior space in the bourgeois home set aside for the timed and localized activity of breakfasting, now regimented by capitalist labor relations.

Reading this work is almost like walking through a city: along any path, you find places built out of different stories (see Keith, chapter 35 this volume), sometimes side by side, sometimes in the same place (say, as one use blends into another). So, in London today, if you go to the corner of Marlborough Crescent and Bedford Road, you can see two different dreamworlds: one is the bricks and gardens of the first garden suburbs built in the late nineteenth century, the other is the concrete and function dream of the 1960s high rise. Meanwhile, a local house in the same area

now houses the local Victorian society, both appropriately (it's in a Victorian building) and ironically (since the Society has changed the use and look of the building). In this understanding, the city is an assemblage of absurdities that have lost their impact, and we can no longer see the dreams that are embodied in their bricks and concrete, their flowers and smells.

Through montage, through shocking juxtapositions, Benjamin was attempting to wake the modern world up, so that it could act on its dreams, rather than simply live in them. In this way, it might be possible to produce utopia, to make the dream real. Or so he hoped. But the dialectic of dreaming and awakening has never quite played itself out (at least, in Benjamin's terms). People seem to have remained relentlessly asleep, indifferent to the shocks of modernity. *But maybe the moderns are not sleepwalking in the city.* Maybe they have been walking open-eyed through the streets, fully aware of the poverty and brutality of modern life (like many of the chapters in this volume). So, it may be that Benjamin's understanding of dreams could usefully gain from another perspective. Benjamin was not adverse to psychoanalysis, though he knew very little about it (as Buck-Morss, Gilloch and Weigel have noted). Perhaps now is a good time to put Benjamin and Freud side by side. Let's see what Sigmund Freud might have to say about walking in the city, as if in a nightmare.

By Another Détour, the Dreamcity

Freud is not renowned for his analyses of urban life (see Smith 1980). In fact, it is more common to complain about Freud's lack of appreciation of his own context (for a review of these criticisms, see Elliott 1998). Freud did use the city as a metaphor to describe mental life (Pile 1996, chapter 8), but it is more useful for this chapter that he described a walk in the city in his essay on the uncanny (1919). More generally, Freud's account of the uncanny has been taken up in many analyses of urban space (see, for example, Vidler 1992; Jacobs 1996 and Pile 2000). However, it is the dreamlike qualities of Freud's urban anecdote that concern us here, because this will allow us to pursue an interpretation of the dreamlike quality of cities and the city-like quality of dreams. In this way, it might be possible to progress Benjamin's project of uncovering the secret discourses of the city, the hidden desires and fears in the city's dreaming. First, let us examine Freud's uncanny story. While walking in Genoa,

> . . . one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without inquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery (Freud, [1919] 1985: 359).

Of course, we should realize quickly that this "uncanny" experience is clearly the experience of a repressed bourgeois man who is afraid to be associated with "painted

women." But Freud at least was prepared to admit a secret desire: to "be with" the women whose character was not in doubt. Now, we can see in this tale how the return of a repressed desire might lead to a feeling of dread. It might be possible, quickly, to observe that the experience of the city – and perhaps of modernity in general – is ambivalent (about the interplay of desire and fear) or paradoxical (about the apparent contradiction between conscious desires and unconscious motivations). Among Victorian bourgeois men, this experience was certainly not unusual (see Walkowitz 1992). However, I would like to apply another form of interpretation to this situation, one derived from Freud's interpretation of dreams ([1900] 1976). In part, this is a legitimate move because it was this that Benjamin drew on in his interpretation of the dreamworld of the modern city, However, in Freudian terms, the move is illegal. So, let's proceed with enthusiasm!

Using Freud's story, it is possible to investigate the relationship between dreaming, waking and the geography of the city (for related discussions, see Pile 1998; 2000). To begin with, we can note that Freud's stance on dreams correlates quite nicely with Marco Polo's and Walter Benjamin's:

> . . . in spite of everything, every dream has a meaning, though a hidden one, that dreams are designed to take the place of some other process of thought, and that we have only to undo the substitution correctly in order to arrive at this hidden meaning ([1900] 1976: 169).

For Freud, dreams are the "*(disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish*" ([1900] 1976: 244). However, dreamwork responds to this imperative in such a way that the wish does not wake the dreamer. Dreams, therefore, are also "the *GUARDIANS of sleep*" (1976: 330). It is presumed that the basic thought constituting the dream would trouble the dreamer enough to wake her/him up: so, the dream takes on a disguised form because the revelation of the dream's secret wish would, presumably, be disturbing and wake the dreamer up. This is certainly Benjamin's understanding of the modern individual, sleepwalking in the city. Thus, dreams are the guardians of a sleeping modern world.

In Freud's waking nightmare, we can see that he arrives at, then returns to, a place – with women – of a certain character. The scene is important. Freud carefully constructs a story out of a sequence of images, but his experience of uncanniness lies in the way in which time and space shift, dreadfully (in the city). Time becomes circular, while space is strangely connected. Both time and space take on character that is in doubt. Moreover, Freud's repeated returns to the same place indicate the labyrinthine nature both of the narrow streets of the city, and also of his unconscious wishes. The city becomes the "show place"of his desire/fear. More than a stage on which the vicissitudes of mental life play out, the city constructs the experience (in mind and body). It was as if Freud had voyaged into some mythic labyrinth, only narrowly escaping intact. Perhaps this is more of a nightmare than a dream, but Freud found it hard to wake up from the torment.

For Freud dreams work mainly (though not only) through the use of images: "Dreams construct a *situation* out of these images; they represent an event which is actually happening . . . they 'dramatize' an idea" (1976: 114). Such a view accords neatly with Benjamin's. The city is a collection of images, which can be produced in different forms. The city is put together as a situation – or series of situations – in

which desire can be dramatized. However, these desires are dramatized in disguised ways. Thus, commodities represent a desire, but not directly. So it is, too, with physical infrastructure: homes, skyscrapers, overpasses, subways, piazzas, and the like. It is evident that, in the production of the dreamcity, some serious thinking has to take place: the wish has to be felt, then thought, then represented through images that disguise the thought, then the multifarious images have to be carefully assembled into a dream that has a (un)believable story line (however absurd the images and story seem). Freud calls this mental process dreamwork and identifies within it some key components: condensation, displacement, and the means of representation. It is this idea of dreamwork that might help us progress Benjamin's analysis of the work of modern cityspaces.

For Freud, dreamwork transcribes the dreamthought from one mode of expression (the desire/fear) into another mode of expression (the dream) by using images (or elements). Freud suggests that the process of transcription (dreamwork) allows for a complex (and duplicitous) interweaving of wishes, thoughts, and images:

> Not only are the elements of the dream determined by the dream-thoughts many times over, but the individual dream-thoughts are represented in the dream by several elements. Associative paths lead from one element of the dream to several dream-thoughts, and from one dream-thought to several elements of the dream. Thus . . . a dream is constructed . . . by the whole mass of dream-thoughts being submitted to a sort of manipulative process in which those elements which have the most numerous and strongest supports acquire the right of entry into the dream-content . . . (1976: 389).

As for dreams, so it is for the city. As Freud walks through Genoa, he makes an element – the street – suddenly take on a character that he might not have noticed on another day. An associative path has been opened up that suddenly gives the place connotations it might not otherwise have had. A train of thought has been set in motion, at both a conscious and an unconscious level, each leading in opposite directions. Consciously, Freud wants to leave; unconsciously, he wants to return. Despite being fully awake, Freud would appear to be sleepwalking. This suggests that the street is dreamlike: a site of both condensation, displacement, and an image through which meaning comes to be represented – a meaning which is not immediately apparent. We can pick specific instances of this, though it should be remembered that these are just examples. In the street, we can see how one idea "painted women" is substituted for another "sex" and how "the street" itself takes on this meaning, without it ever being said. In this way, the "sexual energy" associated with the street is expressed only when the thought gains access to Freud's conscious thoughts, before that he was indifferent. However, the emotional intensity of city life can quickly make itself felt – and we see this in Freud's increasing discomfort.

Of course, Freud draws on a whole repertoire of images to tell his story and these contain or channel his story in particular ways. Others would tell Freud's story differently. Others, of course, have their own stories to tell. Their experiences would be different (see Keith, this volume). Nevertheless, their experiences would also be partial, whether dream- or nightmare-like. This is an important point. This chapter stresses that people's experiences of the city – and of dreaming – are very differently located and localized. This point was paid insufficient attention by both Benjamin and Freud. Now, of course, it is less easy to make credible arguments about

Figure 8.2 Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street: Rainy Day*, oil on canvas, 1876–77
212.2 × 276.2 cm, Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection, 1964.336. Photograph

collective experiences, or collective dreams, of the city or modernity. Instead, we are more likely to see a crosscutting web of power relations, defining class, race, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and so on (as this book amply demonstrates). However, this should not allow us to ignore how "dreaming"is bound up in the "regulatory fictions" [fixions?] that determine how people are seen and how people see themselves, whether they feel at home, where they feel out of place, what mobilizes them, and so on.

Freud's story is significant not because his uncanny experience is *the* experience of cities, but because it suggests that the tension between ordinary indifference and shocking realization is all too rare. A view with which Benjamin would despairingly concur. In Benjamin's terms, this is a revolutionary moment: by putting two and two together, Freud is shocked to discover his own motivations and awakes to the secret discourse of his desires and fears. Indeed, it might be that the city affords the opportunity for such self-realizations, but for most these experiences will be privatized, cast in shadows, as if under an umbrella.

Even awake, the moderns talk – and walk – as if sleeping. The city is like a scene in a dream, not a passive backdrop, but an active constituent of the story itself. Indeed, the street activates the story. Each element a condensation of many meanings, a moment of intense indifference and potential shock, the full meaning of which is never quite realized. Dreams – and cities – remain the guardians of the moderns'

sleep: an elaborate play of remembering and forgetting; showing and disguising. In this understanding, both displacement and condensation work (to make dreams; to make cities) by using associative paths to combine and recombine thoughts, and also to decenter both meanings and feelings. In this way, dreamcity-work enables the dreamcity to be woven out of seemingly desireless, fearless, and absurd elements.

Even awake, then, the most intricate structures (of dreams, of cities) are created, all of which are the points of articulation of many associative paths of meaning, all of which displace the intensity that realized them elsewhere. For sure, an understanding of the city must trace the social relations that produce "things" (from buildings to emotions) – as political economists since Marx have pointed out. But now we must be sure that we understand that the "things" that make (up) the city also have secret discourses of desire and fear, desires and fears that have been displaced along disparate paths. For Benjamin, as for Freud (and Marco Polo!) these paths can be reconstructed. And, in this reconstruction, it is possible to understand the paradoxical motivations that made the dreamcity possible; to map out the yearnings that cannot yet be realized – corporealized – in the dreamcity.

On another day Freud could have walked through the street in Genoa and been oblivious to its character. And he might have found his refuge piazza first time. Someone else walking the street would have experienced it very differently. And the "painted women" were almost certainly having much more fun (at Freud's expense) than Freud! So, we can quickly surmise that *there is no one dream that articulates the city, nor one aspect of the city that defines its dreaming*. Instead, like a dream – or a city – the interpretation of cities must rely on the capacity to trace the lines of "work" that emanate from urban spaces, an understanding of their production in multiple social relations and of how the dreamcity condenses and displaces meanings in their very form. But we know a little more than this too – and on this, I will conclude.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, it was suggested that cities are like dreams, for both conceal secret desires and fears, for both are produced according to hidden rules which are only vaguely discernible in the disguised and deceitful forms (of dreams; of cities). There is of course a difference between the world of dreams and the waking world: to begin with, the world of dreams pays no attention to other people – a rare luxury in waking life! Nevertheless, Benjamin's allegory of the persistence of dreams, suggests that modernity – while constantly proclaiming its open-eyed objective gaze on the world – is just as prone to sleepwalking as the worlds of religion and the worlds of myths (see also Thrift, chapter 34 this volume).

From Freud, it can be recognized that the mind, far from operating in completely incompatible and unrelated ways, in sleep and awake, works in parallel ways. Simmel was the first to suggest that mental life in cities is characterized by indifference, reserve, and a blasé attitude, but this only reinforces the idea that mental life in cities is characterized by displacement, condensation, and the use of images to represent *and effectively disguise* desires and fears – as in dreams. Freud's experience in Genoa suggests that elements of the city resemble dream elements – for not only can sites in cities be visited many times and the meanings of the locality change

depending on the "orientation" of the visit, but also cities bring together elements from different places and urban spaces are produced through the intersection of crosscutting social relations, which combine to produce meaningful places – whether these are Benjamin's arcades or multiplex cinemas, the Ministry of Defence or home sweet home. This is to say that, like the dream, the city is produced in time and space by fervently traced paths, made and unmade connections, and the composition and position of elements.

But to what purpose is all this musing? For Benjamin, we can see that his desire was to shock modernity into waking up. No such option would appear to exist in Freudian thought. Perhaps this means there is no future for cities. On the other hand, it is possible to draw other lessons from Benjamin, Freud, and co. In this, we can think again of the paradox of dreaming: that it occupies both our sleeping and waking worlds. Through dreaming, it might be possible to imagine different transformative possibilities (see also Robinson 1998). Thus, instead of waking (to realize those secret wishes), or, instead of returning to the dream (to find those hidden messages), the significant move may be to pursue with greater enthusiasm the unconscious logics of the city. These will not be singular, nor universal, nor capable of being circumscribed by a master narrative of urban development. Instead, we would be forced to recognize that cities will have contradictory, incommensurable logics. And perhaps this is why cities are like dreams, both because they are never simply works of the mind or of chance, and also because they embody paradoxical and ambivalent elements.

It still feels like musing, all this talk of dreams. The alarm bells are ringing loud and clear: cities are wrecked by earthquakes, riots, (not so) smart bombs, pervasive disease, abject poverty. The problems confronting cities are so vast that they seem absurd: Western-dominated neoliberal economic strictures force people off the land and into the shanty towns of the poorest countries of the world, so cities of 20 million plus are created where there isn't enough food. But it is important to remember that neoliberal dreamings are not the only ones, nor the inevitable ones. Perhaps the scale of the problem explains why it is so easy to forget what the dreams of the city are all about – what it means to live in cities, their freedoms and opportunities, their new communities and cosmopolitanism. This suggests a revolutionary practice that relies as much on imagining and mobilizing better stories as on shocks to the system. Collapsing neither into the waking world of rationalizations and instrumental logic, nor into the dreamworld of barbaric desires and satisfying fears, the transformation of urban space would instead necessitate an understanding of vicissitudes of the dreamcity.

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