

Smith, N. y Mitchell, D. (eds.; 2018).
Revolving New York: How 400 Years of Riot, Rebellion, Uprising, and Revolution Shaped a City, Athens, University of Georgia Press, ISBN 9780820352800 (ebook)

The story Neil Smith and his collaborators recount is a compelling narrative of injustices and upheavals to subvert the imposed order of things that have moulded, reinforced, destroyed, rebuilt, and questioned with constant insistency the geography of New York City. Class, race, gender, religion, political activism and space intersect inextricably at every page in an irrepressible sequence of moments of unrest spanning over four centuries.

In the attempt to condense the complexity of the city's history of geography, the multiple contributors of the book deconstruct and consequently reconstruct both the episodic and the transversal manifestations of rebellion with scientific precision and journalistic eloquence. As Don Mitchell anticipates in the Introduction, the choice of a narrow focus on the unfolding of near-continuous uprising casts a light on how struggle has shaped and continues to shape New York's urban environment. Times of revolt, mob-like actions, carnivalesque rebellious parades and peaceful resistance function as lightning flashes that illuminate moments where the rupture of the elites' hegemony, social order and the institutions' interests is impending – with outcomes sometimes successful, more often violent.

The book comprises of 19 chapters and more than 40 stories of confrontations between the communities of New York, invested with thickly developed social positioning and political-economic background. Although chronologically linear, the unfolding of events follows more consistently an in-

tricated fabric of spatial, social and representational geographies. The story of revolts told by the authors begins with the Dutch colonists' expropriation of land from the local Native American Munsees in the first half of the 17th century (Chapter 1). When New Amsterdam turns into the British colony renamed New York, the violence in the streets and fields mainly entailed struggles of black slaves, working class white European immigrants, artisans and tradesmen in multiply conflicting dynamics with the ruling British Empire (Chapter 2 and 3).

With the Flour Riots in 1837 (Chapter 4), banks and financial bubble bursts abruptly enter history's scene for the first time, initiating a from-then-on reiterative circle of capitalist speculation and real estate traders' imprint on the urban landscape. The restructuring of the police department in the mid-19th century (Chapter 5) draws a dramatic caesura in the expression of civil unrest in the streets, as violence and order are regulated by new dynamics and interlocutors, since the city's administration and the police impose their presence within the very everyday of the city. Religious profiles (white and black Catholics, Protestants, Jewish) and political fervour (communism, socialism, anarchism, unionism) find expression in the streets (and in the burning buildings) towards the end of the 19th century and the turn to the following century, thus laying the ground for the rise of women strikes and African Americans civil rights organisations, in war times and throughout the Great Depression (Chapter 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11).

Resonating with most of New York's uprisings history, the brutality of clashes between the police and African and Puerto Rican Americans characterises more than 30 years of Harlem's riots, when the racial segmentation of the city's housing and welfare policies reaches the threshold causing outbursts

of discriminatory violence (Chapter 12 and 15). However, racism and discrimination were never radically undermined and irremediably unrooted, hence percolated through the decades and reached the contemporary days (Afterword Early 2017). Students feature in the struggle for spatial justice since the 1917 education reform (Chapter 10), but really gain a prominent position in the city's politics in the late 60s with the occupation of university buildings, when they fought for the representation of people of colour in the curricula and admission schemes (Chapter 13). Starting with the queers' joyous performance of coming out in the public spaces (Chapter 14), the flashing moments of revolt marking the streets, parks, squats and empty lots of New York in the last decades of the 20th century draw a narrative of re-appropriation of space of groups marginalised, repressed and evicted by the increasingly dichotomic class society ruling the city.

The city's mayors, the financial elite, and the corrupt police are confronted multiple times by protesters united by claims of Right to the City: homeless, anti-gentrification activists, students, squatters, Muslims, urban gardeners, pro-peace activists, and immigrant rights organisers coalesce in generating momentum for advocating that "a different world is possible" (Chapter 16, 17, and 18). The expectations built up by these groups finally epitomised in the experience of Occupy Wall Street after the spectacular financial crash down in 2011, where the ultimate abomination of neoliberal capitalism – the "Privately Owned Public Space" (POPS) of Zuccotti Park - is appropriated and revitalised in a temporary experiment of horizontal democracy, only to be terminated (depressingly consistently with New York' policing history) with a brutal eviction (Chapter 19).

In the opening lines, Mitchell suggests the book could be interpreted under multiple, perhaps simultaneous, perspectives: the metamorphosis of the landscape, the rise of women, the burgeoning of a global capital's culture, the political power shifts, the police violence, the real estate speculation, or the story of revolts. In his words,

... it is precisely in seeing how struggle has unfolded on the streets (and in the tenement houses, factories,

meeting halls, and public parks) that one can glimpse just how riot, rebellion, uprising, and revolution have been central to the city's history and geography (p. 15).

However, the spellbinding turbulent narrative has gripped me especially for it anchors in the very materiality of the city in the instances of revolt against injustice. Bricks, cans, garbage bins, and more prominently police clubs, broken windows and fire vividly depict the riotous – often exasperate – insurgence, entrenched with the struggle over a landscape of occupied parks, squats, abandoned buildings and degrading neighbourhoods. In turn, the portrait of the built environment reveals the history of capital in New York, from the surge of a real estate elite to the establishment of financial capital's influence over politics, from disinvestment in impoverished neighbourhoods to rent gap exploitation for the pursue of gentrification projects – testifying the making and un-making of the landscape, or *antilandscapes*. As Neil Smith puts it,

... as capital evacuated parts of the central city, leaving block after block physically decayed and demographically abandoned, it also flowed back in search of selective neighbourhoods where land depreciated by disinvestment and abandonment was cheaply available (p. 228).

The rent gap theory, critiques of gentrification and anti-neoliberalism rage are especially fascinating in New York, as it is not only a space where capital driven processes materialise, but it is also one of the global centres of capital generation. Hence the accounts of revolt against the violent dynamics of capitalism provide a more hopeful vision for the future, as they highlight the moments when those who live in the inimical *antilandscapes* become visible by fighting for making it liveable, with creative protest and resistance. In fact, although not as persistently overarching as promised in the Introduction, the last thread of the complex narrative fabric is one of carnivalesque and joyous character of the rebellions, once again illuminating that the existing social order can be subverted, and the geography of the city redesigned.

An alternative title for the book, as suggested by one of the two main editors, may as well have been “City of Disorder”, or “Triumph of Order”. I believe the unearthing of wealth inequality, social injustice and racial discrimination and their manifest expression in the landscape of New York may also be captured by “A history of Right to the City”, where outdoor politics – in jubilant, exuberant,

and violent revelations, “shows not only that the New York landscape is violent but that violence is often productive” (p. 3).

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