[UN] GROUNDING

POST-FOUNDATIONAL GEOGRAPHIES

EDITED BY

FRIEDERIKE LANDAU, LUCAS POHL AND NIKOLAI ROSKAMM

[transcript] Social and Cultural Geography

(Non)Building Alliances:
Approaching Urban Politics through Siegfried Kracauer's Concept of *Nonsolution*

Gabu Heindl and Drehli Robnik

Escalating economic injustice, climate crisis, migration crisis, crisis of institutional political representation, housing crisis and deterioration of urban public spaces, etc. 'We' are confronted with burning questions and pressing problems, which is why 'we' urgently need solutions.

The urgency of the matter, however, should not keep us from asking questions about these questions and from problematizing these problems: who is the 'we' that senses the urgency? Who identifies the problems and prescribes the terms to formulate them? Let us rephrase these objections, shifting the focus from emphasising subjects and actors to a more conceptual point relating to political investments of architecture, urban planning and practice. The problems listed above differ in their very nature according to their respective articulations, and thus call for different solutions: is the urgent problem of economic injustice the gap between rich and poor (global) populations' shares of the common wealth? Or is the problem seen to lie in the fact that not only 'hard-working citizens', but also migrants receive social security benefits? The latter understanding, of course, corresponds to the way in which today's nationalist populist Right tries to appropriate justice-oriented criticisms of capitalist inequality, turning equality's universalism on its head through increased, resentment-driven discrimination. When we say 'climate crisis', are we talking about the rule of industrial capital over ecological agendas? Or are we celebrating the down-to-earth local origins of national food production with chauvinist overtones?

A key consideration is the fact that problems preconfigure their own solutions. In 1966, Gilles Deleuze (1988: 15–17) points out that a traditional, paternalistic conception of thought has us believe that the thought's creative

agency is in finding solutions – while it is, in fact, in the posing of problems that thought makes a difference. This point should not be mistaken for the commonplace statement according to which one wants to 'raise questions rather than give answers'. A problem is much more than a question: it maps out a field of possible moves in thought and action. Also, Deleuze's argument is not about denigrating solutions or the impulse of arriving at solutions; rather, the critical evaluation of the way in which a problem is articulated already implies the terms of the solution. Briefly put: solutions do not make problems disappear. At the same time, problems do not present themselves without at least an orientation towards – or a longing for – solutions. This mutual hauntedness of problems and solutions is one possible conceptual approach to the paradoxical entanglement designated by the term [un]grounding – and to the field of politics where it, shall we say, belongs.

Partial Foundations

Deleuze's argument may appear to be tailor-made for debates over creativity in philosophy. However, his critique of solutions is an instance of thought placed in affinity with power relations in society. In this context, Deleuze (ibid. 16) quotes Karl Marx's expression that "Humanity only sets itself problems that it is capable of solving." This clearly indicates that, on a conceptual level, too, the problem of problems, and that of solutions and their relationship keeps us closely linked to a political history of struggles (which is what this Marxian *bonmot* on humanity is all about). Employing a different vocabulary, shortly after (and independently from) Deleuze, during the 1970s, two prominent Marxist architects and theorists voiced their respective criticisms on how architecture focuses on solutions for problems that were predetermined by hegemonic social and discursive powers. Both Giancarlo De Carlo and Manfredo Tafuri take aim at attempts at problem-solving through planning and building that, in their view, thwarts the socio-political agenda they are supposed to serve.

With regard to standards for an existential minimum in housing, formally proposed by modernist architects at the 1929 *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) in Frankfurt, devoted to 'Minimum Housing', De Carlo (2005 [1970]: 8) highlights the energy and creativity that architects put into offering innovative solutions to the problem of how administrations, investors and homeowners could squeeze ever smaller apartments and ever more of

these into housing blocks. His criticism is directed at a context-blind and politically insensitive approach by modernist planners: Even if well-meaning, they work on *how to* questions instead of asking who would actually benefit from their architectural solutions (e.g. low minimum standards and floorplan size of living space) and at which larger social context their efforts were directed. One might need to caution against 'joining the game' (of exploitation) in De Carlo's argument. A point similar to his is made in Tafuri's (1980) critique of Red Vienna's urban planning and housing politics, which governed the city between 1919 and 1934 under Social Democratic rule. According to Tafuri, the Social Democrats were, in an overall reformist policy framework as well as with regards to housing for the wage-working masses, all too eager to remain within the confines of capitalism. From his perspective, instead of maintaining the goal of overall radical change, Red Vienna with its many *Gemeindebau* social housing super-blocks offered the proletariat homes with a cozy style. To Tafuri, the utopian aspect of Austro Marxist politics and its potential for radical change were sacrificed in favor of stable placements within the capitalist world. In this context, planning and architecture 'just' worked on solutions for housing crises (and issues of urban infrastructure) and failed to address more structural problems of mass exploitation.

It could be argued that the effects of pacification and bourgeoisization caused by Red Vienna's giving homes to the exploited might not have been as grave as Tafuri states, given that the organized proletariat of Vienna was the one risking an – unsuccessful – armed uprising against a Fascist take-over of the country.[1] But we would rather point to the resonance of these critiques in present contexts before we return to our conceptual take on solutions in urban and spatial planning. De Carlo's critique of solutions for architectures of existential minima gains traction in today's multiple housing crises. Today, creative models of "tiny living" for low-income people not only helps to make room in cities for the space-consuming rampages of investment capital, but also sells such spatial self-restrictions as a hip urban lifestyle. Coming back to Red Vienna, fostered by its 2019 centennial, Red Vienna´s urbanist and housing strategies as well as the policies of Vienna´s 2010-2020 Social Democratic-Green administration are today often cited as a best case example for social housing, restricting the capitalization and privatization of urban space. It is

---

1   One could say that during the short 1934 civil war, parts of Vienna's (or Linz's) working masses felt that with their *Gemeindebau* and cultural infrastructures, they had something to lose to fascism, yet also something to rely on in their armed struggle.

ironic that Vienna´s ongoing measures to keep rents affordable are perceived in other cities as radical, almost utopian (e.g. in Berlin, London, Vancouver). Has the antiutopianism that Tafuri once attacked now taken the structural position of Utopia?[2]

A politics of history has to 'critically inherit', highlighting unrealized futures hidden in it, rather than simply transferring what was once present. This approach clings to moments and ideas that constituted the politically emancipatory potential during Red Vienna, but were never realized or hegemonic.[3] It clings especially to dispersed articulations of popular self-empowerment and egalitarian universalism running counter to the paternalism and anti-migrant selectivism also manifest in Vienna's housing policies then and now.[4] And yet, the necessity to remain alert towards historical and current instances of racist exclusion and centralist authoritarianism in this model case should not blind us to the fact – and the grandness of the fact – that Red Vienna manifests an instituted and shaped articulation of power wrested away from capital and 'bourgeois' ideologies.[5] To say it bluntly, one should not be afraid of acknowledging traits of a 'realized' counterhegemony.[6] With all the very well-justified criticism of building totalities and laying stable foundations – in planning, in politics, in planning politics – the problem of totalities and founding procedures nevertheless remains with us, and remains to be tackled and is still left to be addressed.

This is, of course, one of the central points to be made in a theoretical approach to politics that is *post-foundationalist* rather than *foundationalist* (i.e.,

---

2   The same would go for the social reforms of 1970s Social-Democratic governments: seen from our present of neoliberalism allied with nationalism, these projects look daring and radical.

3   Fisher (2014) makes a similar point with respect to unrealized futures, going beyond white heteronormative middle-class subjectivity, inherent in progressive cultural practices of Britain's 1970s welfare state institutions.

4   We mean the restrictions of access for migrants to Vienna's social housing, once directed at Slavic immigrants from Eastern Europe, today under the name of *Wien-Bonus* directed at global refugees and immigrants (cf. Heindl 2020 on the critical inheritance of Red Vienna and the role of radical democracy for planning).

5   The term ideology is somewhat vague – given the Austrian Right´s circa 1930 amalgam of Catholicism, monarchism, Germanic nationalism, corporatism and revanchist militarism, glued together by anti-socialism and anti-Semitism, in the process of shaping themselves in a would-be allencompassing Fascist mode specific to Austria.

6   Our quotation marks and emphases are a way to maintain a distance from identitarian phantasms that accompany conceptions of something *fully* realized, *wholly* present.

oriented towards, or defending the givenness of foundations) or outright *anti-foundationalist* (i.e., seeing every moment of ground gained, form given, definition made as a fall from utopian grace) (Marchart 2010: 59–84). Post-foundational arguments rather come up with statements of the 'yes, but not really, not fully' type. For example, saying yes to the realization of socialist planning politics on a city scale, but without embracing the fullness of planning power promised in top-down master plans. Such an emphasis on 'partiality' (as distinct from totality) could be construed as weakness. But then, a certain weakness is deliberately played out in post-foundational thought, in opposition to conceptual images of fully embodied strength – or to a macho heroism of going all the way, remaining faithful to Truths at all costs.

While undenied weakness, and also the good old notion of self-criticism, mark the *ethical* aspect of post-foundational understandings of power, subjectivity and togetherness, the entanglements of possibility and impossibility point toward its *ontological* register. The latter is the level at which the *impossibility* of founding – for example, an 'egalitarian city' – is the same as, or the verso to the recto of the *possibility* of founding – for example, a Red city as island, a *Rebel City* as a localized "No" to austerity agendas, a *Sanctuary City* as welcoming those whom Fortress Europe wants to see vanishing in the sea or in prison-camps. Something´s impossibility is at the same time its possibility – this, of course, is a paradox.

This *foundational paradox* can, however, be rephrased as the full versus the partial, so that the impossibility of full and stable foundations makes for the possibility of ever new partial and provisional foundations. It is this latter provisionality and precariousness which, in a *political* register, can be reformulated as being 'in dispute': a provisional ground is arrived at through struggling over it - it remains disputable by others with a different idea of how to establish this grounding or founding. Being challenged by one´s opposition is not a value in itself in politics, just as building something unstable is not an aim in itself in architecture. Nevertheless, leaving room for unexpected others to pursue their projects and attempts at foundation is a necessity of such conflictual politics. It is insofar that such a politics can be *democratic*. Which, briefly said, means acknowledging the non-identity of its own formation as well as that of others (ibid. 329–363). And it is *radical-democratic* insofar as it not just accepts, but deepens, unfolds, potentializes this living politically with non-identities – bearing in mind, however, the democratic, emancipatory value of provisional reliance on identity politics, especially on the part of excluded groups. Just as with foundations, the fact that identities are not

stably given does not mean one does not have to tackle the concept of iden-
tity politically – otherwise, non-identity would achieve its full identity. And,
generally, for post-foundationalism, the fact that something does not exist
means, more urgently, that you have to live with it.[7]

So, a post-foundationalist theoretical take on radical democracy is as
much about weighing off as counter-balancing. Put in spatial terms, it is
about taking positions and then making room for the questioning of these
very positions. It involves an unfolding in which extensions – for example,
a socialist city *plus* the critique of its paternalism – become legible as an
actualization of its potential. Briefly put, regarding our example of Red
Vienna: radical democracy asks one to face, rather than deny historical Red
Vienna´s paternalism as well as the singular practices contesting it, and to
re-evaluate both of them today. Generally, it asks for a pragmatics of working
on solutions in fidelity to problems, not betraying them in favor of solutions
– *and* not betraying them in favor of a super-cool position that can do without
solutions.[8]

Nonsolution: Paradoxes of Nonfulfillment Politics

Complimentary to the post-foundational coupling of necessity with impos-
sibility, we want to introduce the quasi-term *nonsolution*, which condenses
much of what we have said so far on the politics of grounding/founding in
spite of its impossibility, and the irreducibility of problems to solutions. A
word not used often, *nonsolution* comes up in a para-conceptual role in 1960s
writings of Frankfurt-born sociologist, theorist of history and film critic
Siegfried Kracauer (cf. Robnik 2014; 2019). With Kracauer – who had studied
and briefly practiced architecture, maintaining his interest in buildings
throughout his fifty years of writings – we want to discuss a thinker who is
compatible in interesting ways with the (different) post-Marxisms mentioned
before: 1970s critiques of architectural 'solutionism' and post-foundationalist

---

7   The latter is a chief point of Derrida's (2012 [1993]) hauntology: learning to live with
     those not present.
8   Sticking to merely *technical* solutions, claiming they do not relate to politics, is a selfde-
     ception: For architecture, remaining outside the game of democratic politics, with its
     points of contact with movements and institutions, means joining the ranks of those
     who are currently winning in terms of submitting cities to profits and countries to na-
     tionalism.

democratic theory.[9] The currently predominant theories situate Kracauer at the fringes of critical theory, reclaiming him as a founding figure for cultural studies, or rather, their German-language would-be counterpart of *Kulturwissenschaften*. This results in an underestimation of the political and theoretical dimensions of his writings. Our unpacking of some of his engagements with the term *nonsolution* aims at regaining some of the *political* Kracauer – or Kracauers, given the many fields, in which he wrote before and after his escape from Nazi Germany to Paris in 1933, and subsequent immigration to New York in 1941.

In his last two books, Kracauer implicitly connects *nonsolution* to a long line of conceptual scenarios pointing in this direction: a solution that is one by not being one – neither a solution nor not-a-solution, but a *nonsolution*. The wide expansion of meanings, opening up a terrain for arguments of the post-foundational kind, is what turns this word into something akin to a concept.

In Kracauer's 1960 *Theory of Film*, *nonsolution* appears in the sub-heading of a work on early U.S. film director D.W. Griffith, who was infamous for his apology for racism in his 1915 *Birth of a Nation*. It is, however, as an innovator of cinematic mise-en-scene, who standardized montage patterns (still employed today), that Kracauer approaches him and his "admirable nonsolution". This is how Kracauer (1960: 231) labels Griffith's practice of "establishing dramatic continuity" while, at the same time, "invariably insert[ing] images which do not just serve to further the action...but retain a degree of independence of the intrigue." Kracauer (1969: 129) makes the same statement in his 1969 *History*. This book places film and history – the process and the field of research – in affinity with each other as modes of experience adequate to contingency in social and temporal formations, and to the incommensurability of micro and macro levels of social reality. In order to explain this latter interrelatedness of singular occurrences and overall frameworks in its problematic, yet interminable nature, Kracauer compares it to a "paradoxical relation" between

---

9   With regards to the Left-Socialist non-orthodoxy of Red Vienna´s Austro-Marxism, Kracauer's conceptual exchanges with his long-time Communist friend philosopher Ernst Bloch – discussing possibilities of a non-economistic Marxism that values non-simultaneity and heterogeneity– could serve as a bridge to Max Adler's Austro-Marxist position. Around 1930, Adler steered a revolutionary conceptual course between Bolshevism and Social Democracy, with their respective beliefs in the uniformity and irrelevance of revolutions.

context-oriented images and individuating close-ups in film (ibid. 126). This paradox is what he labels as *nonsolution*.[10]

To explore what a *nonsolution* is and does, Kracauer specifically references a scene from Griffith's 1917 film *Intolerance*, with the alternation between a long shot of a courtroom and a close-up of the clasped hands of the worried heroine in the trial's audience. In the eyes of most viewers, this construction will appear as far from 'paradoxical' or exemplifying a *nonsolution*. Such an alternation of general overviews with particularities within it is an instance of the most normalized mode of organizing cinematic montage. It is, however, this very epitome of a stable form relating parts to a whole, which Kracauer, almost insistently, approaches as something highly precarious, as something on the verge of falling apart under the pressure of internal tensions. What he calls *nonsolution* is a way of maintaining – in his post-messianic terminology: redeeming – *contingency*. The latter is non-necessity: the potentiality of being otherwise, in the face of even most normalized formations. The intrinsically conflictual nature of filmic constructions is carried over from his film theory into his book on history, on the temporality of societies. History, in Kracauer's approach, is contingency; dealing with it is the bread and butter business of politics.

One does not get rid of conflict and internal tensions. *Nonsolution* tells us this, and more: it also does not get rid of that, a shaped, livable formation in which conflict takes place, which is social, cinematic, architectonic, political. In this respect, it is telling how Kracauer's *nonsolution* in film and history was translated into German, namely as "Verzicht auf eine Lösung" – literally "renunciation of a solution".[11] This wording implies that someone, for whatever reason, *abstains from a solution* to a problem. If we turn to history, where *nonsolution* is the paradoxical relation of particularities to generalities, the idea that historians, or history itself, would abstain from such relating produces an even stranger result. Seeing *nonsolution* as *abstaining from solutions* (as the translation suggests) amounts to claiming that *no* forms are shaped, *no* relationships established, *no* foundations attempted. This would manifest a radical ethics of opting out. In contrast, we propose to concede to *nonsolution*'s paradoxical, ultimately political aspect. Thus, *nonsolution* becomes a name for the fact that tension (which is always already there) and conflict (which is

---

10   Self-quoted in *History* as "non-solution"; we prefer the non-hyphenated way.

11   Only once is nonsolution rendered as *Nichtlösung*, a word even rarer in German than *nonsolution* is in English.

sometimes acute, yet always latent) are the very things that keep particulars and generalities related to each other, keep them from separation, indifference – or from freezing into harmony (which would be the end of history). Conflict enables form(s), or rather, *formations*. Note that these forms are not about artworks and styles, they are about social matters: cities, architecture and planning, political projects, and movies.

Instead of a solution made fully present, but also instead of the absence of a solution (two easy ways out of problems, as it were), Kracauer suggests going for two things at the same time. *Nonsolution* means to think and tentatively practice both a solution and its *non*, the fact that it is one by being none. To make this less abstract, and to address political stakes of architecture via *nonsolution*, it is helpful that Kracauer used similar concepts in connection with building(s), in his Weimar German writings around 1930. There is the strange 'non'-word *Nichterfüllungspolitik* (nonfulfillment politics), with which he, as a newspaper reviewer, describes the activities of a clown troupe as they are building a bridge onstage. The clowns´ performance mocks rather than fulfils conventions of work. In Kracauer´s approach, their nonfulfillment is deciphered as an entire politics: a thwarting of norms of rationalized productivity that suggests a different – less exploitative – reality of cooperation. So, there is a sense of a solution in this – the clowns are really building something – but also a nonsolution because they do so nonsensically. Are we then confronted with a performance that short-circuits work and play? This would be a romanticist, easy way out; one which Kracauer blocks by addressing the clowns' rationality as logics of nonsense: a "strange logic" amounting to practices with names as complicated as "nonfulfillment politics" (Kracauer 2011a [1932]; on nonsense cf. Deleuze 1993 [1969]).

Kracauer's most condensed 'non'-formulations directly designate the simultaneity of doing and non-doing something, acting and non-acting. In an early Frankfurt essay, before his newspaper writing turned to social criticism, he suggests that intellectuals take a position of "silent waiting and the nondoing of contemplation" –"*stille[s] Warten und [das] Nichttun der Einkehr*" (Kracauer 2011b [1922]: 371). What interests us about this phrase is not its religious overtone. Spirituality subtracted, this quote is not about quietism, but about a critique of modes of action. Rather than contemplation, the standard translation of *Einkehr*, Kracauer advocates a *turn*, a *Kehre* (albeit a nonHeideggerian one) – specifically, a turn from interiority (in this case: German-idealist interiority) to a perceptive opening up to outside reality. What Kracauer's early 1920s talk of non-doing and emphatic waiting amounts to (1922 in the now-

canonic "Those Who Wait"; Kracauer 2011c) is confronting, not disavowing, social contingency. His best-known name for this is *realism*.

Kracauer (1969: 84) states: "Waiting in this sense amounts to a sort of active passivity…". When he later takes up this motif as the categorical historical attitude towards reality past and present, *active passivity* becomes his term for not dissolving reality (history) into homogenizing narratives (defining solutions). He advocates for taking positions from which it becomes possible to value that which is heterogeneous in reality. This does not mean embracing anything goes (let alone neo-fascist pseudo-oppositions to neoliberalism): this is made clear by the frequent references to Marx and massempowering social struggles in Kracauer's *History*. Also, along with *nonsolution*, his usage of non-doing, waiting, and active passivity does not amount to a program of doing nothing and letting things be (as exploitative, sexist, racist as they are). Especially Kracauer's active passivity is often misinterpreted as if he championed 'passive passivity'. In contrast, active passivity implies a paradox that can be temporalized as a process: a passivity *turns out to be* active; a *surprising* activity manifests itself where we would normally expect nothing *but* passivity. So, in ultimate conceptual condensation, active passivity suggests taking a second look at distributions of power and agency, subordination and possible insubordination, in a given field, be this a way of thinking, a social situation, a historical moment, a political constellation.[12] Waiting and *nonsolution* maintain this grasping of contingency within hierarchy in the other direction, as it were: here, the temporal process is one of things being done, solutions being worked on, to the point at which one stumbles upon something that is not just there, but also not just. A kind of passivity shows up in activity – not as paralysis, rather as waiting, *Einkehr*, turning one's head to look twice. One

---

12   Looking at insubordination as well as 'non'-terms in Kracauer's writings: In *History* (Kracauer 1969: 211) he quotes a condensed distinction made by late 19th century historian Jacob Burckhardt: "History is coordinating and hence non-philosophy, philosophy subordinating and hence non-history." (Burckhardt's original German wording is – without hyphen – "Nichtphilosophie" and "Nichtgeschichte"). Kracauer's writing generally sides with history, against the subordination he associates with principle-driven, ahistorical philosophies. His proto-political non-philosophy of history maintains that every subordinating formation contains, however latent, a coordinating dynamic which, when activated, places in a side-by-side relationship (next to each other, on equal footing) that which is and those who are normally separated by hierarchy. Placing coordination against subordination amounts to advocating – less soberly put – insubordination (On these Kracauerian concepts, cf. Robnik 2019).

looks, for instance, at presuppositions of one´s doing, at the violence inflicted by hegemonic powers and what to do about that. Perhaps by attaching a non to a solution. In this way, one arrives at the mapping of dilemmas rather than finding easy ways out.

Nonsolution in Practice: Well-Planned Nonbuilding

We experienced this kind of active passivity in 2014, when GABU Heindl Architecture took the commission to contribute a project of public art, *Kunst am Bau*, to a short-term prison in the Austrian small town of Krems (cf. Heindl 2017). One could argue that cooperating with the regime of punitive incarceration is in itself something to be rejected politically. Choosing, however, to enter into the process of working with – and in – a problematic coercive institution, doing so as an architectural office within the framework of an art project, you find yourself poised between at least two possible solutions a) contribute to ever so slightly improving some living conditions of inmates, which could end up in beautification that exudes an unequivocal Yes to imprisonment; or b) produce a gesture of criticism, perhaps refusal, that runs a high risk of remaining indifferent to the lived reality of those who spend months in there. In the end, the project *Draußen im Gefängnis – Out in Prison* was a *'nonsolutional'* attempt to do and undo, ground and unground both approaches. Within the prison´s tiny, empty walking yard, a *bambini* type soccer field was built, with a soft floor with field lines adequate for several sports activities, however, extending up the wall on one side to highlight the fact that this yard is, with or without soccer field, too small for people to move. Nothing is changed about the specific violence inflicted on inmates´ bodies, materialized by the smallness of the yard (sticking to some cruel notion of existential minimum), and yet, something is changed, because the project makes the yard a little more usable for passing the day (or the much shorter duration of daily yard time allowed for prisoners). Briefly put, the project represented a case of working on improvements of a hegemonic constellation *and* formulating counter-positions to that very constellation.

Instead of self-congratulation for the best *nonsolution* – which would be a selfcontradiction– the prison yard project should be seen as exemplifying the founding paradox of post-foundational political theory: you cannot, therefore you must. Less pathetically, less individual-ethically, put: grounding a project (architectural or otherwise) in a politicized, thus disputed field is at once im-

possible and unavoidable. Which, needless to say, does not prescribe this or that specific way of grounding, this or that provisional positioning. It does not tell you what your contribution to a *Kunst am Bau* project in a prison should be like. It does not even tell you if you should contribute to it or not. Any decision remains as disputable as the concrete shape it takes. What the postfoundational *nonsolution* orientation rules out, however, is an approach in which you would, ultimately, claim the following: architectural work making inmates' lives less unlivable would *only* justify the system submitting them to these conditions; a project displaying the utter unliveability of the situation would be preferable; consequently, there should be no soccer field, only full exposure of the yard's dismal qualities. Such a position is not far-fetched. A comparable logic is implicit in Tafuri´s criticism of Red Vienna's bourgeoisization of potentially revolutionary masses by giving them nice housing blocks. This argument could easily be re-phrased as a formula in which edgy, non-cozy architecture equals consciousness of one's being the wretched of the earth. In terms of this logic, edgy buildings would advance revolutionary politics. This, however, is an aestheticist and 'maximalist' short-circuit that has you look out for the Big Break to come, or for Art to lead the way, a way paved with frustration. This is familiar from avant-garde understandings of politics that are not too keen on grappling with uneven, contingent realities, be they their own realities or those of others.[13]

Kracauer voiced a similar critique of modernist architecture in his 1927 review of an exhibition on *Das Neue Bauen* ('The New Construction'), a companion piece to his contemporary famous essay called *Mass Ornament*. Just like the fragmentized formations of mass culture in rationalized capitalism, the breaking up of once cozy private spaces into functionalist housing was, according to Kracauer (2011d: 638–639), an "ambiguous" phenomenon. It was decipherable as an anticipation of a new, collectivist social order – or as a belated keeping up of everyday culture with the move towards standardized

---

13   Or those realities that make someone one of the others, or that assemble all the others within someone. Not to mention that people who make such claims on behalf of others, whose environments they find too cozy, tend to spend their own lives in super-beautified environments. If they like their houses, cultural centers and restaurants rough and edgy, then, this is a matter of sophisticated taste from which nothing follows politically (except the need, politely put, to keep their classist contempt for other people's senses of beauty to themselves).

anonymity in Taylorized regimes of work and leisure. To Kracauer, modern-
ized architecture, even if it broke with a bourgeois tradition of self-enclosed
privacy, carried no guarantee for advancing egalitarian politics. What con-
nects his take on functionalist architecture with his *nonsolution* theorem is
the notion of *mourning*: the building's façades, polished by chopping off the
decorations should be read as signs of mourning over an enforced asceticism.
This very mourning, he continues, should be understood as the negative tes-
timonial to a utopian plenitude to come: an emancipated society, in which
decorations would be adequate rather than class demarcations. Around 1930,
Kracauer also uses this 'mourning as utopian testimonial' concept with re-
spect to the problem of social justice. Progressing from observations in a dis-
mal employment office as well as from his immanent reading of white-collar
workers' habitus (Kracauer 1998 [1930]: 106), he writes that, in the present
situation, collectivity mostly manifests as something uniformed, forgetful of
the individual in her or his vulnerability and mortality – especially in Socialist
mass movements. And yet, a kind of justice geared to collectivity is absolutely
preferable to the hegemonic conception of justice tailor-made for the indi-
vidual in his (mostly his) bourgeois aggregate as the proprietor of a tough,
normalized self. Kracauer (2011e [1930]) – himself a renowned staff-writer of
a liberal newspaper – calls for solidarity with an existing collective political
project that struggles for a less exclusive justice. And yet, this solidarity is
framed by mourning, which is the signature of collective justice´s provisional
character (ibid.). Such a solidarity with the masses in uniforms is as manda-
tory as it is *in mourning*, thus pointing at a selfhood beyond property. This also
is a trait of Kracauerian *nonsolution*.

Let us once more place this in affinity with practical experiences in the pol-
itics of planning and architecture. In 2014, as a result of a competition run by
Vienna's city administration who were searching for guidelines to the devel-
opment of the inner-city riverbanks of the *Donaukanal*, the Danube Channel,
GABU Heindl Architecture together with architect Susan Kraupp drew up a
nonbuilding plan (*Nichtbebauungsplan*).[14] The purpose of the peculiarly named
plan was to ease the pressure exerted by investors upon the public space of

14   The rare German wording *Nichtbebauung, Nichtbauen* immediately seems to carry over
      into political struggles over planning: Katrin Lompscher, Berlin's Left-wing Senator for
      Urban Development and Housing, is polemically labelled "*Nichtbausenatorin*" by oppo-
      nents close to investors and houseowners afraid of lower rent limits. (Baumann 2019:
      32)

Donaukanal, which during the last fifteen years had turned from wasteland into a hip subcultural, and then massified recreational area with numerous restaurants and 'urban beaches'. The nonbuilding plan was written to restrict capitalist expansionism, protecting the remaining non-commercialized inner-city riverbanks. An architectural plan for *not* building is the first aspect of *nonsolution* in this ongoing project; it hints at *nonfulfillment politics*. Its second *nonsolution* aspect is the insertion of hesitation into an otherwise free-ranging process of investors appropriating this area and expelling people with low purchase power. This hesitation, as passivity, involves buying time for others´ activity, for counter-hegemonic forces to become articulated. Which is exactly what happened: in 2015, *Donaucanale für Alle*, a protest movement defending the last remaining horizontal inner-city meadows against a restaurant project, referred to the *nonbuilding plan* as supporting their agenda (i.e., keeping that area for people sitting, lying, playing for free). Schematically put, in this political constellation, with the character of a chance encounter, the conflictual, radical democratic potential of the plan was actualized après coup. The plan could have remained an administrative technical tool[15], but it was politicized through the popular agency of a situated movement.

Two final *nonsolutional*, post-foundational points. Obviously, it makes a difference whether a plan supports investors in taking over urban space or tries to block such a kind of takeover; up to the degree that there is a sort of hinge in the plan that hopes and calls for its activation by urban social movements. Radical democratic architectural practice intends to provide for contact zones with urban social movements, or to work in alliance with them. Also, the fact that there is a precise plan in the first place – the *nonbuilding plan* was drawn as precise as one resulting in buildings – has a proto-political dimension in our times of neoliberal flexibilism. Think of how plans and publicly defined generalizing laws are targeted by deregulation propaganda, which describes them as unsuited to the needs of a lively capitalist economy, thus strangling the tender blossoms of investment.[16] A clearly defined, publicized plan, on the other hand, positions itself as an object – and a site – for

---

15   Vienna authorities (who partly had expected a more investor-friendly plan) merely formally "acknowledged" it, thus limiting its legally binding power.

16   The deregulation-happy *non-plan* movement in 1970s anti-masterplan architecture would be one of the starting points of this process of neoliberalization (which, for that matter, is quickly making its peace with neofascist and nationalist-populist politics bent on hollowing out human and civil rights).

dispute. It maintains, through and beyond the sphere of law, a contact zone with issues of universal egalitarian justice at a time when ethics of capital and governments are to 'get things done quickly', which means wanting to get rid of them. Architecture and planning take their positions in this context along the lines of the double meaning of *just architecture*. On the one hand, architecture tries to maintain a relationship with justice as a political category: not because architecture mistakes itself for an expert discipline in moral philosophy, but because it takes part in the questioning of the hegemonic order in the face of massive injustices (in wealth distribution, gender relationships, global economics, etc.).[17] On the other hand – and countering the pathos of the claim just made – architecture is, of course, *'just'* architecture, *only* architecture. In matters of politics, it definitely is nothing close to everything, and it has in most cases rightly given up its pretensions to grandeur in grounding or shaping the whole of social life. But then again, architecture is, in political matters, also *not nothing*; and it certainly is not something in itself. This means that architecture should not bother too much about its 'interiority', or whatever label one applies to quests for the discipline's identity. If there is something like a self-questioning of architecture today, then such an ethical gesture should not result in the solutionism of happily regained 'fundamentals' or essentials. Rather – along Kracauer's lines of *Einkehr* as a turn towards outside reality – it should pose the problem of how to take a position in contingent realities: how to remain sensitive to their 'histories' past and present, and how to turn political chance encounters into strategic alliances.

In the 1923 newspaper article *The Architects' Trade in Distress*, Kracauer gives us a wonderfully condensed, oddly dynamic version of the double meaning of *just architecture* with its affinity for *nonsolution*. He writes (2011f: 567; own translation):

> architects are not so much mediators between things as, for instance, the tradesman [*Kaufmann*] is. Rather, they think in the things themselves and put their efforts into their shaping. Their activity does not immediately found [*stiftet*] relationships between people, but it amounts to creating the spaces that people live in, and it establishes the relationships that prove to be necessary between one space und the other [*zwischen Raum und Raum*].

---

17   In this respect, *nonsolutional* critique echoes in the reference to justice *as* deconstruction of power regimes in Derrida's (2012 [1993]) 'spectral' post-Marxism.

At first, this passage reads as if it cautioned against self-misunderstand-
ings: architects are not politicians or social/economic engineers whose activ-
ity founds the whole of social relationships; rather, architects establish spaces
and spatial relationships of society. But then, this is an innocently phrased
paradox, in which the political agenda expelled through the front door re-
enters through the back door of spatial relationships: how do you work on
relationships between people's spaces without working on relationships be-
tween people? In Kracauer's time when state-communist and fascist politics,
and also capitalist rationalization, began to show their firm grip upon popu-
lations, his proposition is one of architectural politics, however one without
maximalist pretensions, and also distinct from the 'market' (the 'tradesman' or
-woman). Architecture "thinks in things", neither marketing nor subsuming
them.[18] Politically, it acts indirectly, and in a radical democratic perspective,
it does so in alliances with other groups, movements, activities – and, yes,
sometimes in cooperation with political institutions (e.g., trade unions, city
governments, party initiatives), as long as they adhere to democratic stan-
dards and allow for planning and building that helps, however gradually, to
expand egalitarian room for play. Instead of being so purist as to insist on
never working with institutions, we opt for *nonsolutions*. Not least, the prob-
lem of institutions is also how to institutionalize, put on a somewhat regular
basis, the alliance of architects with social and political movements. In our
planning work during recent years for counter-hegemonic collective housing
initiatives in Vienna – an intersectional one-kitchen-house for LGBTQ peo-
ple with and without wheelchairs, with and without migration backgrounds;
a rebuilding for LGBTQ cultural and housing center *Türkis Rosa Lila Villa*; a
housing and working area for anarchist/communist Baugruppe *SchloR* – one
issue becomes salient: the radical democratic and *nonsolutional* impossibility
to fully occupy or ground, but also to fully avoid or unground, the position
of the architect as knowing expert. This brings up, once more, an ambiguous
ethics of self-estrangement. One has to question the identity one is assigned
by existing hierarchies, and, at the same time, face the limits of such ques-
tioning. And it is one of the cases that show that architecture is just (only) ar-
chitecture and that it is connected to an outside; which does not *eo ipso* mean
that it is in alliances. Architecture's affinities with politics, especially radical

---

18   This is an early formulation of Kracauer's idea that thinking reality historically (i.e.,
      politically), means "to think *through* things, not above them." (1969: 192; cf. Heindl 2018)

democratic politics, remains contingent, without guarantees, ungrounded. This is why one has to work on them even more.

References

Baumann, Birgit (2019): "Linke Ostfrau lehrt Vermieter das Fürchten." In: Der Standard 32.

De Carlo, Giancarlo (2005) [1970]: "Architecture's public." In: Blundell-Jones, Peter/Petrescu, Doina/Till, Jeremy (eds.), Architecture and Participation, New York: Spon Press, pp. 3-18.

Deleuze, Gilles (1988) [1966]: Bergsonism, New York: Zone.

Deleuze, Gilles (1993) [1969]: The Logic of Sense, New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, Jacques (2012) [1993]: Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International, London and New York: Routledge.

Fisher, Mark (2014): Ghosts of my Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures, Hants: Zero.

Heindl, Gabu (2017): "Out in Prison: Taking the Case of Spatial Rights to a Prison Court(yard)." In: Petrescu, Doina/Trogal, Kim (eds.), Social (Re)Production of Architecture, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 67-73.

Heindl, Gabu (2018): "Zwischen Raum und Raum: Mit Siegfried Kracauer über gleichwertige Dinge, alltägliche Architektur und Kino als demokratische Öffentlichkeit." In: Groß, Bernhard/Öhner, Vrääth/Robnik, Drehli (eds.), Film und Gesellschaft denken mit Siegfried Kracauer, Vienna and Berlin: Turia + Kant, pp. 62-69.

Heindl, Gabu (2020): Stadtkonflikte: Radikale Demokratie in Architektur und Stadtplanung, Vienna: Mandelbaum.

Kracauer, Siegfried (1960): Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality, Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Kracauer, Siegfried (1969): History: The Last Things Before the Last, New York: Oxford University Press.

Kracauer, Siegfried (1998) [1930]: The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany, London and New York: Verso.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2011a) [1932]: "Akrobat – schöön." In: Kracauer: Werke 5.4, Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 244-249.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2011b) [1922]: "Deutscher Geist und deutsche Wirklich-keit." In: Kracauer: Werke 5.1, Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 363-372.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2011c) [1922]: "Die Wartenden." In: Kracauer: Werke 5.1, Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 383-394.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2011d) [1927]: "Das neue Bauen. Zur Stuttgarter Werkbund-Ausstellung 'Die Wohnung'." In: Kracauer: Werke 5.2, Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 632-639.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2011e) [1930]: "Über Arbeitsnachweise: Konstruktion eines Raumes." In: Kracauer: Werke 5.3, Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 249-257.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2011f) [1923]: "Die Notlage des Architektenstandes." In: Kracauer: Werke 5.1, Berlin: Suhrkamp, pp. 565-571.

Marchart, Oliver (2010): Die politische Differenz: Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben, Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Robnik, Drehli (2014): "Reading/Reclaiming/Recovering Kracauer's Film Thinking of Nonsolution within Postfoundationalist Political Theory." Paper at Conference Where Is Frankfurt Now? Critical Theory and Media Studies, Goethe University Frankfurt. www.academia.edu/9816237.

Robnik, Drehli (2019): "DemoKRACy: Siegfried Kracauers Film-Theorie als Po-litik der nonsolution." In: Biebl, Sabine/Lethen, Helmut/von Moltke, Jo-hannes (eds.), Siegfried Kracauers Grenzgänge: Zur Rettung des Realen, Frankfurt and New York: Campus, pp. 203-216.

Tafuri, Manfredo (1980): Vienna rossa: La politica residenziale nella Vienna socialista 1919-1930, Milan: Electa.

Post-foundationalism departs from the assumption that there is no ground, necessity, or objective rationale for human political existence or action. The edited volume puts contemporary debates arising from the "spatial turn" in cultural and social sciences in a dialogue with post-foundational theories of space and place to devise post-foundationalism as radical approach to urban studies. This approach enables us to think about space not only as socially produced, but also as crucially marked by conflict, radical negativity, and absence. The contributors undertake a (re-)reading of key spatial and/or post-foundational theorists to introduce their respective understandings of politics and space, and offer examples of post-foundational empirical analyses of urban protests, spatial occupation, and everyday life.

In this superb collection, post-foundationalism is elegantly and lucidly brought into conversation with urban and spatial research. With both clarity and depth, these collected essays show that post-foundationalism does not remove the ground for spatial thought but rather productively [un]grounds it by introducing contingency, conflict and lack. Bringing together key thinkers and trenchant case studies, [Un]Grounding is a must read for anyone grappling with today's most acute questions of space and politics across the fields of geography, planning, architecture and urban studies.

Anna J. Secor, Durham University

[Un]Grounding: Post-Foundational Geographies is an invitation to bring spatial thinking into dialogue with political theory. Through a rich and deep engagement with post-foundational political thought, this book opens up new avenues of thinking space and politics in their contingency, without recourse to given grounds. The results are rewarding conceptually and politically; what we have here is both a toolbox to understand post-foundational political thinking and a stepping stone to imagine novel articulations of politics and spatiality.

Mustafa Dikeç, Ecole d'urbanisme de Paris

[transcript]