

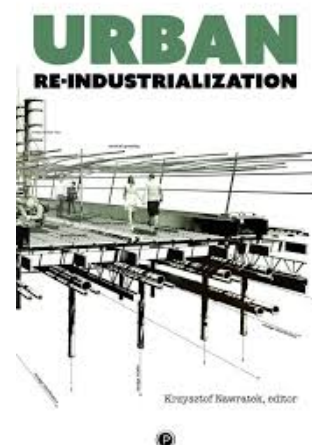
Book Review: Urban Re-Industrialization edited by Krzysztof Nawratek

In *Urban Re-Industrialization*, editor **Krzysztof Nawratek** brings together scholars to discuss the constitutive elements of the image of the creative city and explore ways of moving beyond it towards what Nawratek calls the 'Industrial City 2.0'. While the nature and contribution of the individual essays are at times uneven, this is a kaleidoscopic work which weaves together diverse and intriguing lines of worthwhile investigation, finds [Frederik Weissenborn](#).

***Urban Re-Industrialization*. Krzysztof Nawratek (ed.). Punctum Books. 2017.**

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Cities are sometimes considered agents of social innovation and political emancipation: machines for the production of the new. In *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Emile Durkheim thus posited urbanisation as an efficient cause in the transition from societies based on 'mechanical solidarity' (where labour is not subdivided, and where social codes are strong) to those based on 'organic solidarity' (where the division of labour is more complex, and social codes looser); similar ideas were subsequently put forward by V. Gordon Childe and [Jane Jacobs](#). Given this association with the new, it is perhaps not surprising that the city has been the source of powerful social imaginary, a catalyst for utopian dreams about the good life as well as social and spatial justice. Several such 'images' have been developed over the years – including Ebenezer Howard's 'garden city' and Le Corbusier's model of the 'Ville Contemporaine' – and these have informed the discussion of what constitutes good design as well as the production of actual urban formations.



In more recent years, the defining image of the city arguably has been that of 'the creative city'. This image builds on the idea that urban settlements constitute engines of productivity, rarefaction and value addition – a theory already explored in Jane Jacobs's *The Economy of Cities* (1969) – but adds the more specific narrative that post-industrial cities are places of a particular kind of productivity associated with the tertiary sector and informed by 'creative' agency. The image of the creative city imagines the city as a container of fluid forms of cultural production and consumption, and it evokes a place of knowledge-based labour and 'innovation' which is defined in more or less direct opposition to industrial production and its more hierarchical forms of organisation. Richard Florida's 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, arguably constitutes the high-water mark of this paradigm – synthesising ideas about twenty-first-century urban existence with a post-industrial and eerily post-political worldview – but aspects of it are found in the work of other authors too, and are espoused by think tanks like the McKinsey Global Institute and the Brookings Institute as well as, closer to home, the LSE Cities research centre.

The image of the creative city has, however, become increasingly difficult to sustain after the 2008 financial crisis (in some ways, the ultimate artefact of its time: a catastrophic, cascading phenomenon produced at the intersection of complex financial products and the deregulation of housing markets). This has caused some – [including Florida](#) – to call for a review of the neoliberal urban agenda. But with what should it be replaced? Krzysztof Nawratek's new edited collection, *Urban Re-Industrialization*, offers an answer to this question. Part zeitgeist diagnosis, part utopian reverie, it discusses the constitutive elements of the image of the creative city and explores ways of moving beyond it, towards what Nawratek calls the 'Industrial City 2.0'. (The anthology may be read as a companion piece to Nawratek's previous book, [Holes in the Whole: Introduction to the Urban Revolutions](#), which explored contemporary cities as sites of economical stasis and social crisis rather than progress.)



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Urban Re-Industrialization is divided into three main parts: ‘Why should we do it?’, ‘Political considerations and implications’; and ‘How should we do it?’. This structure is logical, but the contributions do not always fit into the predefined categories. It is, for instance, not obvious why Jonathan Vickery’s excellent text on the evolution of policies in the European Union is located in the first part (why should we do it?) rather than the second (political considerations and implications), and the selection and order of texts sometimes seem haphazard.

This notwithstanding, the book offers an intriguing panorama of theories and practices aimed at questioning and subverting the image of the creative city. Apart from a couple of largely apolitical texts on 3D printing, this, then, is a book with a revolutionary aim – a collection of essays which probe for lacunae in the neoliberal truth of the creative city – and one finds multiple references to the utopian Marxist geographer, Henri Lefebvre, in the different contributions. It is in this utopian light that the call for urban ‘re-industrialisation’ should be seen: not as a nostalgic clamour for a return of heavy industry, but as a vehicle for bringing about new forms of urban coexistence involving communitarian and sustainable forms of production. As Nawratek argues, ‘progressive re-industrialization could be a way towards an alternative, effective economic model’.

Not all the book’s contributions are equally engaging. Tatjana Schneider’s text on what she calls ‘small scale’ and ‘big scale’ political programmes asks an important question – do we lose sight of larger political battles by buying into the (Latourian) assertion that everything is political? – but the text never manages to mount a sustained critique of this tendency. Similarly, Karol Kurnicki’s discussion of ‘loss’ as a kind of extra-being through which a new economic agenda can be hatched never really hits its stride and remains embryonic as a theory. Both investigations would have benefitted from further unpacking. There are, however, also important and genuinely engaging contributions. The aforementioned text by Vickery is one example. It traces the evolution of EU policies designed to further creative industries and to promote urban and interurban integration in the EU. What makes this investigation particularly satisfactory is its refusal to offer up simple truths. Vickery expertly demonstrates the contradictory forces at work in the complex machinery of the political juggernaut and the market forces that it at once influences and is suffused by. This makes for compelling reading and leaves the reader enlightened.

Also of note is Alison Hume's discussion of different industrial models in China and their relationship to urban policy and political ideology. With reference to Beijing's hip 798 Art District, Hume demonstrates how neoliberalism uses art districts as a mechanism to gentrify run-down areas, making it possible 'to re-appropriate an often alternative space into something that fits [the neoliberal] agenda whilst maintaining the outward appearance of being different and independent'. But she goes deeper than this, working backwards in time from 798 to present an archaeology of Chinese economic models over the past 100 years, showing how these draw on and are refracted through different ideological prisms including early Confucianism, Maoism and the neo-Confucianism of Deng Xiaoping. This is a fascinating read: an illuminating example of the nonlinear ways that what Marxists call 'structure' (economic production and consumption) and 'superstructure' (ideological institutions) commingle in, and transform, forms of industry and spatial practice (which itself influences the dialectical process). The text will delight anyone with an interest in urban policy and historical materialism.

Urban Re-Industrialization is a kaleidoscopic work which weaves together diverse lines of investigation. At times, these coalesce to suggest the outline of a bigger picture, a new urban image at the edge of the horizon, but in the end this is not delivered on. There is, for instance, quite a jump from some of the book's more philosophical investigations to the praxis-driven discussions on 3D printing and the so-called 'maker movement'. This chasm remains throughout the book and no real attempt is made to bridge it. To adherents of Lefebvre – for whom theory and practice must be dosed in equal measures – this may not represent a huge problem. Complete theoretical integration furthermore comes with its own inherent dangers: the ossification of truth, the closing off of enquiries. Yet, at least this reader was left with a desire for a more sustained enquiry: the affirmation of a deeper truth, the full-toned commitment to a particular urban vision. That may well come in a later book (perhaps penned by Nawratek). Until this is written, *Urban Re-Industrialization* represents a useful and worthwhile – if not triumphant – investigation.

This review originally appeared at the [LSE Review of Books](#).

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Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the reviewer

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Frederik Weissenborn is an independent researcher. He holds a PhD in Architecture and an MSc in Advanced Architectural Studies, both from the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. Frederik is currently working on a book which explores the different conceptions of the city in Marxist Geography and the 'artefactual' accounts of urban form found in the writings of Bill Hillier and Yuval Portugali.