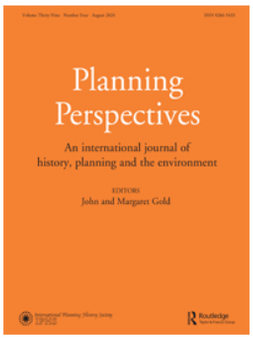

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Tahl Kaminer

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The subjugation to contingency: Popper, postructuralism, and fear of the plan

Tahl Kaminer

Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

ABSTRACT

The critique of planning in the 1960s and 70s legitimized the subsequent emaciation of governmental planning, which marked a shift from comprehensive, rational planning and government-created masterplans to looser forms of urban governance through regulations, codes and 'flexible' frameworks, produced by urban designers, planners, developers and local authorities. This paper interrogates the idea of contingency, a key ingredient in discrediting 'the plan'. It argues that the proposition to 'embrace contingency', which permeated work of scholars ranging from Popper to Laclau, has had a detrimental impact on planning theory and practice. It has condoned the uncertainty and havoc caused by the free-market within the built environment. It continues to de-legitimize attempts to reintroduce 'tight' planning, which describes what ought to be done, and hence steers our cities towards evermore libertarian and neoliberal (non-) governance. This theory paper's argument concisely studies the idea of contingency in general terms, proceeding to analyse key literature in urban design and planning that delegitimized 'the plan' in the 1960s and 70s through accusations of utopianism, and finally looks at more recent contributions that, as this paper demonstrates, continue to follow the contingency-dependent, anti-plan path identified decades ago, often explicitly criticizing neoliberalism while implicitly supporting it.

KEYWORDS

Contingency; utopia; blueprints; planning; masterplanning

> [The] discursive effects of 'modernist' theorizing—reductionism, essentialism, and so on—are nowadays treated in the post-Marxist literature almost as unpardonable gaffes or 'sins'. (Gregor McLennan)[1]

> The notion[s] of contingency and particularity have entered and undermined all our languages that stretch across time, that are true for all societies […]. (Stuart Hall)[2]

Many of the most urgent challenges of current times, including the climate emergency, inequality, and housing crises, fall within the territory addressed by spatial planning and urban design in their diverse forms. Yet current planning, as it exists today in most OECD countries, struggles to respond to these challenges because it is weak, reduced to bureaucratic procedures and lacks the instruments to address contemporary challenges. The weakness of planning today is demonstrated by its limitation to producing frameworks, not blueprints, to creating rules, not plans.[3] The systematic

CONTACT Tahl Kaminer kaminert@cardiff.ac.uk

[1]McLennan, "Post-Marxism and the 'Four Sins,'" 54.
[2]Akomfrah, "The Stuart Hall Project."
[3]Kaminer, "The Emaciation of Planning."

emaciation of governmental planning bodies since the 1970s has resulted in the situation in which in countries such as the United Kingdom 'planning', in effect, no longer takes place – 'planning' understood in its full sense as a 'positive' articulation of what ought to be, as opposed to the restricted 'negative' articulation of what should not, as in regulations.

In the 1950s and 60s, planning 'was design-based and reliant on a "command and control" framework for implementation (the "blueprint"), its key planning instrument being master plans […]'.[4] Masterplans were large-scale, 'showing the exact disposition of all land uses, activities and proposed development […]',[5] and were a vital instrument in devising and delivering 'the plan', that is, the 'positive' articulation of what ought to be. In 1965, at the apex of 'strong' planning, the American planner Alan Altshuler underlined the importance of the masterplan:

> Those who consider themselves comprehensive planners typically claim that their most important functions are (1) *to create a master plan* to guide the deliberations of specialist planners, (2) to evaluate the proposals of specialist planners *in the light of the master plan*, and (3) to coordinate the planning of specialist agencies so as to ensure that their proposals reinforce each other to further the public interest.[6]

Initially, the gravitation of planning during the 1960s from a land-use-focus towards systems and rational planning enhanced the idea of comprehensive planning, expanding the synergy between economic, social and spatial planning, enabling planning to conceive of the city as an amalgam of immaterial processes.[7] In the long run, though, this shift devalued the idea of the destination, a key feature of the plan, and instead encouraged responsive, light-handed and short-term approaches, as in action planning.[8]

Governmental planning in its diverse forms (spatial, economic, and societal) was of course the perfect vehicle for the implementation of postwar neo-Keynesian economics and Fordism. By 1985, however, the direction of travel was clear enough: 'National planning efforts have been abandoned in Britain and the United States', wrote Richard Klosterman, 'and the public agenda in both countries now focuses on deregulation, privatization, urban enterprise zones, and a host of other proposals for severely restricting government's role in economic affairs'.[9] The retreat from planning over the last decades into the realm of 'loose frameworks', 'codes' and 'regulations' is intertwined with similar processes that have taken place throughout society and economy, processes of deregulation and liberalization associated with neoliberal economics and post-Fordism.[10] One example is the wide implementation of New Public Management policies and procedures throughout public bodies, including municipal planning departments. 'The underlying idea', wrote Christopher Hood and Guy Peters, 'was that decreasing emphasis on ex ante and processual controls over public sector managers would be balanced by increased emphasis on ex post evaluation of results'.[11]

In the United Kingdom, for example, masterplans are commissioned today by developers; local government masterplans, when and if commissioned, typically serve as guidance and are not statutory. The key statutory document in the UK is the Local Plan, published every four years or so, following an arduous process. At its inception, following the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, the Local Plan was understood as merely a general guidance of land-use

[4]Jenkins et al., *Planning and Housing*, 130.
[5]Jenkins at al., *Planning and Housing*, 131.
[6]Altshuler, *The City Planning Process*, 299; my emphasis.
[7]Alexander, "After Rationality"; Taylor, *Urban Planning Theory*; Jenkins et al., *Planning and Housing*.
[8]See Jenkins et al., *Planning and Housing*, 139.
[9]Klosterman, "Arguments For and Against Planning," 169.
[10]for deregulation, see Stigler, "The Theory of Economic Regulation"; Peltzman, "Toward a More General Theory"; for a critique, see Harvey, *A Brief History*; Peck et al., "Neoliberal Urbanism."
[11]Hood and Peters, "The Middle Aging," 271.

intention.[12] The function of the Local Plan is primarily to guide potential developers – it is not, in effect, a plan, but a loose framework. In the absence of comprehensive statutory plans, it allows the market to shape the outcome with only minimal steering by the local government. As a result of the liberalization of planning discussed above, planning in its broadest sense is no longer responsible for the direct allocation of resources in advance of their distribution, *ex-ante*; nowadays, the allocation of resources is done by the market at their point of distribution and evaluation is *ex-post*.[13]

The emaciation of planning is not the focus of this paper; nor is the inability of contemporary planning to address current urgencies facing societies.[14] Instead, the paper aims at developing a better understanding of an idea that legitimized the curtailing of planning – namely, the theory of contingency – and its relevance to the question of planning among urbanists, planners and urban designers. Whereas the term 'contingency' is not much used in urbanist discourse, the concept is nevertheless implicitly ubiquitous, folded into discussions of universality versus particularity, of uncertainty, 'loose frameworks', 'meanwhile use' and risk.[15] One aim of this paper, then, is to drag the concept of contingency out of the shadows and make it visible. A second aim is to critique the role of the idea of contingency in undermining the legitimacy of planning. The logic of contingency, this paper argues, continues to support today the rejection of tight planning through its disavowal of universalism and utopianism – and hence, any call for enhanced planning powers, for *ex-ante* allocation of resources or for a resuscitation of 'positive' planning has to first contend with the challenge posited by contingency.

The paper is animated by the idea that forms of 'positive' planning are warranted first-and-foremost as a means of addressing poverty and inequality, that their loss has been to society's detriment. Planning theory is not lacking critiques of neoliberal urban development or commendable alternative propositions. Some alternative proposals, such as Communicative Planning Theory, focus on the democratic deficit.[16] Others, such as Susan Fainstein's 'just city',[17] highlight equity, diversity and participation. Similarly, some planners have lamented the loss of utopian thought or called for its resuscitation.[18] Most of these arguments have remained in the realm of theory. Moreover, because yesterday's 'positive' planning remains an anathema, they search in distances for answers that lay hidden in plain sight. The utopia which is called for is typically stripped of the excesses which made it utopian in the first place (e.g. Fainstein's 'spirit of utopia'). Much of this is beyond the scope of the argument here: this paper cannot cover all alternative propositions, address in its entirety the 1960s critique of planning, or elucidate an original proposition. It chooses to focus on contingency as a central, even if unacknowledged, element, which ties into others such as planning's indictment for 'utopianism'.

Three related and overlapping uses of the term 'contingency' can be identified in the literature. The first of these three is the most common use of 'contingency' in organizational and management studies. The latter two are mostly found in the work associated with poststructuralism and postmodernism discussed later in this paper:

[12]Collar, *Planning*.
[13]Mandel, "In Defence"; Kaminer, "The Emaciation of Planning."
[14]Sager, "Neo-Liberal Urban Planning"; Gleeson and Low, "Revaluing Planning"; Peck et al., "Neoliberal Urbanism."
[15]See, for example, Beck, *Risk Society*. Kees Van der Heijden, in *Scenarios*, describes risk as a substratum of uncertainty.
[16]Albrechts, "Strategic (Spatial) Planning Reexamined"; Healey, *Collaborating Planning*; Sager, *Communicative Planning Theory*.
[17]Fainstein, *The Just City*.
[18]Pinder, "In Defence of Utopian Urbanism;" "Necessary Dreaming;" Harvey, *A Brief History*, 202; Even 'incrementalist' Lindblom, in 1979, hesitantly called for utopian thought – see Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain*, 132.

(1) The literal use of the term to refer to the particular, unforeseeable and unexpected circumstances that shape a given reality.
(2) The use of the term to undermine the validity claims of universalizing, essentializing and generalizing arguments or theories. Such deployment of 'contingency' exposes the shortcomings of theories that posit a reductive understanding of reality by ignoring the particular dimensions of an issue and how these shape an outcome, a process and a reality. This second use stresses the *critical* dimensions of the term.
(3) An expanded use of the term to project an understanding of reality as constituted primarily, or even solely, via the particularities of its condition, to emphasize inherent complexity, instability, and unpredictability of the world. This use goes a step further than merely a critique of universalism: contingency here supports an understanding of the world construed as an assemblage of disconnected, discrete and particular moments and processes in the absence of a 'whole'.

This paper takes issue with the third of these three. It argues that the step taken from the second to the third use is significant and has contributed to undermining the legitimacy of societies' attempts to shape their future – here, discussed primarily through the prism of spatial planning and urban design.

This paper does not suggest that the ideas surrounding contingency are *directly* responsible for the curtailing of the powers of planning. Governments, under pressure to respond to stagnation in productivity, inflation, unemployment, and fall in companies' profits,[19] and increasingly sceptical of neo-Keynesian prescriptions, sought new solutions, adopting monetarist policies and other 'remedies' outlined by the Chicago School economists.[20] Contingency, in this context, had an ideological function, contributing to the delegitimization of economic, societal and spatial planning typical of Keynesian economies and the Welfare State.

This paper will first discuss contingency and its use in the poststructuralist critique of Marxism, which led to the valorization of the term. It will be followed by interrogating the use of the term in the critique of planning as utopian. The paper will proceed from there to discuss the recent focus on 'flexible' frameworks,[21] exposing the indirect impact of ideas of contingency on planning and urban design theory. The ability of planning authorities to shape urban processes differs significantly from one country to another, yet overall, bar some exceptions, the trajectory away from 'tight' planning is widely shared. The 'logic of contingency' emerges from this story as a means of legitimizing the free-market and an obstacle to rectifying some of today's shortcomings of planning structures and practices.

The logic of contingency

Theories and concepts of contingency, in the sense pursued here, have been developed extraneously to planning, primarily in philosophy and in social and political theory. 'Double contingency', for example, articulates a critical moment for sociology in which social relations are established by the social interaction of two 'contingent' individuals. In the fields of organizational and management studies, contingency is understood primarily as the basic circumstances that shape an

[19]Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*; Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*; Harvey, *A Brief History*.
[20]Harvey, *A Brief History*.
[21]Greenberg, "A Third Way"; Moroni, "Complexity"; "Planning, Law, Ownership"; Sendra and Sennett, *Designing Disorder*.

organization's performance, such as the existence (or absence) of a mass market and availability (or unavailability) of technology for the mass production of a commodity.[22] In 1961, Burns and Stalker termed the organization of the typical large-scale Fordist corporation of the postwar period 'mechanical', and contrasted it with an 'organic' model that emphasized adaptability and flexibility as a means of response to changing contingencies.[23] The transition from Fordism to post-Fordism has meant that today's leading firms have increased their ability to react to contingencies by adopting a mixed mechanical – organic organization whereas smaller, cutting edge firms are 'organic' in their structure; large-scale 'mechanical' organizations are today the exception.

The term's emphasis on the particularities of a situation allowed its deployment in support of 'critiques of positivism and inductive generalizations about universalist norms',[24] which were duly formulated by scholars associated with post-Marxism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. Most of the scholars who deployed the term in the late 1960s developed their work from a radical critique, in which a focus on the particularity of reality enabled rejecting Marxism and Hegelianism as essentialist, universalist, totalizing, and erroneous.[25] The transition from 'Saussurian' structuralist linguistics to poststructuralism was accompanied by a shift of emphasis from the relation of the signifier to the signified to an interest in the arbitrariness of this relationship, already demonstrating an emergent interest in the contingent.

In Hegel's universal history – a target of poststructuralist critique – 'contingency' appears as both the opposite and a manifestation of 'necessity'. Hegel's universal history is a story of a progressive development of the spirit (*Geist*), of reason and freedom in society, which concludes once reason and freedom have been fully developed in a self-conscious society that can identify this – and thus its own – historical trajectory. It is a teleological history, in the sense that it can only be read from a specific standpoint in time. The progression of history along the trajectory of increasing reason and freedom is the 'necessary' component. Contingency appears here as the opposite of necessity, related to the instability created by the negative in Hegel's dialectics, yet the particularities of a specific context are also key elements in ensuring the move forwards and hence they too are ostensibly 'necessary' aspects of this history. Throughout, Hegel subordinates contingency to necessity.

In Marx, 'necessity' includes 'natural necessity' (*Naturnotwendigkeit*), the term he uses to describe the struggle of early humans with nature for their basic needs.[26] In nineteenth-century society, the factory labourer likewise worked for a reward that was external to the work itself – due to the necessity of income in order to feed oneself, to pay rent and so on. In these conditions, freedom does not exist, only necessity. 'The first step toward freedom, toward the period of real history when men will operate autonomously in the "self-conscious activity of freely associated individuals"', wrote the theorist Donald C. Lee, 'is knowledge of those laws of capitalism which operate with "blind necessity"'.[27] The ending of human subservience to necessities is the means of ending alienation and achieving true freedom, which is reached via a historically-determined path, a 'necessary' route to freedom, not dissimilar to Hegel's 'necessity'.[28] Certain processes are therefore historically determined: the 'laws' of 'inevitable' ('necessary') historical development.

[22]Hage, "Economic Organizations," 189.
[23]Burns and Stalker, *Managing Innovation*.
[24]Chaney, "Gendered Political Space," 204.
[25]McLennan, "Post-Marxism."
[26]Marx, "Selected Writings," 496–7; Kandiyali, "Freedom and Necessity!; Klagge, "Marx's Realms."
[27]Lee, "The Concept of 'Necessity'," 49.
[28]Lee, "The Concept of 'Necessity.'"

In its critique of Marxism and Hegelianism, poststructuralist theory emphasized 'contingency' and questioned 'necessity'. Michel Foucault, for example, rejected historical determinism and highlighted the contingency that mediates between the power of the apparatuses that shape society and the final form of society.[29] Foucault offered 'a new logic of contingency in his idea that causality and necessity be abandoned and replaced by "a polymorphous cluster of correlations"'.[30] Jacques Derrida's deconstruction took aim at universal meta-narratives, deliberately deploying a conception of an 'unstable' reality for the purpose. In the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Hegel's universal history is associated with the despotism of the State – a form of teleological layering of new meanings on events of the past, making the events legible as part of a retrospective universal history.[31] In Contrast, Deleuze and Guattari's own proposition, argues Craig Lundy, is non-linear, contingent, and heterogeneous.[32] Contingency takes centre stage and 'necessity' is absent: there are no 'laws' here of inevitable progression.

The influential *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, authored by political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, explicitly states that one of its interests is to describe 'the logic of contingency'.[33] Laclau and Mouffe argue that contingency not only provides an explanation for inevitable gaps between theory and reality, but completely shatters inflexible universalist theories.[34] '[T]he relations between "necessity" and "contingency" cannot be conceived as relations between two areas that are delimited and external to each other […]', Laclau and Mouffe wrote, 'because the contingent only exists within the necessity'.[35] They argue that 'necessity' is, in effect, contingent, temporary and in-flux.

An important influence on Laclau and Mouffe was the early twentieth-century political theorist Georges Sorel, 'the philosopher of social contingency':

> We find in Sorel not only the postulation of an area of 'contingency' and 'freedom', replacing the broken links in the chain of necessity, but also an effort to think the specificity of that 'logic of contingency', of that new terrain on which a field of totalizing effects is reconstituted. […] Unlike [Eduard] Bernstein, he does not make the slightest attempt to replace [Marxist] orthodoxy's historical rationalism with an alternative evolutionist view […].[36]

Sorel considered the State and its bureaucracy a self-perpetuating apparatus, independent from hegemonic ideologies and political parties: the State as the 'false god' of security, a threat to freedom.[37] According to Sorel's theory of contingency, every era has to return to the question of freedom and authority, underlining the importance of the immediate response to the contingent at the expense of a 'necessary' historical trajectory. Sorel, wrote theorist Irving Louis Horowitz, 'doubted the efficacy of categorical generalities that offered no means of verification or disproof, and no way of separating tautological from empirical statements'.[38]

Against utopia: from open society to collage city

The propagation of contingency and the critique of totality, universalism, and historical determinism have been key vehicles of the critique of utopian thought. Here too, the crosshairs were placed

[29]Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; *Archaeology of Knowledge*; Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism*, 105–11.
[30]McLennan, "Post-Marxism," 67.
[31]Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*.
[32]Lundy, "The Necessity and Contingency."
[33]Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xxiii.
[34]Ibid., 14–15.
[35]Ibid., 100.
[36]Ibid., 31–32.
[37]Vernon, *Commitment and Change*; Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason*.
[38]Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason*, 174.

on Marxism, identified as 'utopian'. In the 1940s, long before the poststructuralist critique, the work of liberal scholars such as Karl Popper and Friedrich Hayek provided arguments against utopia that persist today.[39] At the time, their work was elucidated as a defence of liberalism and contributed to what planner Andreas Faludi called 'the classic planning debate'.[40] Hayek had 'enormous importance in influencing the negative view of utopian thinking in Western political culture'.[41] He argued against centralized planning, describing the market as a self-organizing system that could allocate resources efficiently by reacting to localized contingencies and needs.[42] In planning and urban design, Hayek's writings have indirectly shaped the 1960s and 70s critique of planning and, more recently, the conceptions of alternatives to masterplanning, as this paper will later demonstrate. Popper, though, has had a more direct impact on the fields' rejection of utopianism and rational planning.[43] 'Popper's arguments against central planning remain powerful', wrote Faludi in 1983.[44] The urban theorist Nathaniel Coleman has argued that the absence of utopia in current architectural thought 'is as much as anything founded on a myth, in many ways understandably spun by Karl Popper in *The Poverty of Historicism* […] and *The Open Society and Its Enemies* […], which laid the foundations of the anti-utopianism that has persisted ever since […]'.[45]

Popper argued against historical determinism ('historicism'), described as an erroneous methodology within social sciences.[46] In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper directly targeted utopia and Plato, Hegel and Marx, whom he associated with it. The latter two were identified as culprits in the rise of 'historicism': Hegel for his philosophy of history, Marx for his historical materialism. Popper's critique of utopias was not limited to modern, social utopias, placed at the end of time, directing and determining the unfolding of history towards their full realization, but also included 'classical', a-temporal utopias such as Plato's.

The attempts to realize blueprints of an ideal society via social engineering are described by Popper as misguided and dangerous.[47] Popper posits the practices of the 'piecemeal social engineer' as an alternative: a figure that focuses on the pragmatic, immediate, and particular, and shuns holistic, 'total' approaches and idealized distant futures. When discussing the work of the 'piecemeal engineer', he writes:

> *Institutions* are inevitably the result of a compromise with circumstances, interests, etc., […] the Utopian attempt to realize an ideal state, using a blueprint of society as a whole, is one which demands a strong centralized rule of a few, and which therefore is likely to lead to a dictatorship.[48]

> One of these unpredictable factors is just the influence of social technology and of political intervention in economic matters. The social technologist and the piecemeal engineer may plan the construction of new institutions, or the transformation of old ones; they may even plan the ways and means of bringing these changes about; but 'history' does not become more predictable by their doing so. For they do not plan for the whole of society, nor can they know whether their plans will be carried out; in fact, they will hardly ever be carried out without great modification, partly because our experience grows during construction, partly because we must compromise.[49]

[39]For example: Scott, "Authoritarian High Modernism."
[40]Faludi, "Critical Rationalism", 266.
[41]Olssen, "Totalitarianism and the 'Repressed' Utopia," 528.
[42]Fontenot, *Non-Design.*
[43]Faludi, "Critical Rationalism."
[44]Ibid., 269.
[45]Coleman, "Utopic Pedagogies," 317.
[46]Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, II; *The Poverty of Historicism, III*; *The Open Society.*
[47]Popper, *The Open Society*, 148; Dağlioğlu, "Karl Popper's Architectural Legacy," 113; Olssen, "Totalitarianism and the 'Repressed' Utopia."
[48]Popper, *The Open Society,* 149.
[49]Ibid., 352.

The practice of the 'piecemeal engineer' privileges the here and now of battling against the most urgent evils rather than the 'greatest ultimate good'.[50] Society should not be conceived as a comprehensive totality, according to the philosopher, but rather, through a Gestalt psychology approach,[51] as a loose 'whole'. Popper, then, emerges as the scourge of totality, of utopia and of planning.

In the 1960s, Popper's arguments were echoed by the architects and planners of Team 10 and were cited in what Faludi termed 'the modern planning debate'.[52] The critic Reyner Banham extolled the designers who were reading Popper and embracing 'uncertainty'.[53] David Braybrooke and Charles Lindblom referred to Popper in their 1963 *A Strategy of Decision*, a book with lasting influence in planning.[54] They questioned the rationality of decision making and proposed a flexible approach in which ends are adjusted according to needs, laying the ground for 'incremental' planning that reflected the logic of Popper's 'piecemeal engineer'.[55] George Chadwick, a decade later, used Popper's work to criticize rational planning and utopianism, and turned to the philosopher's writings on objective knowledge and scientific methods to build his own proposition.[56] '[W]e have suggested that human beings are self-adapting, self-satisficing, self-optimising', he wrote, 'and if they are, why should we [planners] not leave the attempt at optimisation to them?'[57] Planners such as Nigel Taylor followed suit in engaging Popper's later writings as a means of increasing the scientism of their work, whereas John Friedmann in 1978 criticized Popper's 'objective knowledge' as technocratic.[58]

Popper's work proved particularly useful for the critiques of utopia and planning, as demonstrated by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's influential 1978 *Collage City*. *Collage City* uses Popper's critique of utopia to discredit modern planning. Hegel's universal history is ridiculed.[59] Versailles is derided as 'the triumph of generality'.[60] Modernism is accused for 'the fantasy of the comprehensive city of deliverance, propounded as poetry and read as prescription […]'.[61] Planning is depicted as a 'historicist' practice – a Hegelian, future-oriented, historically determinist 'error', focused on delivering utopia at the end of time. Planning, Rowe and Koetter argue, is bound to fail – the contingency of reality disrupts the plan.[62] The destination of the plan, *utopia*, can never be reached – it is merely a mirage. Rowe and Koetter cite Popper in a passage that emphasizes instability and contingency rather than a linear historical progression:

> [T]he period of utopian construction is liable to be one of social change. (For) in such a time ideas are liable to change also. […] If this is so, the whole approach is in danger of breaking down. For if we change our ultimate political aims while attempting to move towards them we may soon discover that we are moving in circles … (and) it may easily turn out that the steps so far taken lead in fact away from the new aim … [63]

[50]Ibid., 148.
[51]Dağlioğlu, "Karl Popper's Architectural Legacy," 115.
[52]Van den Heuvel, "The Open Society and its Experiments"; Fontenot, *Non-Design*; Faludi, "Critical Rationalism."
[53]Fontenot, *Non-Design*, 73–75.
[54]Braybrooke and Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision*.
[55]Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through'."
[56]Chadwick, *A Systems View of Planning*; Faludi, "Critical Rationalism."
[57]Chadwick, *A Systems View of Planning*, 361.
[58]Faludi, "Critical Rationalism"; Friedmann, "The Epistemology of Social Practice."
[59]Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, 27–28.
[60]Ibid., 90.
[61]Ibid., 48.
[62]Rowe and Koetter write of 'modernist architecture' and the 'modernist city' even when inferring 'urban design' and 'planning'.
[63]Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, 123.

Where Popper deploys the figure of the piecemeal engineer, Rowe and Koetter introduce Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur, who likewise works with contingency and fragments. They identify in the work of Lévi-Strauss a balance between necessity and contingency, unlike modern architecture and planning, which opted for 'an all-pervasive scaffold which largely exhibited itself, a scaffold which pre-empted and controlled any incidentals'.[64] The authors state their opposition to planning as a means of shaping the future, highlighting that their own 'argument, […] supposes that, beyond a point, protracted political continuities should neither be postulated nor hoped for and that, correspondingly, the continuities of hyper-extended "design" should also be viewed with doubt'.[65]

The assemblage of techniques the authors propose, which is termed 'collage city', 'frees' itself from destination (utopia) and from totality. As a methodology of adding to and adapting cities, collage city is reactive to circumstance and restricted to physical form. The past does not vanish in this methodology – it is present through the extant buildings and structures. The new additions are expected to be shaped by these existing, 'contingent' morphologies – they react (geometrically, morphologically), identify a suitable response ('decorum'). In this sense, collage city is a technique free of 'Hegelian' linear history, a means of adding through piecemeal actions. The whole is reduced to a loose collage in which each element retains its characteristics, autonomy and difference. Social, political and economic dimensions are superseded by form. For Rowe and Koetter, the idea of the collage suggested democratic pluralism, yet it also can be read as the reduction of community to the bare minimum, to the glue that connects the fragmented collage elements to the canvass.

From masterplanning to 'flexible' frameworks

Planning as a system, advocacy planner Paul Davidoff suggested, is a politically-neutral 'container' that is used *politically* to promote conservative *or* progressive outcomes.[66] Planning legislation, regulations, processes and protocols, and governmental planning departments become vehicles of specific political agendas. The emaciation of planning discussed above can be described as such an agenda. Yet, while regulation generally and economic regulation specifically were developed as much as a means of increasing market efficiencies or in service of private interests as for public good,[67] planning was an answer to the havoc and uncertainty created by the free market. It was a response to the same conditions to which nineteenth-century Marxism and social utopias reacted. As the Marxist theorist Ernst Mandel argued,[68] a socialist economy is necessarily a planned economy: it opposes the market's allocation of resources by allowing in advance (*ex-ante*) allocation of resources according to society's needs. The diverse forms of planning – economic, societal and spatial – are bound together, and are proven and effective means of redistribution. All three were invested in producing a better future by subordinating change to the public's will and interests.

Few planners or urban designers would have read *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* or be familiar with the question of Marxist 'necessity'. Yet by the late 1980s, the ideas of Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault were well-disseminated, however loosely, throughout most disciplines, and would become visible in urbanism in recent Deleuzian-influenced assemblage theory.[69] The ideas propagated by

[64]Rowe and Koetter, "From Collage City," 104.
[65]Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, 117.
[66]Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism."
[67]Stigler, "The Theory of Economic Regulation."
[68]Mandel, "In Defence of Socialist Planning."
[69]McFarlane, "Assemblage"; Kamalipour and Peimani, "Assemblage Thinking."

these thinkers, such as anti-essentialism, anti-universalism, and the rejection of utopia and historical determinism, not only represented the *Zeitgeist*, but articulated and affirmed it. They sat comfortably with Popper's critique of utopianism and Hegel, and with the general critique of the state by the advocates of neoliberalism. They map on to planning theory's concern for uncertainties and growing interest in solutions that avoided untenable certainties.[70] Such thought challenged also the tenets of Keynesian economics and planning: the 'Keynesian' state's attempt, through planning, to conceive of a better future, to identify and direct a warranted historical trajectory.

Some key planning theory publications that argued against 'rigid' and 'utopian' planning have been mentioned above. Other literature emphasized that uncertainty can never be completely eliminated,[71] or that decisions by policy makers are never fully rational.[72] Urban design's canonical texts carry a similar message: 'Non-Plan', the provocative 1969 article by Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price,[73] is arguably the most radical, suggesting that the complete elimination of planning would guarantee 'freedom'. The paper opens its argument by listing some cases in which plans turned out successful thanks to the quirks of reality rather than by design – the contingencies the planners had been unable to imagine, such as the susceptibility of Hampstead Garden Suburb to accommodating car garages. Jane Jacobs' 1961 *Life and Death of Great American Cities* is an unabashed diatribe against postwar planning;[74] the architectural historian Anthony Fontenot has demonstrated the manner in which Jacobs' 'diverse city' and 'organized complexity' are an urban counterpart to Hayek's 'spontaneous order'.[75] Christopher Alexander's early work is an attempt to vastly increase complexity in urban thought, moving away from rigid descriptive forms ('the tree') to more complex forms (the semilattice), and introducing early conceptions of spontaneity.[76] Kevin Lynch encouraged urbanists to notice the cognitive, psychological and experiential aspects of cities.[77] Gordon Cullen's picturesque-revival *Townscape* replaced planners' 'rational' overview with the experiential 'view from the street' and an emphasis on urban irregularities and particularities, which were often produced by unexpected circumstances and chance.[78]

Such publications emphasized the richness of the spontaneous city in contrast to the dullness of the planned, 'over-determined' city. Contingencies are here not only the basis for the critique of the planned city, but are key components of the alternative propositions posited by these publications. In a practical sense, though, such propositions to enrich and enhance urban vibrancy could be – and in some cases have been – absorbed into planning and urban development alongside masterplanning and other postwar planning instruments to compensate for the latter's sterility.[79] The 'Loose' or 'flexible' framework, however, as an instrument designed to *replace* the masterplan, posits a more direct challenge to planning. Urban designers such as Kenneth Greenberg propose 'flexible' frameworks as a means of addressing the contingent:

> Experience is teaching that prescriptive templates do not hold up well when market forces, changing programs, and new needs come into play. *What are needed instead are flexible frameworks* that allow for innovation, hybridization, organic growth, change, and surprise. While this shift is

[70]Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain*; Abbott, "Understanding and Managing the Unknown;" Shackle, *Decision, Order and Time*.
[71]Shackle, *Decision, Order and Time*.
[72]Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through'."
[73]Banham et al., "Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom."
[74]Jacobs, *Life and Death of Great American Cities*.
[75]Fontenot, *Non-Design*.
[76]Alexander, *A City is Not a Tree*.
[77]Lynch, *The Image of the City*.
[78]Cullen, *Townscape*.
[79]See, for example, Miazzo, *We Own the City*, 26–33.

> challenging to planning that aspires to an illusionary end-state predictability, its inherent pragmatism has the potential to liberate design and harness many kinds of creativity coming from others. Urban design becomes more like improvisational jazz. In Stuart Brand's terminology, we are learning 'how cities learn.' Rather than producing finite products, urban design is increasingly about the anticipation and guidance of long-term transformations *without fixed destinations*, mediating between values, goals, and actual outcomes.[80]

The sociologist Richard Sennett has posited 'the open city', a term urban designer Kees Christiaanse associated with Popper's 'open society',[81] as a vehicle for embracing contingency. Sennett wrote that:

> If a novelist were to announce at the beginning of a story, here's what will happen, what the characters will become, and what the story means, we would immediately close the book. All good narrative has the property of exploring the unforeseen, of discovery; the novelist's art is to shape the process of that exploration. The urban designer's art is akin.[82]

Sennett echoes the critique of Jacobs and other 1960s voices.[83] But he extends the object of critique from the city created by 'state socialism', the term he uses for 'tight' postwar planning,[84] the focus of Jacobs, Lynch and others, to the more recent city of 'bureaucratic capitalism', a term describing contemporary corporate-driven urban development. Sennett wrote that 'If [Sennett's book from 1970] *The Uses of Disorder* saw modernist developments as impositions of order that were erasing city life, today the forms of order imposed come from a globalised real-estate industry'.[85] A few years earlier, Sennett wrote: 'The social contrast to the closed system [of the Fordist – Keynesian city] is not the free market, nor is a place ruled by developers the alternative to the Brittle City. That opposition is in fact not what it seems'.[86] As a result, the differentiation between the Fordist – Keynesian city and post-Fordist – neoliberal city is side-lined: the two are merged into a single adversary, the 'Brittle City'. The Brittle City is depicted as a closed system programmed towards full integration of parts into a whole – conveniently focusing on processes of homogenization while overlooking the increasing independence of parts, fragmentation and the weakness of the 'whole' caused by the free market in conditions of weak planning.

In a jarring statement, Sennett transfers responsibility for addressing contingency to individuals, arguing that 'people need to develop an ability to deal with ambiguity, difficulty and the unknown to explore the unexpected turn rather than defend against it'.[87] Later, he adds: 'If we want urban development to be open, we cannot counter these forces [of urbanization] simply by saying "slow down" or "wait"'.[88] Such statements worryingly echo the neoliberal managerialism exemplified by the title of a management manual such as *Go with It: Embrace the Unexpected to Drive Change*.[89] 'Embrace change', in such contexts, typically infers the curtailing of opposition to neoliberal restructuring. The logic of such statements is straightforward, even while it contradicts other features of Sennett's own prescription: go with the flow, adapt to circumstance.

[80]Greenberg, "A Third Way," 638; my emphasis.
[81]Christiaanse, "The Open City and Its Enemies," 25.
[82]Sennett, "The Open City," 5.
[83]Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*; "The Open City"; Sendra and Sennett, *Designing Disorder*.
[84]The use of the term 'state socialism' to identify the practices of governments of both the Western and Eastern coldwar blocs is telling.
[85]Sendra and Sennett, *Designing Disorder*, 3.
[86]Sennett, "The Open City," 2.
[87]Sendra and Sennett, *Designing Disorder*, 13–14.
[88]Ibid., 27.
[89]Hough, *Go with It*.

The proposition of 'flexible' frameworks was inspired, to a degree, by unplanned, informal settlements, and in particular their ability to self-organize.[90] Achieving 'a complex spontaneous order, a self-organizing order' is at the heart of another contemporary planning proposition,[91] complex cities, envisioned as a means of enhancing urban adaptability to circumstance.[92] In Stefano Moroni's complexity theory,[93] for example, 'nomocracy' (a term borrowed from Hayek) describes the desirable form of governing that deploys 'framework-instruments' rather than masterplans and avoids deciding, in advance, on specific, warranted outcomes. Alexander, Mazza and Moroni wrote that:

> Premised on concepts of self-organising systems in complexity, nomocracy is limited to framing the spontaneous order that already exists. Nomocracy refrains from specific directive coordination, but works through general relational rules and norms. Plans to regulate private decisions or direct societal action are proscribed, limiting state planning to public undertakings such as infrastructure and public services and facilities. Nomocracy's instruments, instead, are […] prohibitive rather than directive: laws, regulations, standards and codes […].[94]

Moroni argues that 'nomocracy' ought to be the form of urban governance conducted by government, whereas a more prescriptive approach ('teleocracy') would be acceptable for decisions by private sector regarding its own property – in other words, the masterplan should be the privilege of the developer and should not be a statutory instrument of government.[95] Moroni's argument cannot, of course, be generalized to all variations of complexity theory; however, a recuring theme is that self-organization is achieved through individual intent and activities rather than through collective decision and that there is no predictability of outcome.[96] In his 1990s excursions into complexity theory, the architecture critic Sanford Kwinter similarly argued that a new, complex urbanism 'does not plan, it does not precisely or inflexibly impose, and it does not fetishize the integrity and pristine unfolding of the fixed abstract scheme'.[97] The urbanist Maroš Krivý commented that '"complexity" perpetuates another kind of naturalism, one that considers unpredictable events as the norm and catastrophic change as inevitable'.[98]

Sennett's above-mentioned statements ('people need to develop […]'), recall not only neoliberal managerialism, but more specifically the discussion of 'resilience' – the influential concept developed in recent times to address unpredictable events and catastrophic change.[99] 'Resilience' suggests developing systems, communities and individuals' capacities to adapt to sudden, externally-induced stress or shock in fluctuating conditions.[100] It reduces the pressures to address the actual *causes* of the unwarranted conditions, such as climate change or market volatility, and consequently demonstrates how the emphasis on the contingent leads to the transfer of responsibilities from government to individuals and to the acceptance of reality as it is. The resilience expected of cities and their inhabitants is modelled on markets' (presumed) resilience to shocks, calling for planning's focus on the contingent rather than on the realization of 'the good city'. Moroni

[90]Sennet, *The Uses of Disorder*; Sendra and Sennet, *Designing Disorder*.
[91]Moroni, "Complexity and the Inherent Limits of Explanation and Prediction," 249.
[92]Batty, *Cities and Complexity*; Boonstra and Boelens, "Self-Organization in Urban Development"; Moroni, "Complexity and the Inherent Limits of Explanation and Prediction,"; Portugali, *Complexity, Cognition and the City*; Portugali, Meyer, Stolk, et al., *Complexity Theories of Cities Have Come of Age*.
[93]Moroni, "Complexity"; "Planning, Law, Ownership," 306.
[94]Alexander, Mazza and Moroni, "Planning Without Plans?" 39.
[95]Moroni, "Complexity"; "Planning, Law, Ownership"; Alexander, Mazza and Moroni, "Planning Without Plans?."
[96]Rauws "Civic Initiatives."
[97]Krivý, "The Unbearable Lightness," 66.
[98]Ibid., 69.
[99]Burayidi et al., *Urban Resilience*; MacKinnon and Derickson, "From Resilience to Resourcefulness."
[100]What is resilience if not a means of mitigating risk (Beck, *Risk Society*)? And risk, in this context, is the contingent.

discloses as much when extrapolating his own urban complexity theory from Hayek's description of the free market as a self-organizing system.[101] If Hayek's neoliberalism has an idealized form that differs in its purity from 'actually existing' neoliberalism,[102] then the Hayek-derived complex cities theories, likewise, are an idealized form of neoliberal urbanism, which differs from the 'actually existing' neoliberal city.

The argument of Sendra and Sennett discussed above dovetails with other propositions that emphasize localism and citizen participation. Such propositions are responses to the democratic deficit rather than inequality that suggest the choice is not only government or market control, but also residents' empowerment.[103] The major vehicle in planning theory for ideas of democratization has been, since the late 1980s, Communicative Planning Theory (CPT),[104] developed in response to Jürgen Habermas's communicative action theory (1984) and deliberative democracy (1996).[105] It offers a response not just to the democratic deficit, but also to uncertainty by empowering stakeholders and actors in the decision-making process.[106] Habermas's deliberative democracy proposes a horizon, an ideal condition of rational exchanges between individuals in the absence of delimiting and oppressive power relations and structures.[107]

Some of the critics of CPT have turned to the critique of deliberative democracy by Mouffe.[108] Against Habermas's ideal condition, Mouffe deploys the messiness of reality, a reality suffused with contingency and power dynamics which cannot simply be willed away.[109] From Mouffe's perspective, Habermas's proposition is naïve and detached from reality – a utopian proposition. There are echoes in this critique, which 'learns' from reality and leads to her own proposition of 'agonistic democracy', of the objections to the plan discussed earlier. Lindblom's proposition of incrementalism, for example, was a theorization of the reality he identified in decision-making processes: an understanding of certain aspects of reality as fixed and unassailable.[110] Habermas, however, is fully aware that the ideal condition he proposes is a horizon which cannot be fully and purely realized. It is a destination, and the closer a (deliberative) process reaches the ideal condition, the more democratic it becomes. A plan, likewise, is a destination; it sets a horizon and a direction of travel.

Beyond contingency

The codes, regulations and 'loose' frameworks that have become standard in urban design and planning discourse are contingent-focused and free-market friendly. All this, despite the ubiquity of critiques of market-driven urban development and planning within the relevant discourses, and in contradiction to the explicit anti-neoliberal positions of some of the advocates of these measures. Too often, it seems, critics of the free-market valorize earlier, pre-Keynesian forms of free-market

[101]Moroni, "Complexity and the Inherent Limits of Explanation and Prediction," 251; "Planning, Law, Ownership." The use of the term 'self-organization' is not associated solely or necessarily with Hayek (Keller, "Ecosystems"; Rauws, "Civic Initiatives"; Fontenot, *Non-Design*).
[102]Olssen, "Totalitarianism and the 'Repressed' Utopia."
[103]Rosa and Weiland, *Handmade Urbanism*; Katz and Nowak, *The New Localism*.
[104]Healey, *Collaborating Planning*; Healey, "Building Institutional Capacity Through Collaborative Approaches to Urban Planning;" Sager, *Communicative Planning Theory*.
[105]Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*; Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*. See Mattila, "Habermas Revisited," for a study of CPT and Habermas's work.
[106]Zembri-Mary, *Project Risks*.
[107]Habermas. *Between Facts and Norms* ; Benhabib, "Towards a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy;" Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*.
[108]Purcell, "Resisting Neoliberalization."
[109]Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism."
[110]Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through'."

liberalism, or are beholden to critiques by 1960s radicals of the Welfare State as an accomplice of capitalism.

'Flexible' is a term that can also describe the statutory Local Plan in the United Kingdom, discussed above, which is already 'polyvalent' due to its lack of definition and generality. 'The *totality* as a founding rational substratum has been dissolved', wrote Laclau and Mouffe regarding the work of Sorel, in what sounds like an apt description of our own times, 'and what now exists is *mélange* [indeterminacy]'.[111]

The Marxist theorist Gregor McLennan argued that:

> it is often said that social theory must gear itself up to accepting as a basic premise the radical contingency of social life, its discontinuity, and its specificity, but I am still not sure what this could really mean in any literal sense. How can one theorize contingency—does not the very idea amount to explanatory capitulation in the face of happenstance?[112]

The advocates of contingency are rarely concerned with inequalities and poverty. Rather, they oscillate between the horizon of 'freedom' (which primarily means, in effect, freedom from the state) to the endorsement of what they perceive as an underlying reality (which, in effect, means the naturalization of free-market processes). For middle-class intellectuals, professionals and creatives, the idea of 'embracing contingency' can be exhilarating. But for those in more precarious conditions, including the poor, the disabled, the workers of the 'gig economy', and generally the section of society that struggles to make ends meet, volatile, uncertain and in-flux circumstances result in insecurity and are a source of anxiety.[113] The 'capitulation in the face of happenstance' of the last decades has brought about increased insecurity through the weakening of employment protections, of social security and collective insurances, of once safe housing tenures such as council housing, plunging individuals, families and communities into debt and poverty.

Earlier in this paper, three uses of the term contingency were identified: the first was the literal use of the term to describe the circumstances of a situation; the second use was to critique universalities and generalities; and the third was to undermine any conception of a 'whole' and to reject attempts to control the future. It is this third use which this paper aims to overturn, as it delegitimizes the use of the full range of planning instruments, including both extant and terminated instruments, for society's good. Moreover, it assumes that 'the good city' is produced spontaneously by contingency, not by plan, and it infers that the 'hand of the market', in contrast to 'the hand of the planner', is non-coercive.[114]

At the end of the day, the experience of the last decades has shown that weak planning, whether articulated through the Local Plan, regulations or 'loose' frameworks, reduces the control of government, maximizes the freedom of the developer, and produces the inequitable city. Weak planning cannot provide solutions to the great challenges society faces today, whether the climate emergency or housing crisis. Inevitably, 'embracing contingency', in spatial planning as in other spheres, means subjugation to the status quo, or, more precisely, to the free market. 'Whenever the utopia disappears', the social theorist Karl Mannheim wrote, 'history ceases to be a process leading to an ultimate end. The frame of reference according to which we evaluate facts vanishes and we are left with a series of events all equal as far as their inner significance is concerned'.[115]

[111]Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 31–32.
[112]McLennan, "Post-Marxism," 67.
[113]*Precarization* as a sense of 'increasing insecurity in both subjective and objective respects.' Alberti et al. "In, Against and Beyond Precarity," 449.
[114]Mandel, "In Defence."
[115]Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 227–28.

This paper has not questioned the validity of the critiques of universalisms and planning, but wishes to challenge the complete rejection of utopianism and 'positive' planning. It must be possible to acknowledge the truth in the critiques of universalisms, utopias and planning, yet to opt for 'the most responsible error', as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak termed such action,[116] in order to resuscitate the concept of utopia as well as the instruments and tools that reduce the control of the market over the built environment, that support redistribution, and that could subjugate urban development to the greater good.

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Notes on contributor

Tahl Kaminer is Reader in Architectural History and Theory at Cardiff University. He has previously held positions at the University of Edinburgh and TU Delft. Among his publications are the edited anthologies *Urbanizing Suburbia* (2023) and *Urban Asymmetries* (2011) and the monographs *The Efficacy of Architecture* (2017) and *Architecture, Crisis and Resuscitation* (2011).

ORCID

Tahl Kaminer http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0331-7869

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[116]Spivak, "No Definitions for Activism."

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