
Edward W. Soja, Los Angeles and Spatial Justice

Rereading *Postmetropolis: critical studies of cities and regions twenty years later*

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"I focus my critical studies of cities and regions on such achievable goals as **spatial justice** and **regional democracy**, terms which have rarely appeared in such explicit juxtaposition elsewhere in the literature." (Soja, 2000: 14, emphasis in the original)

With these brief reading notes, I wish to come back some twenty years later to a particular book written by a geographer, Edward W. Soja, who occupied a prominent place in the formulation of the current scientific discussion on the spatial dimension of justice (even if this formulation was to his taste far too imperfect¹). Through the memory effort needed to recontextualize a major piece of work published nearly twenty years ago, I also wish to return to a privileged moment in the construction of the field of critical urban studies, and to the weight of a particular city in this construction, i.e. Los Angeles. Finally, these notes represent also and above all an opportunity to pay tribute to the memory of Edward Soja who passed away at the end of 2015, and to underline the important role he played in the construction of *JSSJ*'s scientific project, as well as the unwavering support he gave to the journal during these past ten years.

Translating *Postmetropolis* into French

As a good fellow traveler to the whole adventure, Soja was present at the Nanterre symposium on "Spatial justice and spatial injustices" held in 2008 as a prelude to the founding of the journal. His invitation was strongly motivated by the organizers' reading of the last chapters of *Postmetropolis*², which firmly raised the issue of justice in relation to the new urban order, as underlined in the opening quote of these reading notes. Soja's contribution to the symposium, published in the inaugural issue of the journal (Soja, 2009), worked as a prelude to the 2010 release of *Seeking spatial justice*, the book that most directly associates him to scientific discussions on spatial justice (Soja, 2010). But for many of us, the important place of Soja in the *JSSJ* ecosystem goes back further, and in particular back to the years directly following the new Millennium, when we read *Postmetropolis*, often with admiration, sometimes with astonishment. For some of us, reading *Postmetropolis* was an evidence guided by their particular choice of field work: *Postmetropolis* works on one level as a synthesis of the state of knowledge on Los Angeles, a city which for a long time was not recognized as a research object worthy of interest for Social Sciences, and for Urban Studies in particular. In his previous book *Thirdspace* (Soja,

1. Soja insists in his definition of spatial justice, "the specific pairing of spatial + justice as something more than just the spatial aspects of social justice" (Soja, 2011: 98).

2. I will use this shortcut to imprecisely name a book with a particularly meaningful subtitle with regard its overall scientific project.

1996), Soja recounts rather mischievously how a funding application submitted by one of his colleagues in the early 1980s dealing with the ongoing processes of deindustrialization/reindustrialization in Los Angeles was met with a non-plussed answer from the project's scientific evaluators. It was well known evidence at the time that Los Angeles was not an industrial city, period³. And, to go even further, Los Angeles was not a city either, for the field of urban studies firmly rooted in the classic terrains of the East Coast and the Midwest (New York perhaps, but especially of course Chicago). Apart from the innovative historical sum written by the great journalist Carey McWilliams in the immediate post-war period, a landmark for the city's historians (McWilliams, 1946), Los Angeles flew well below the scientific radar until the early 1980s, even though the city-region had some of the highest growth rates on the North American continent since the 1950s, in anticipation somehow of the other cities of the Sun Belt. *Postmetropolis*, offering a synthesis of all the work produced on the city from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, definitively sanctifies the Angeleno example. Expanding from the very meticulous Marxist-inspired geohistory produced by Mike Davis at the very beginning of the decade (Davis, 1990), it aims at sketching a more global theorization of the transformation of metropolises and, why not, at reflecting on L.A.'s value as a model, even if the ambition of this book in particular is not to play the game of creating new models to replace the Chicago school. This ambition is rather to be found on the most postmodern fringe of authors working on Los Angeles⁴, in particular Michael Dear and Steven Flusty who broke this path shortly before the release of *Postmetropolis*, not necessarily with total success (Dear, Flusty, 1999 and, for a critique of the model, Dorier-Apprill E., Gervais-Lambony P., 2007).

Many of us great fans of *Postmetropolis* recklessly decided in 2007 to collectively translate the book into French but unfortunately the project did not succeed, despite the interest of its author. And it may be for the better: it seems difficult to render some parts of the book in French, because in addition to the elegance of Soja's scientific writing in English, several exposition devices (to which I will return later) would certainly not have made the translation job very easy... Above all, the translation project was surely born too late, at a time when French scientific publishing in geography had already retreated into more lucrative commercial niches such as undergraduate and Teacher's Qualification handbooks, and shortly before the remarkable translating and publishing by non-academic publishers of several works rooted in critical Urban Studies (see in particular Davis's translations at *La Découverte* and those of Harvey and Davis at *Les Prairies Ordinaires*). It was therefore difficult at the time to promote works such as Soja's, very much centred on a theoretical critique of the schools of thought prevalent in English-speaking Geography, and even though the author's main inspirations should be traced to French Theory, Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault in particular (see the chapter on Foucault and his understanding of space in *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja, 1989). However, *Postmetropolis*, with the ambition of its demonstration and its scientific project to synthesize critical Urban Studies at the end of the 1990s, could perhaps have been sold in France as a welcome renewal of traditional Urban Geography textbooks⁵.

3. And to close the historical loop: it seems that this anecdote actually is about his colleague Allen J. Scott, who also mentioned it in a response to an article published in *Antipode* in 1999 (Scott, 1999).

4. At this stage, we could discuss the use of the label "Los Angeles School", if we identify a school through the sharing of methods, of theoretical references and of an institutional background (likely to generate joint projects and support the training of a host of doctoral students). If Walter Nicholls recognizes the existence of a "Los Angeles school" in the mid-1990s (Nicholls, 2011), it seems more questionable according to Soja himself (see note n°8 of this text).

5. In the chapter introductions, the book offers a number of reading suggestions, in the manner of a textbook.

Yet the book was very discreet in the pages of French Geography journals on the occasion of its publication, probably because of the strong resistance of the major journals and their associated French schools of Geography to the “postmodern” label stuck too quickly perhaps on the back of Soja. A single review of *Postmetropolis* written in 2003 by Yves Guermond, appearing three years after its publication by Blackwell, was published in *L’Espace Géographique*. *Postmetropolis* here shares the stage with *Postmodern Geographies* (Soja, 1989), but also with Michael Dear and Steven Flusty’s *Spaces of Postmodernity*, and Claudio Minca’s sum, *Postmodern Geography. Theory and Praxis*. No surprise here: the review appeared at the time in a special issue of the journal devoted to a major debate on... postmodernism in geography (and in France, and probably fifteen years too late, I should add), a debate that turned into an epic quarrel between the old and the (post) modern, the latter identified as several of the co-authors and editors (Christine Chivallon, Béatrice Collignon and Jean-François Staszak) of *Géographies anglo-saxonnes* published by Belin in 2001 (for the debate itself, Antheaume *et al.*, 2004). Soja is strangely not featured in this book, but David Harvey and David Sibley appear in the section “Radical Geography and its developments” (Staszak, 2001). Eventually, in the mid to late 2000s, *Postmetropolis* will inspire much more profoundly the work of French geographers more specifically interested in the city and the urban in general, and the metropolitan phenomenon in particular. *Postmetropolis* will also be used by comparison with “other” metropolises, by researchers testing the value of the arguments put forward in the book in their struggle to qualify the historical change in the nature of urbanization processes on a global scale.

A sequel to *Thirdspace*

Postmetropolis arrives chronologically in Soja’s body of work four years after *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Soja, 1996), and it is intimately linked to this atypical work structured in two main parts that could finally be read independently of each other: first, the tribute to Henri Lefebvre written in the form of a “geographical biography” (to use the words of Soja himself, in an interview transcribed in Benach, Albet, 2010: 63), then his personal exploration of the so-called Thirdspace, working as both a method for analyzing spatiality borrowed from radical cultural studies and as the object of this analysis itself; and finally, the second part exploring Amsterdam and Los Angeles, in the form of first-person visits and “empirical” demonstrations of previous theoretical developments. It seems, and the conclusion of *Thirdspace* as well as the introduction of *Postmetropolis* confirm this, that initially the two books were to be only one, but that, following the advice of his publisher, Soja was to publish a second book called *Postmetropolis* in the immediate wake of the first one, as a more empirical companion book.

With a planned publication date set for 1997, *Postmetropolis* was finally released in 2000 after a considerable amount of additions and extensions (the book weighs a solid 440 pages), and a particularly sophisticated structure. The whole first part looks back at the Three urban Revolutions, and reconstructs in about sixty pages the world history of the city and the urban (no less!), while introducing the central idea of a Fourth ongoing Revolution exemplified by the L.A. metropolis. The second part, after a geo-historical introduction to the Greater Los Angeles area, develops the famous six speeches on the postmetropolis, all of which represent a complete panorama of the studies of the time on Los Angeles, borrowing from different theoretical positions from Marxism and regulation theory to postmodernism and its focus on difference or

hyper-reality... Finally, the third part looks back at the events of 1992 Los Angeles, seen as the moment of crystallization of the Fourth urban Revolution mentioned in the first part. This third part eventually opens on possible futures for the city, written as openings for both theory and action.

The book in fact focusses less than *Thirdspace* on a general theory of the spatiality of individuals and societies. *Thirdspace* in short is a geographer's book, and its reader gets sometimes lost in the meanders of abstraction due to a blurring effect between the categories, objects and concepts discussed under the same term of *Thirdspace* (see for a rather severe critique in French of the epistemologies proposed in *Thirdspace*, Chivallon, 2004). In *Postmetropolis*, Soja will follow up on the ideas proposed at the very end of *Thirdspace* on Los Angeles by mobilizing the analytical arsenal designed in *Thirdspace* from the lefebvrian trilogy of perceived/conceived/lived spaces (Lefebvre, 1974) and using it to achieve in three main chapters a synthetic analysis of the city in general and the Los Angeles metropolis in particular. In fact, the two books respond to each other in several ways, and similarly, the back-to-back reading of both gives the impression that the same central theoretical questions are brought up again from one book to the next, or even as a distant echo of the author's previous publications (and in particular of *Postmodern geographies*, Soja, 1989). But this process ultimately appears to be largely cumulative, giving *Postmetropolis* its scope and theoretical ambition, both for Geography as a discipline and for critical Urban Studies as a transdisciplinary field of investigation.

Marxism, postmodernism, and other labels

It is indeed difficult to label Soja's relationship to theory in a simple way, beyond recognizing his membership to a school of critical Urban Studies more eclectic in its theoretical approach than the more traditional Marxist branch of radical Urban Studies (for two contextualizations in French of these positioning issues within the large critical family, English-speaking and French-speaking, see Staszak, 2001 and Morange, Calbérac, 2012). From this point of view, *Postmetropolis* represents the culmination of a long theoretical journey and combines several approaches with a considerable amount of theoretical and empirical reading. This combinatorial approach is used here to unpack the object "postmodern metropolis", as much as to build the specific epistemology to which the object refers⁶. The author's position is ultimately very logical: if the city has entered a new phase of transformation, this famous Fourth urban Revolution, it becomes absolutely necessary to change the very way we look at it and the tools with which we look at it. Thus, he writes in a lefebvrian way: "new ways of making practical and theoretical sense of the empirically perceived, conceptually represented, and actually lived spaces of the city need to be developed" (Soja, 2000: 150). If we combine this imperative with Soja's earlier propositions, we can better understand the filiation of the arguments developed along the pages:

1/ Soja resumes his fight against the historicist tendencies of Social Sciences and of Marxists in particular (even though he largely recognizes David Harvey's influence in the presupposition of unequal development that guides his reading of the production of the city – Harvey, 1978). This fight against historicism has been central in his work since the 1980s and aims to replace the spatial alongside the historical in the analysis of societies, in equal parts. More generally, it refers

6. This scientific project is indeed very specific to so-called "postmodern" geographies, and it goes far beyond the types of objects studied to engage in profound epistemological foundations, see Bernard Debarbieux's remarks in *Géographies anglo-saxonnes* (Staszak, 2001: 208).

to the three directions that critical spatial thinking should take: the taking into account of the ontological spatiality of our lives, but also the understanding of the central place of space as social production and, finally, the careful exercise of what he calls socio-spatial dialectics, with space shaping the social as much as the reverse (Soja, 1980). This line is directly responsible for his being accused of fetishizing space, but it will be put to good use in *Postmetropolis* in a very convincing articulation between theoretical and empirical arguments, particularly in his first reflections on spatial justice.

2/ He also fights a side battle for the recognition of the dual micro-macro approach, when he confesses his frequent frustration with the anthropological micro-approaches of postmodernists who tend to sacrifice the scale of the agglomeration in their analyses, under the constraint of being as close as possible to the experience of the subordinates in the city. But he is equally frustrated by the traditional "overhanging" approaches, for disciplines such as Geography in particular. For Soja, the scale of the agglomeration is obviously essential in the understanding of spatialities that are specific to the postmetropolitan transition, and he will again insist on this issue of city-regions in his latest text published in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, on the occasion of a debate launched in the journal regarding its possible name change (and therefore regarding a possible abandonment of the mention of the "regional" in the title). Soja took this opportunity to plead once again for the regional dimension, underlining the unprecedented phenomena caused by this change of scale of the urban environment, but also how this new scale of lived spaces directly affects the search for a fair form of decision-making, which he understands as an issue of regional democracy (Soja, 2015).

3/ Finally, the third struggle of *Postmetropolis*, directly resulting from the proposals made in *Thirdspace* and *Postmodern geographies*, deals with the decompartmentalization of analyses (particularly geographical) between "real" objectified reality and representations, in order to reach a third lefebvrian path of inspiration essential to understand the lived dimension of the postmetropolis (what he calls the *real-and-imagined*, Soja, 1996: 10). According to him, this method of analysis must also help open up creative thirdspaces for action. Thus, his revival and inversion of the notion of hyper-reality in the last part of *Postmetropolis* around the legal follow-up given to the 1992 riots provides proof of the potentially formidable effectiveness of this decompartmentalization between reality and the geographical imagination, here combined using the method of socio-spatial dialectics:

"The electronic cyberspaces, Simcities, and hyperrealities of everyday life were being slowly infiltrated by, as bell hooks described them, those who dare to desire differently, to look away from the conventional ways of seeing and acting upon the oppression of race, class, and gender to open new spaces for struggle that work to transform prevailing imagery, create strategic alternatives, and project new images that subvert and transform our established worldviews" (Soja, 2000: 404-405).

To put it shortly: Soja does not embrace the absolute pessimism of Mike Davis in his pioneering analyses of the transformations of the L.A. metropolis at the end of the 20th century, and in particular in all aspects of its militarization (Davis, 1990). While Soja picks up and pays tribute to Davis's analyses (although not without a pinch of criticism), there is no fatality for him in this new urban form, and all the things that compose it are potentially open to challenge and reversal. He follows here a line directly inspired by Lefebvre, a line which will later be picked up by several researchers in critical Urban Studies inspired by the notion of Right to the City, such as Kurt Iveson, here in a 2013 article:

"To start with the key lesson of Lefebvre, the production of space is a contested process. The shaping and reshaping of urban spaces is a product of complex power-geometries, as different actors seek to determine who and what the city is for. Among the resources mobilized in these power struggles are capital, property rights, planning codes, spatial design, law, various policing techniques and technologies, education, socialization, and labour. Of course, the capacity to mobilize these resources is not limited to one group. This is not to say that the city is free of power imbalances, just to observe that there is no operation of power that is beyond subversion and/or appropriation for a range of different (and possibly unintended) uses" (Iveson, 2013: 942). For if only one of these many struggles had to be retained, the one of social utility would perhaps be the most appropriate (even if Soja himself, and this is a strong limitation often underlined about his work, was an armchair geographer and was not personally engaged in a translation of his work into action). Soja's Marxist filiation, which draws on unequal development and the notion of crisis, is thus complemented by the various theories of difference (and in particular postcolonial and feminist theory) to find spaces of struggle in the interstices of urban production. In the end, Soja's approach remains deeply transversal and humanistic in its analytical effort: not confining oneself, not contenting oneself with a binary vision of the facts in order to better understand the transformations underway, all of this requires listening to other disciplines and to others in general. It also speaks to other disciplines directly: a few years later, in a response to Marcelo Lopez de Souza's review of *Seeking spatial justice*, about the "spatial turn" Soja so powerfully championed, he bragged: "The spatial turn has spread much further and deeper than de Souza imagines, inspiring innovative thinking in such diverse fields as critical legal studies, education, literary criticism, art history, theoretical archeology and critical theology, leaving most (but certainly not all) geographers squabbling in the background"⁷ (Soja, 2011: 99).

Parts 1 and 2: 4 urban revolutions and 6 speeches on the postmetropolis

This eclecticism is reflected in the very structure of *Postmetropolis*, which begins in the form of a large historical-theoretical fresco. Soja begins his book with an analysis of the First Urban Revolution, consisting in a cross-reading of the archaeologists of the Middle-Eastern city, of Jane Jacobs' book on urban economics (Jacobs, 1969) and of the most recent contributions of the contemporary schools of economic geography (Storper, 1997, Scott, 1989) to demonstrate the creative capacity held by urban areas. This combination of readings allows him to formulate the hypothesis (a real kick in the Marxist anthill) that the urban fact precedes the production of the agricultural surplus, by using the examples of Jericho and Çatal Hüyük. Soja then turns to Sumerian civilization as representative of the Second Urban Revolution, distinct from the first by the scale of its spatial organization and the transformations of power over entire territories that this change of scale implies. Then, the pace accelerates towards the Third Urban Revolution in connection with industrialization, which for Soja is not only remarkable for the size of the agglomerations it creates but also for the global transformation of societies that it represents:

"this revolutionary reorganization of cityspace required not only making room for the millions of new migrants and for the infrastructure of industrial production but also for the development of

7. In fact, Soja was not always kind to geographers, who according to him tend to underestimate the value of their own approaches. He links this with the famous inferiority complex fostered by the domination of the historical in the analysis of social facts... and this has obviously brought him accusations of spatial fetishism by the more classical Marxists. His external position in many transdisciplinary debates has certainly contributed to his formalization of the centrality of space in social construction.

new ways to keep this emerging industrialized space economy of urbanism together, to administer and reproduce the social and spatial relations of capitalism at its now tightly nested global, national, regional, and local state scales" (Soja, 2000: 77).

Here, Soja, catches up with Marxist political economy, and he then mobilizes the notion of crisis through a reading of Manuel Castells' and David Harvey's interpretations of the urban crises of the 1960s and the global restructuring they triggered. These very erudite developments prepare the speculative exposition of a possible Fourth Urban Revolution based on the example of Los Angeles, taken as representative of a crisis directly generated by the restructuring that followed the 1960s. In this sense, the L.A. example suggests a new kind of urbanization processes, both a palimpsest of the "classical" industrial-capitalist city's past and of its restructuring, and simultaneously a privileged site to witness this unprecedented kind of "reverse" restructuring: "The concluding chapter on Los Angeles thus serves to raise the question of whether what we are witnessing today, after thirty years of intense urban restructuring, may be the start of a fourth Urban Revolution, a question that, like many others, I leave open to alternative viewpoints" (Soja, 2000: 15).

The second part of *Postmetropolis* therefore articulates all the interpretative schemes⁸ produced on this transformation of the nature of urban production, as seen from Los Angeles. For Soja, it is important not to favour one over the other because they are largely interdependent, nor it is relevant to affirm that these interpretative schemes totally replace the previous ones whose presence persists because of the spatial and structural inertia of the modern metropolis (see in particular his rejection of the notion of the term "post-industrial"). Soja attempts his global theorization by combining six discourses that all relate to very different theoretical, empirical and methodological approaches. The first speech, *The Postfordist Industrial Metropolis*, refers to the work of the School of Regional and Urban Economics represented by his UCLA colleagues Allen J. Scott and Michaël Storper (Scott, 1990, Storper, 1997), and this discourse describes the transformation of the metropolitan regional economic base and its spatial dimensions. The second discourse, *Cosmopolis*, questions the globalization of the metropolis and its different meanings, and is in particular an opportunity for a great exploration of all the understandings of globalization, in relation to the dynamics of capital and labour. The third discourse, *Exopolis*, addresses suburbanization as characteristic of the restructuring of the urban form from its peripheries, far from the classic patterns of metropolitan centrality. The fourth discourse, *Fractal City*, addresses the issues of intra-urban inequalities as well as cultural and ethnic diversity. The fifth discourse, *The Carceral Archipelago*, refers directly to Mike Davis' work on the militarization of space, the development of fortress enclaves, and the jailing techniques for the most deprived. Finally, the sixth discourse, *Simcities*, reinterprets the work of European semiologists and theorists of hyper-reality such as Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco in order to unpack the urban landscapes of hyper-reality where simulacrum has finally replaced its original. On this occasion, Soja repeats his previously published analyses of Orange County, but in a much more convincing way.

This extremely complete and detailed synthesis functions in fact as a prelude to the third part, which returns to the crystallization in 1992 of the inconsistencies and the explosion of this particular urban system: the post-crisis restructuring of Los Angeles, which followed other urban crises, that of Watts in 1965 and then that of the Fordist production regime, directly produced

8. "If indeed there is a distinctive Los Angeles 'school' of critical urban and regional studies, as some have claimed, then these six discourses represent its major overlapping subdepartments" (Soja, 2000: 16).

the new urban order outlined in the six speeches. Overtime, Los Angeles has transformed itself towards more globalization, more transformation of its economic base, more flexible and cheap labour from all over the world, etc., at the cost of strong contradictions that eventually exhausted the model some twenty years later.

Part 3: Los Angeles 1992, a look back at a historical moment and an opening to justice

Most certainly, this final part of *Postmetropolis* entitled *Lived Space. Rethinking 1992 in Los Angeles* may have seemed most surprising to French readers more accustomed to a certain standard of what scientific writing should be. This section, whose title obviously echoes the lefebvrian category of "lived space", returns to the events that took place in Los Angeles during the week of 29 April to 4 May 1992. These events caused the deaths of more than 60 people, the destruction of nearly 4,000 buildings in a vast area from Koreatown to Compton, and more than 11,000 arrests. The Los Angeles riots, called by Soja "Justice riots", but also known as the "L.A. Uprising"⁹, are told here through a narrative device directly representative of the scientific project unveiled in *Thirdspace* through the form of collage, Soja aims to go beyond the dichotomy between the perceived/conceived categories to reach this third dimension in the writing of the urban that would exceed objectifying writings on the one hand, and the classical division between the geography of reality and the geography of the imaginary places on the other. Directly inspired by the readings in radical cultural studies previously mobilized in *Thirdspace*, this third section is more an invocation than a classical and ordered search for causes, effects and consequences.

Indeed, the polyphonic effect produced is particularly strong, and ultimately reflects quite well the confusion of interpretation that accompanied the events at the time. The riots were indeed the subject, like any major event of this type, of many contradictory interpretations, but it was also their incredibly mediated nature that proved confusing, since part of the week's events were covered non-stop by the helicopters of local television stations and then relayed on national channels in a seemingly never-ending loop. By ignoring entire sections of the "lived" riots in the rest of the metropolis, this partial coverage (in both senses of the word) effectively imposed a form of hyper-reality of these riots on the world. The polyphony proposed by Soja aims to contradict this hyper-reality, or at the very least to bring some nuance to it.

The trails of testimonies that function as so many interpretations are therefore intertwined in the third section of the book: were the riots the product of racial polarization, a kind of echo of the 1965 Watts riots, this time triggered by the acquittal verdict for the police officers responsible for the beating of Rodney King? Were they rather the expression of a social explosion caused by the unsustainable restructuring of the Angeleno economic system with widespread impacts on the poorest sectors of the metropolis, when the arrests perpetrated during these new kinds of hunger riots identified a majority of population of Latin American origin among the looters? Did they represent the contestation of an oppressive and democratically opaque local system (especially when it came to the police, but not exclusively)? The collage of the third section does not favour one interpretation over another, but ends with a generalization representative in its conclusions of the chosen exposure method:

9. This brings us back to the inevitable and nevertheless necessary contestation of the meaning of this type of event, an essential contestation in Soja's detailed understanding of lived spaces.

"What was happening in 1992, viewed with hindsight from the edge of a new millenium, may very well have been a profound local turning point, marking with other events before and after a shift from a period of crisis-generated restructuring to the onset of a new era of **restructuring-generated crises**. In other words, the full-grown postmetropolis has reached a stage when innovative practices and restructured urban spatialities that proved most successful in restoring robust economic growth and in effectively controlling social unrest after the 1960s are now showing signs of disturbing dysfunctionality" (Soja, 2000: 354, emphasis in original).

We come full circle here with the first section. The formulation, bringing the Marxist tradition of crisis analysis one step further (or more precisely one step aside), will become a milestone, and rightly so. But Soja obviously does not stop there: he recalls in the afterword what happened in the eight years that followed. The first developments (*New Beginnings I*, p. 396-407) seem very pessimistic and note an increased militarization of public space and physical distancing between rich and poor, the rise of a local anti-immigration political discourse, and finally the political sleight of hand of post-riot reconstruction. The inspiring story of Rebuild LA (R.L.A.), a super-committee appointed by Mayor Tom Bradley for the reconstruction and entrusted to Peter Ueberoth, an entrepreneur of the transport and tourism sector still crowned with his past glory as organizer of the 1984 Olympic Games, is read as a classic public/private partnership advocating trickle-down effect and the revival of entrepreneurship in the neighbourhoods, but ultimately consolidating the influence of large private companies in the Angeleno system, or even simply working as a form of post-crisis reinsurance for the business sector (for a recent overview of the R.L.A. farce, see Chadburn, 2017).

The assessment of official reconstruction efforts and the general evolution of the metropolis is therefore harsh, and the hope of overcoming the crisis seems at first sight compromised... but the second part of the afterword on the contrary proposes a completely different direction. *New beginnings I: Struggles for Spatial Justice and Regional Democracy* (p. 407-415) functions as the conclusion of the book, and interprets instead the "encouraging signs" (Soja, 2000: 411) of the angeleno social movements and their post-1992 transformation. The examples chosen draw from public transport user groups (the Bus Riders Union), labour organisations defending the most precarious workers who are also the most emblematic of the functional transformation of post-metropolises (domestic workers, workers in the hospitality and catering industries, with the example of the Justice for Janitors movement), coalitions offering new forms of intersectionality (this is the example of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, L.A.A.N.E., developed p. 411-413)... These examples show the emergence of the adoption of deliberately spatial strategies in the fight against the widening of inequalities, and in the end, the whole argument of spatial justice takes shape in a double theoretical and empirical movement that will be widely followed as a general scheme in Soja's following book, *Seeking spatial justice* (Soja, 2011, and for a commentary in French on his mobilization of the notion of spatial justice, Dufaux, Didier, 2014). Thus, by presenting the urban fragmentation of Los Angeles as a force and as a tool of choice in the construction of a possible horizon of justice, Soja also contradicts a certain pessimistic Marxist analysis: this marks a return to the great principle of the city as a point of maximization of density and heterogeneity, and therefore as a crucible of social innovation. Yes, fragmentation is real, but Soja implies that it is the urban form itself in its very fragmentation that makes it possible to find and invent these famous Thirdspaces conducive to emancipation.

Conclusion: *Postmetropolis*, twenty years later?

Postmetropolis therefore ends on a positive note, and on an introduction to the notion of spatial justice that Soja will mature for another 10 long years. It would be tempting to read *Postmetropolis* today in light of the recent reinterpretation of Lefebvre's concept of planetary urbanisation (Brenner, Schmid, 2014). I am not sure that this type of backpedalling is very fair for the author, who to my knowledge never claimed to be a visionary. However, we can still pull today the threads brought up in *Postmetropolis*: in the sub-prime crisis and the financialization of the production of urban space, particularly visible in the urban peripheries mentioned by Soja; in the Los Angeles homelessness crisis, central to the local political debate of 2017-2018; but also in the return of the debate on the urban condition of minorities in the United States, and especially the African-American minority, on the occasion of the Ferguson events, after a decade in which the Conservatives had classified the entire American society as "post-racial"; in the expanding of globalization and the transformation of the economic base of the largest metropolitan areas, and in the profoundly unequal development that results from it, to the point that issues such as the fight against inequalities, urban fragmentation and spatial justice have become common items on the shopping list of the major international institutions; in the recurrence finally of the urban insurrections of working-class districts, and the example of the French suburbs of 2005 in particular comes to mind, etc.

I close a book that I had read *in extenso* at the time of its release, then again in 2007 at the time of the translation project, with the exact same feeling which left me impressed by the sophistication of the structure and the author's ability to synthesize, and at the same time a little relieved that it was over, somewhat for the same reasons... *Postmetropolis*, a very full book, explores many avenues that will not be followed by Soja, but echoes can be found in the work of former students or doctoral candidates sponsored by Soja at U.C.L.A. To name but a few of these developments and cross inspirations between student and teacher: critical and feminist approaches to planning (Hooper, 1998), Right to the City (Purcell, 2003), urban social movements (Nicholls, Uitermark, 2016), the spatial dimension of injustice (Dikeç, 2007), but also the transferability of major theories to contexts deeply different in terms of their production of urban space (Myers, 2011; Kanai, 2013)...

And this brings me to a short conclusion on the scientific issue of comparison which is today back on the academic agenda (Robinson, 2016), and which was called directly by Soja in the introduction of his book: *Postmetropolis* was written at a time when the formulation of the Southern turn of Urban Studies (Parnell, Robinson, 2012) was not yet fully articulated, at a time when the theory of global cities still dominated debates on the urban, and when interpretations of the urban phenomenon in the Global South were in fact still considered abnormal or lagging behind. Yet *Postmetropolis*, because of its strong empirical foundations, could not claim to interpret Los Angeles as a precursor or as an absolute model of the global dynamics of urbanisation (Soja, 2000: 17). Fifteen years later, in the wake of the epistemological controversy published in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* around the decentralization of Urban Studies to the Global South (Scott, Storper, 2015), Soja argued for a non-dogmatic decompartmentalization between North and South, a renewed proof of the broad-mindedness demonstrated in *Postmetropolis*:

"What the globalization of the urban suggests is that the differences between urbanization in the developed versus the developing world are decreasing. They have certainly not disappeared entirely, but more than ever before their similarities make it possible for London to learn from Lagos as much as Lagos can learn from London. It is this global balance that must inform

contemporary urban and regional studies, not some categorical Eurocentrism or Third Worldism" (Soja, 2015: 378).

To quote this paper: Sophie DIDIER, "Edward W. Soja, Los Angeles, and Spatial Justice", [« Edward W. Soja, Los Angeles, et la justice spatiale », translation: Sophie Didier], *Justice spatiale | Spatial Justice*, n° 12, October 2018 (<http://www.jssj.org>).

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