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Libertecture: A catalogue of libertarian spaces

Rowland Atkinson
University of Sheffield, UK

Liam O'Farrell
University of Sheffield, UK

Abstract

In this article we identify spaces and built environments that have the effect of placing libertarian thinking in urban contexts, using the term 'libertecture' to refer to the way that these architectures convey principles of personal liberty and unfettered market activity. These ideas are thus embedded in cities via the design, architecture, management and function of an emerging array of buildings, districts and infrastructures. Locating our analysis in cultural political economy, we believe that these libertectures are important because of the way that they refract and amplify divisive ideas into the social spaces and thinking of residents and citizens. Whereas neoliberal urbanism was seen as undermining socially just cities, libertarian ideas amplified by new built environments may presage more atomised, unequal and unsustainable urban conditions, potentially foreclosing the identification of more just alternatives and democratic forms. We offer a 'catalogue' of seven forms of libertecture: private cities, residential exits, portal spaces, fiscal lockers, pioneer exclaves, infinity spaces, and necrotectures. We conclude that the manifestation of libertarian thinking in spaces and city forms is an important object of study for urban studies as it considers challenges to inclusive and sustainable forms of urban governance.

Keywords

architecture, ideology, libertarianism, neoliberalism, urban governance

Corresponding author:
Rowland Atkinson, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK.
Email: rowland.atkinson@sheffield.ac.uk

摘要

本文中，我们确定了那些能够将自由主义思想置于城市背景下的空间和建筑环境，并用“自由结构”一词来表示这些建筑所传达的个人自由和不受约束的市场活动原则。这些理念通过一系列新兴建筑物、区域和基础设施的设计、建筑、管理和功能将融入城市之中。从文化政治经济学角度分析，我们认为此类自由结构非常重要，因为它们将分裂的思想折射和放大到社会空间和居民及公民的见解中。人们认为新自由主义城市化破坏了城市的社会公正性，而被新的建筑环境放大的自由主义思想可能预示着更为原子化、不平等和不可持续的城市状况，进而可能阻碍对更公正的替代方案和民主形式的识别。我们提供了七种自由结构的“目录”：私人城市、住宅出口、门户空间、财政柜、先锋飞地、无限空间和死亡建筑。我们的结论是，自由主义思想在空间和城市形式中的表现是城市研究的一个重要研究对象，因为它考虑了对城市治理的包容性和可持续形式的挑战。

关键词

建筑、意识形态、自由主义、新自由主义、城市治理

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Introduction

In this article we examine the relationship between the built environment and systems of social thinking. Our core argument here is that ideological frameworks, in this case a focus on libertarian thinking, may be made manifest in, or amplified by, specific spaces and architectural forms. This proposition rests on much older ideas in which the design of buildings, cities and patterns of urban life itself are seen to express or relay ideological currents. These connections can be seen in the work of writers like Lefebvre (2003), Castells (1972) and Althusser (1971), who were among earlier commentators who posited connections between ideology – foundational currents of thinking that help to constitute social structures and hierarchies – and its expression in the institutional, political, economic and physical life of cities. For example, for Lefebvre the explosion of urban life presented a totalising form of capitalism and its related ideas that risked bringing everyday life ever more firmly into logics of commodification, economic expansion and human redundancy. Today, these logics have become more fully formed and socially enveloping, and the role of cities and their built environments in facilitating interrelated ideational and physical changes has become an important element of urban studies that concerns us in this article. This is particularly pertinent because we can see today how forms of deepening privatisation, financialisation and power-elite expansion, in corporate and national settings, can be tied to urban centres while also being located in inequality regimes – ideological forms that justify existing forms of social disparity (Piketty, 2020).

Our understanding of what is natural, just, ordinary or acceptable (including the question of inequality), and of how environments and systems press upon or shape human relations and experiences within them, forms the central concern of this article. The move to an increasing saturation of human experience within urban space is very often dominated by the market principles that underwrite the development, expansion or management of those spaces. To advance this perspective is not to suggest that social actors simply fall under some kind of

ideological spell in such spaces; it is important to recognise variability in form and extent. However, ideological shapes and positions allied or related to capitalism, and its varying localised forms, clearly shape and delimit form, design and function in cities. Stemming from these observations, we observe the relationship between the physical environment and currents of libertarian thinking moving within the broader flow of pro-market ideas and in which, in some national and urban contexts at least, interest in such ideas appears to be growing. As Jones (2009) has powerfully argued, culture is both woven into architectural forms and is also expressed by them. The built environment and its textures symbolise and convey forms of existing social power and human organisation, with planning used to denote the position or triumph of 'winning' groups and ideas (Kaika and Thielen, 2006; Steets, 2016). It is through such sites that forceful strands of thinking and the hierarchical positions of wealthy groups and individuals are expressed. As Jones argues:

> The attempt of regimes to use buildings such as cathedrals and town halls to capture the 'skyline and the public imagination' also most commonly was couched alongside the mobilisation of traditional aesthetics, a reflection of the need to stress lineage and invent tradition… we can consider architecture a key part of an ideological and material shift that renders an economic project socially meaningful and sufficiently 'resonant', albeit representing a highly partial message about the city, identity or place. (2009: 2529)

Many buildings are read here as the embedding of capitalism (and in our article's case, libertarianism) into the physical life-world – a received atmosphere, a sense of place embedded in the symbolic elements of physical buildings and built spaces. We build on these observations, relating them to trends in the increasingly private modes of urban governance running through many cities and districts (Le Goix and Webster, 2006). More specifically, our project is to identify buildings, infrastructures and architectures that appear as expressions of, or conduits for, the principles of libertarian thinking. Why undertake such a project? Our analysis is propelled by the apparent rise of libertarianism within a social condition already heavily inflected by neoliberal principles. Libertarianism advances the absolute primacy of personal freedoms and the desirability of reductions in, or total dissolution of, social bonds. It can be read as advancing an anti-democratic model of urban governance, given the hostility among many right-libertarians to notions of the state or modes of collective life, and the eschewing of (any) regulations or levies in favour of special designations and freedoms. These principles have often been advanced by networks of institutions and actors enabling or working with the wealthy, while being absorbed and relayed by market-savvy and atomised younger social actors.

Ideational, as well as economic and social, forces are key elements driving the ambience and form of many cityscapes and their component elements. In many analyses the configuration or assembly of, for example, neoliberal cities, privileges the role of market activities, houses (and indeed unhouses) particular classes of residents and enshrines certain modes of complementary institutional activity (Stein, 2019). Such ideologically underpinned city forms vary considerably, rather than adopting a distinct or singular 'look'. However, the underlying ideational systems of places can be spatially located and this project forms the focus of this article.

The structure of our contribution is as follows. We first review the literature regarding contemporary libertarianism, followed by a reflection on the relationship between ideology and architecture. We then consider ways

to understand and define the ideological underpinnings of what we call libertecture. This leads on to several case studies of exemplars of libertecture; a kind of 'catalogue' or typology of such forms in which we offer interpretive schema of these types. Finally, we conclude by considering what our analysis may offer ongoing debates in urban studies about private governance and the role of libertarian ideas and city form.

Ideology and the built environment

Urban theory has frequently commented on the organisation of space, social functions and economic rationales underpinning the topography and distinct organisation of cities in relation to prevailing modes of production or thinking (Hall, 2014). A number of attempts have been made to locate underlying systems of ideas in the varied symbolic displays that appear in architectural forms and the layouts of built environments. The connection of these sites and forms to the ideological substrate upon which such cities and societies were historically located is well-known. For example, Victorian London's new bridges and railway stations referencing Gothic architecture, imperial Saint Petersburg's monumental classical westernism (Mkrtchyan, 2017), and Habsburg Vienna's Ringstrasse project of historicist styles (Schorske, 1979) have been seen as ventures that physically embody the socio-political milieus that directed their construction.

Social value systems and hierarchies can be traced as they are manifest in the built environment. This is shown in overt forms of symbolism, such as architectural motifs, signs of patronage, and the use of scale or stated functional roles in the symbolic order. Key seats of power, such as parliamentary buildings, sites of worship and police stations, as well as quotidian spaces such as transit points, shopping centres, infrastructural developments and housing projects, are imbued with symbols of power, intention, sponsorship (whether state, private or individual), arrival into elite positions, legal dominance and so on. In more prosaic terms, even apparently functional structures are always embedded in social conditions which are 'spoken' of through their form, design, architecture or construction techniques. Deeper or more subtle elements of such relationships can be seen in the symbolic content of other aspects: scale (such as the attempt at using physical presence to impose ideas or status positions on urban populations), symbolism (the use of inscribed signs that denote rank, privilege or authority, such as statues or memorials) or architectural form (such as the common use of classical columns and elevated facades to connote ideas of democracy and heritage stemming from antiquity). City form in particular may subtly or more clearly parallel social, political and economic contexts (Kostof, 1999).

The counter to these propositions is that there are surely many examples of built environments in which a connection to an undergirding set of ideas is difficult or impossible to locate. However, even everyday, unremarkable spaces can be interpreted as being imbued with ideological content. For instance, suburban developments of stylistically identical detached and semi-detached homes sprawling over a large, low-density site reflect dominant notions of aspirational consumption, land use and assumptions of socially valuable infrastructural connections, for instance conditioning residents towards car ownership. In this sense much of the built environment denotes elements of political, economic and normative content, often when it is brought into play with and 'speaks' to the wider assembly of city form.

Elite spaces and the representation of power and wealth inequalities driving luxury architectures have often been discussed with

reference to palaces and stately homes, noting how these buildings reproduce a common architectural language and scale that speak of the status and value of the individuals building them (Roberts and Armitage, 2019). The design preferences produced by more recent variants of investment capitalism in its search to offer residential products in lucrative ultra-wealthy markets are similarly infused with ideological content (Soules, 2021). Soules argues that the flow of financial imperatives, stripped of interest in street sociality, has generated distinct forms, including ultra-thin pencil towers, iceberg homes extending downwards, and the proliferation of 'zombie' neighbourhoods in which housing primarily functions as a speculative asset largely absent of residents. Here it is distinctive forms of experience and (non)interaction that suggest the presence of this particular mode or type of architecture.

The materiality of architecture is also imbued with meaning, such as the near-universal use of marble and Greco-Roman classicism in the architecture of Western democracy to denote standing and prestige (Kaika and Thielen, 2006). In a study of contemporary Georgian architecture, Curro (2015) analyses the deliberate choice of glass as a building material to embody valuable democratic reference points post-independence in the republic. Thus, ideas of transparency, accessibility and accountability could be embodied in new police stations, which were built in glass to mark a symbolic break with the secrecy and inscrutability of police forces in the Soviet era (Curro, 2015). In this way, both form and function can be read to understand the ideas that influenced the mapping and design of these spaces, shaped by the tastes of individuals involved and the deeper, hegemonic social values in turn influencing these tastes.

Studies of urban design in the former Eastern Bloc have highlighted the importance of dominant ideas in generating the form, function and materiality of environments, including the public architecture and positioning of metro stations, cultural institutions, sports and leisure facilities, schools, universities and housing developments. While the ideal societies of Eastern Bloc socialists and US libertarians conceived in planning and design diverge sharply, these two groups share a deep fascination with the use of space, and how its reconstitution might 'produce new social relations that would, in turn, produce a new consciousness' (Crowley and Reed, 2002: 15). To take another example, the planning of key public spaces, like New York's Central Park, was designed to promote a space of exchange and encounter across classes in a civil city, thus promoting ideas of inhabiting a city infused with democratic values. Such forms relate to Sennett's (1970) observation about public city life in capitalist cities more broadly as places of democratic encounter and mutual visibility, as well as protest and dissent.

Contemporary libertarianism and the built environment

There are various forms of libertarianism, from left-wing forms that focus on issues such as collective stewardship of natural resources to right-wing modes which privilege the market with a central role in allocating resources. The core principles of libertarian thinking tend to be a focus on the withdrawal or negation of the state as either a legitimate or necessary institution, the prizing of individual liberty, and a celebration of voluntary association over what are seen as power relations founded on coercion. It is increasingly right-libertarianism (hereafter 'libertarianism') that we focus on in this article and which is arguably the main form globally. We focus our attention here on examples of built environments that we

understand this ideology to have been generative of and we refer to these forms libertecture, but first we need to develop our analysis of the ideas underpinning these spaces.

Libertarianism and neoliberalism share a belief in the necessity of free markets without state intervention, viewing the market as the most efficient way to allocate resources and maximise economic growth. However, the two ideologies diverge regarding the role of the state. Neoliberalism ultimately views a much reduced state as a necessary actor only insofar as this helps to maintain environments that are conducive to markets (Lynch, 2017). Here the state plays an important role in managing cyclical crises, underwriting market regulations and orchestrating conditions that generally support capital accumulation (Klein, 2007; Shankar Jha, 2006). Libertarianism seeks to dispense with the state altogether, identifying markets as the sole means by which resources should be allocated, free from the 'tyranny' of collective forms of intervention. Libertarianism fetes the skill and hard work of the 'winners' of capitalism, who are often seen as constrained by interfering governments that steal hard-earned rewards (Davidson and Rees-Mogg, 1999). Libertarianism asserts that market actors and the voluntary association of individuals offer a more effective and legitimate form of social organisation that will lead to the greater satisfaction of individual needs and aspirations (Brennan, 2018).

Libertarian ideas have become influential among many high-profile networks of decision-makers, wealthy elites and think tanks such as the Atlas Network, which has partners in almost 100 countries, the UK's Institute for Economic Affairs, and the Koch Institute (Gamble, 2013). Libertarian ideology has often been spliced into neoliberal movements and has also found its way into the ontological foundations of elite decision-maker worldviews which stress individualism and state minimalism, while at the same time seeking to reduce investment in any form of social support. Rather than appealing to ideas of nation or supposed national characteristics, libertarians envision the citizen consumers of the future 'voting with their feet', moving to governance jurisdictions that most satisfy their personal preferences, rather than rights-based models of provision for citizens (Lynch, 2017).

Libertarian thinking idealises tax, work and regulation regimes that are compliant with the needs of capital, finance and the wealthy, many of whom stand to gain most from low and zero tax targets (Craib, 2022). Such 'liberation' thus comes with the potential to further sediment existing inequalities, as markets in land and labour and other forms of commodification erode the quality of social conditions for many. Questions of care, health and education are left to self-organising units and communities, even though their capacity to do so is determined by whatever resources they already possess, or indeed are deficient in. Here ideas of competition and choice are key, and notions of structural disadvantage or barriers are frequently dismissed in favour of valorising the individual (Lynch, 2017).

Libertarian thinking can be linked to city development and governance through the Dark Enlightenment movement, a techno-futurist framing of capitalism linked to many influential figures in Silicon Valley. Dark Enlightenment thought posits that freedom and democracy are incompatible and that human beings are not created equally, rooted in a biologically determinist worldview which sees success as the product of existing forms of skill, ingenuity and innate qualities. These ideas go beyond the positioning in neoliberalism of the individual and markets, often seen as important *levellers* of social hierarchy in libertarianism. Nick Land, a philosopher who first coined

the term 'Dark Enlightenment' as a rejection of the principles of liberal democracy, argues that human inequality and social stratification are inevitable, arising as a result of biological facts such as gender and ethnicity or physical attractiveness, using these factors to argue that 'people are not equal, they do not develop equally, their goals and achievements are not equal, and nothing can make them equal' (Land, 2013). For analysts like Burrows (2019), these anti-social principles are increasingly inscribed in the ambience and form of many urban centres or particular districts around the globe. We now turn to consider the implications of these principles for city life and built environments.

A catalogue of libertecture

It is possible to identify libertecture as a series of developments and infrastructures, often threaded through many built environments, rather than being an epochal or national narrative driving city planning and form more fully. The term libertecture is built from the Greek root of *architecture*, a word constructed from two elements meaning *chief* and *creator*. In this sense we use the term libertecture to denote built environments that are 'free' forms, or which can be applied to structures and spaces created or planned by actors and institutions who express a debt to the ideas of libertarianism. Such spaces and buildings embody libertarian ideas in their symbolic aspects, and in their planning and functional operation, rather than simply adopting some unified aesthetic set of qualities. We argue that elements of these developments perform the role of making manifest key ideological positions. These buildings and spaces may form spectacular examples, such as the Burj Al Arab, One Hyde Park or the Shard. However, we also suggest that many closed, hidden, less visible and sometimes more 'illegible' spaces and buildings can be described as libertecture: the apartment blocks of Manhattan's 'billionaire's row', the residential blocks built for private equity investors, safe deposit infrastructures, 'black box' buildings like many freeports, and elite gated communities built to secede from public jurisdictions, such as Mooikloof in South Africa or Puebla's Lomas de Angelópolis in Mexico. Many such examples of libertecture are drawn by us from national contexts with extreme income inequality (OECD, 2023) and suggest a relationship between these spaces and the legacy of decades of neoliberal policymaking which has created social conditions that have served to propel libertarian thinking.

Libertecture can be seen as a physical index of the presence and play of pan-global efforts to build physical systems, permit information flows, and to otherwise enable spatial forms that bolster flows of capital, maximise the freedoms of privileged users, and help to spatially or socially 'break' bonds with state and community actors or institutions. Thus, such forms help to shore-up, accelerate or shield the residential lives, investments, mobilities of wealthy bodies, money capital and embodied capital (art, wine, coins, precious metals and stones) of the wealthy and their intermediaries. There are often strong fantasy elements to libertectural forms and its applications. For instance, many examples possess futuristic international styles that are detached from local culture, history and politics – or indeed, pre-existing human societies altogether. Such forms suggest the presence of currents of these worldviews, riding in tandem with the wealth generated by speculative investment, technological entrepreneurship, crypto currency exchanges and residential adventurism (Piketty, 2020).

We suggest that there are seven identifiable mutually exclusive forms of built environment that can be described as libertecture: (i) private cities; (ii) residential

exit spaces (such as gated communities); (iii) portal-spaces (private airports or marinas); (iv) fiscal lockers (luxury freeports); (v) apeirotopias or infinity spaces (digital architectures, such as offshore bank accounts or elements of the metaverse); (vi) pioneer exclaves (such as seasteads or space colonies); and (vii) necrotectures (socially dead but 'investment full' dwellings). This array of spaces is often physically or virtually linked, creating a detached, hermetic system for wealthier groups, who may move (or move stores of capital) from residential exits through portal spaces to private cities, using resources stored in capital lockers, apeirotopias and necrotectures. Underpinning these spaces and forms is libertarian thought, the inspiration, blueprint or ideological guidebook which seeks to influence or shape the production of spaces consistent with its values and principles – it is not a style or a reference to the functional range of space uses or classes.

There has been a long-standing discussion in urban studies regarding the kind of transformations witnessed by cities during an age characterised by the deep imprint of neoliberalism, not least its effects in generating intensified processes of gentrification, deepening inequalities and sharpening precarity (Blomley, 2008). While noting the continued dominance of neoliberalism in much urban politics, our ambition is to highlight how libertarian ideas are both emerging and merging with the ideological and constructed environments of many cities today (Davies and Gane, 2021). In sum, we use the term libertecture to refer to environments (buildings, architectural forms, infrastructural services or planned districts or spaces) in which principles of sovereign personal freedom, corporate primacy and municipal organisational dismantling sit at the centre of their planning, design or management. Such spaces express a series of tendencies. First, they are often designed as member- or subscriber-only spaces. Second, they tend to offer a general absence of public controls and sanctions that help to make it possible to avoid or reduce the interference of state jurisdiction. Third, they are often the master-planned ventures that provide a sense of 'authorship' by groups (corporate or private interest or investment groups) or individuals. Fourth, they often involve the enclosure of public space or its privatisation and, in some cases, the externalisation of costs, such as pollution or public tax burdens. In this section we set out a catalogue of the types of libertecture as follows.

Private cities

The first type of libertecture we outline is almost certainly the most visible – the private city (Glasze et al., 2004). Private cities are usually founded on constitutional arrangements and contracts in which the development and subsequent governance of the urban territory are undertaken by a corporate, rather than public, entity. Such arrangements are notable for their incorporation of a body that is not drawn from a democratic or public domain. These tend to highlight spatial designations designed to override or circumvent the fiscal, social or territorial rules of governance of the wider territory they are part of.

Private cities privilege a more enclosed or truncated form of urbanism in which principles of public accountability are reduced or replaced by the idea of voting or controlling shares by owner-residents. Their capacity to offer 'good' governance appears to be linked to a broader principle of enabling individual residents to exit if standards or management is not deemed good enough. Such cities appear to be effective where any demand for services or support is likely to be minimal. The potential effect is of excluding or segregating groups who might burden or excessively use education, healthcare or social

support systems. Combined revenues or subscriptions may be used within the jurisdiction to pay for high quality leisure or other 'club' provided goods (Warner, 2011), such as golf clubs or medical care. Analysts like Sennett (1970) have argued that cities have historically formed constellations of public actors using public spaces over which forms of public, more or less participatory, modes of governance were overlaid. Private cities therefore reverse a general historical tendency in which urban life offered combined and publicly accountable modes of co-ordination.

One of the most notable examples of a private city is Neom, currently under development in Saudi Arabia's north-western corner, extending 170 km along the coast of the Red Sea. Neom (a name which combines the Greek word for 'new' followed by the first letter of the Arabic word for future) is being constructed by a joint stock company owned by the state's wealth fund and its public investment fund (built on national oil revenues). In the United Arab Emirates we can find Masdar City and in the US, Telosa – planned by a billionaire with a projected population of five million by 2050, a venture intended to underwrite a model of 'equitism' to benefit all residents. Alongside these examples, plans for Eko Atlantic City in Nigeria are well underway. Many of these new and planned private cities tend to coalesce around a vision of techno-urbanism, futurism and a desire for forms of trade that are seen as being impeded by the state. They advance the need for fiscal self-determination and indeed fiscal minimalism. The use of special economic zones and significantly reduced regulation are celebrated as a means of drawing inward investment and ostensibly empowering or including populations of poorer workers by avoiding tax commitments to the jurisdiction they are territorially a part of. Many of these cities model the possibility of seeing corporate governance as something dynamic, sophisticated and responsive to the needs of residents. Advocates see these cities as infusing urban policymaking with the innovations of private enterprise, eschewing what are identified as discredited models of urban governance which are unable to resolve urban problems.

Residential exits

One of the most notable developments in private urban governance, the master-planned gated community can be linked to libertarian thinking on several levels (McKenzie, 2011). The development of club goods theory has merged normative and analytic thinking, viewing such 'communities' as laudable examples of governance practice delivering better services and urban districts by combining the spending power of residents to pay for private services that rival or exceed the quality of those services provided by public cities. Here we use the term residential exit to think through the way in which desires for security and privacy (Blakely and Snyder, 1997) are meshed with requirements for escape from standard models of urban governance and revenue funding which require forms of levying and taxation, usually on property or commerce, to pay for shared services. Of course, such services are also required as part of systems to redress forms of inequality and social vulnerability. In this sense, private governance and the privatisation of social services of various kinds may threaten the provision of core services to poorer or marginal groups, and those without the voice or entry/exit capacity predicated on ability to pay, that associations and gated communities are founded on.

Within our view of libertecture we would include, beyond discrete gated communities, urban compounds and developments that enable apartment or other urban blocks to

become exit points for subscriber residents who can exit the public city into micro-jurisdictions. For example, in London we can find One Hyde Park, a super-prime luxury development that requires annual management fees of £40,000 or more. Such fees and the architecture of the block itself enable residents to be absorbed into the highly private building through guarded doorways or an underground car park accessed by a car lift and serviced by valet staff. Alongside these forms of residential exit in urban spaces we can find island examples, in which billionaires and wealthy residents have created more emphatic forms of social and fiscal escape, including the newspaper owning Barclay brothers in the Channel Islands, or Richard Branson in the Caribbean. Further 'escape and defend' locations have been created in low population density US states such as Wyoming and in New Zealand, which now contain many billionaire ranches to allow temporary or permanent forms of escape for wealthy residents. Residential exits are key examples of libertecture, often creating defendable or bunker spaces that help preserve the material and social privileges accruing from value extraction from wider economic systems, while simultaneously defensively isolating those who own these spaces from the environmental and social consequences of the process by which wealth is accrued (Garrett, 2020; Garrett and Klinke, 2019).

Portal spaces

The ability of affluent urban actors to move without let or hindrance is a feature of what we call portal spaces, infrastructures that enable rapid movement and connecting other nodal, residential, leisure or corporate elements of the urban area. The primary examples here are private airports, such as London's five that girdle the city, or Van Nuys airport in Los Angeles which sees hundreds of thousands of flights per year despite no commercial service offering routes to the site. Further examples come in the form of heliports and private highways. These infrastructures enable movement and what Soules (2021) refers to as new forms of avatar urbanism in which wealthy, globe-striding private actors, and what Van Fossen (2012) has called the transnational capitalist class, are able to pop-up within residential units and other spaces. Portal spaces often form a critical form of infrastructural libertecture – helping to stitch together the wider fabric of spaces and contexts. This raises an important further point around the way that assemblages of libertecture create wider and emergent effects, as sites and jurisdictions are stitched together by mobility platforms such as portals or by private modes of exclusive transportation. Portal spaces such as heliports tend to be few in number given the controls over urban airspace, although they are prolific in cities like Rio de Janeiro and Mexico City where there is less regulation. We also include examples of maritime docking facilities and marinas for superyachts in this form of libertecture, given their key role in facilitating mobilities and sitting at the very ideological core of social practices and principles in which ideas of freedom of bodily movement, personal sovereignty and, allied to this, capital flows are critical.

Fiscal lockers

Fiscal lockers are spaces where tangible assets are held securely to withdraw from tax obligations and serve as a physical store of wealth that can guard against inflation and other risks. In some cases it may also be possible to avoid or undermine the application of rules governing trade in illicit or sensitive objects, along with the impacts of sanctions. A key example of such lockers are freeports, facilities that are a type of special economic zone (SEZ) in which tax and customs rules

are differentially applied. Advocates argue that freeports generate growth, create new jobs and stimulate investment (Sunak, 2015). However, these claims are undermined by weak and contradictory evidence. Research has linked freeports – and SEZs more widely – to a range of risks, including illicit trade in counterfeit and smuggled items, as well as the undermining of environmental and labour standards (Hall et al., 2023).

Several freeports play pivotal roles in the trade and storage of art, gold, jewels and other extremely valuable objects, leading to their conceptualisation as 'luxury freeports' (Helgadóttir, 2023). These include the freeport in Geneva, the largest such site, as well as the state-of-the-art Luxembourg Freeport located within the EU and a smaller facility in Monaco, a micronation widely regarded as a tax haven. Further risks have been identified within luxury freeports. These include facilitating the trade in illicit antiquities and cultural artefacts (Dietzler, 2013; Sadowski, 2021) as well as the potential for enabling money laundering (Financial Action Task Force, 2010). The benefits of using these sites for the storage of art are typically exemptions on taxes and obligations for holding, buying and selling these items, with the super-rich increasingly viewing art as a safe store of capital in turbulent economic times (Deloitte, 2021; Picinati di Torcello, 2012).

Conceptually, freeports can be viewed as a kind of spatial purgatory, where objects are physically held within a state space but are legally viewed as being outside of the state's territory or in transit (Schwarzkopf and Backsell, 2021). In terms of physical design, many freeports are functional warehouse-style structures which appear to be made so as not to attract attention. However, the Luxembourg Freeport is notable also for being a stylishly designed structure with an interior akin to an international art gallery. While physical designs vary, at their heart fiscal lockers are designed to enable public ignorance as to their functions and the scale of the tax-avoiding holdings inside (Roberts, 2019).

Apeirotopias

Apeirotopias, libertarian digital spaces, exist in a virtual realm in which traditional resource constraints or physical boundaries are circumvented and additional space can be created through new lines of code. The term here combines the Greek words for 'infinity' and 'space', seeking to capture the distinctive form of libertarian digital architecture, and the detached, utopian and borderless quality which characterises said spaces. Take for instance the offshore bank account, with successive shells of legal entities concealing the identity of the beneficiary of an account registered in a place the owner may have never even visited, registered by a business (which could itself comprise layers of shell companies) that may also have no physical presence in the jurisdiction (Hampton and Christensen, 1999; Palan et al., 2010). Cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin form an important element of this type of space, enabling flows and markets to exist, or indeed the creation of new markets altogether, ostensibly all without borders, limits, state controls or interference. Yet as recent scandals highlight, the capacity for states to intervene where enablers break local laws suggests that libertarian fantasies of capital escape may be challenged in the future.

Libertarian utopian belief in the power of new digital technologies to disrupt markets, states and human societies and to create new opportunities for clever operatives in these spaces have become more popular (Burrows, 2019; Land, 2013). New products have emerged to take advantage of the lack of state regulation or borders within the internet, including non-fungible tokens or NFTs which denote ownership of virtual assets on

a blockchain, a secure algorithm (Smith and Burrows, 2021). The notion of these spaces as ones of fantasy is highlighted by the example of Liberland, a development in the metaverse designed by Zaha Hadid Architects that intends to be an NFT-driven online city. Liberland has become a proclaimed libertarian micronation, situated in a small territory between Croatia and Serbia that is disputed following the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s (Riding and Dahlman, 2022). Whereas physical Liberland is just seven square kilometres in size and is not officially recognised, the virtually reproduced iteration of the same space circumvents the need for recognition and is planned as a digital city for events and networking of professionals and investors in cryptocurrency and the metaverse.

Pioneer exclaves

Libertarianism has long dwelt on ideas of escape and social exit, often fixed on uninhabited islands or the high seas away from human societies with their series of rules and obligations (Craib, 2022). The pioneer exclave describes a libertarian colony of the seafaring or spacefaring kind. There has been substantial research into the proposals of the Seasteading Institute to establish floating colonies in international waters, which advocates see as a means of creating competitive government systems with their own dynamic sets of rules (Friedman and Taylor, 2012). The fantasy of a floating city is thus a logical evolution of *The World* residential cruise ship, which roams the seas and is home to wealthy residents able to partially detach from life on land (Atkinson and Blandy, 2009).

The seastead can also be seen as a response to the dearth of uninhabited islands for sale alongside dreams of creating new fiefdoms on the high seas (Spence, 2017). Miéville (2007) sees seasteads as offering potentially cohesive and stable micro-societies in which 'citizenship' is conferred through the price of entering these spaces, and the high cost of which can be used to exclude undesirables such as the poor and troublemakers, who can be ejected back to land as a result of the application of residency conditions. The seastead highlights a paradox in much libertarian thinking in which desires for unlimited personal liberty outside of state control are often practically compelled to offer state-like alternatives in order to guarantee individual freedoms and the safety of residents (Steinberg et al., 2012).

Libertarian ideas have been applied to exclaves of pioneers beyond the planet, in colonies on Mars, the Moon or in outer space. There is a bitter irony in proposals to create such settlements if they allow the super-rich to escape a planet in environmental collapse and suffering from the effects of the kinds of wealth exploitation that have generated this group. The recent Artemis Accords, a series of agreements among US allies concerning issues such as the exploitation of resources from space, demonstrate the libertarian ideological underpinnings of plans for corporate-led exploration and exploitation of the Moon, Mars, comets and asteroids (Schmidt and Bohacek, 2021). There is official support from NASA and affiliated space agencies for private companies to invest significant sums of money in proposals for space travel, mining and the creation of human settlements. Nevertheless, public attitudes display widespread scepticism about pioneer exclaves in outer space owing to concerns about their cost and safety, along with an impression that 'Mars is for rich people who have given up on Earth' (Platt et al., 2020).

Necrotectural space

The final type of libertecture we identify are the dead space-forms generated by global

investment capital, finding its expression primarily in notably under-used or empty districts, houses or apartments (Soules, 2021). Necrotecture has begun to be identified in several urban contexts, from evident centres of the global capitalist economic system like London (Atkinson, 2019) to the 'skeleton cityscapes' of Africa (Goodfellow, 2017). Dead residential space takes no particular constructed form; rather the common feature of this model lies in the under-occupation (infrequent stays by owners) or the production of long-term vacant properties associated with speculative investment in rapidly rising asset markets. At other times, such spaces act to enable the capital holdings of criminal syndicates looking to store substantial capital in purchases to integrate their capital into the formal economy.

Necrotecture brings with it notable problems for city governance, raising questions about the dividing lines between national fiscal systems and regulatory or policing powers, on the one hand, and local or city-based politics and its capacity to challenge empty homes through planning, annual taxation or other policy innovations. Arguably necrotecture represents the apotheosis of libertecture – venture forms built by developers and speculative capital that provide units often owned from offshore or within condo or leasehold formations. This is because houses held empty represent a fundamental challenge to deeper social understandings of housing as a core human necessity. Necrotecture highlights a callousness in which the freedom of capital and capital-investing bodies is seen as absolute, generating hot-running housing-finance economies where winners operate to maximise further rounds of benefit. These issues have played out in political economies that have proved either weak or uninterested in the kind of inequalities and social distress generated by the lack of homes for families and low to middle-income working populations.

A final element of necrotecture that we note here is the way that the spectral presence of super-thin apartment blocks in Manhattan, dark apartment blocks in London and housing estates in Spain's coastal and urban areas, among many others, point to a social crisis that is amplified by the pursuit of unfettered property markets. These outcomes particularly appear to be related to libertarian thinking and principles of sovereign individualism. What Soules and other commentators appear to allude to is an unsettling aspect to these shifts in contemporary urbanism. As dead space touches many cities and urban districts, the dysfunctionality and raw power of markets to waste core resources and to erode the social vitality of cities offers a clearer focal point for resistance and social anger about the inequalities generated and reinforced by libertarian urbanism.

Conclusion

In this article we have outlined how built environments may be connected to underlying systems of thought, organised doctrines and ideological and often unsaid values operating in social systems. What we have termed libertecture raises important questions for governance as these ideologies compete in key locations to reframe city life as a place of freedom, unfortunate but inevitable injustices and market freedoms that bring associated social freedoms. We have been careful not to argue that libertarian thinking and its related built forms represent either a totalising set of discourses nor a dominant element of urban life today globally. Nevertheless, our cataloguing of what we see as libertarianism's associated forms, or libertectures, of built environments is intended as a means of creating conceptual 'slots' into which new observations of emerging urban conditions might be made and understood. We suggest that this project is

necessary because, as with emerging forms of private urban governance, we see libertarian modes of urban life as a strong potential threat to the vitality and social equity of cities, even where libertecture only touches certain parts or districts. The emergence of libertecture represents the physical manifestation of libertarian ideas in urban contexts and thus in the life-worlds of urban residents. As demonstrated by other examples of symbolic development, we can therefore expect ideas embodied by these structures to have greater influence in years to come as they appeal to current adherents and attract new followers.

Another purpose of our analysis has been to provoke discussion and further critiques of the competing systems of ideas which are today shaping new urban forms and extensions that may be divisive or socially corrosive in their consequences. This is particularly because of the way that much libertarian thinking appears to commit itself to the denigration and dismantling of forms of public assistance and the tendency to naturalise forms of inequality, while allowing social and economic 'winners' to escape these conditions. In this sense our contribution is political to the extent that the intervention is guided by a critique of the development and potential of these forms.

One notable aspect of the expansion of a global group of the super-rich and a cast of enabling actors has been a related transmission of fractions of this wealth into projects to influence the political economy in ways that might further reduce forms of regulation, taxation and contribution. Moreover, a variety of charismatic individuals now act on the world stage, informally through social media and formally through think tanks, to set the agenda of governments, fund lobbying groups and take to platforms that might help relay these messages. This 'dark' influence operates in tandem with a set of personality cults attached to Randian figures striding the earth, who in conspicuous displays of wealth reminiscent of earlier eras of extreme inequality talk about building cities on the sea, sending rockets to space, and occupying spectacular ranches and skyscrapers from which their wealth can be monitored and expanded (Farrell, 2021). While there may not yet be a cohesive vernacular style to libertecture, we nonetheless posit that there is a common language underpinning these developments: one of spectacular displays of wealth coupled with a fervent devotion to technological progress, the fetishisation of the individual and rejection of the collective, and the sense of efforts to exit the social and environmental challenges facing the rest of society.

At a time of severe workplace fragility and prognoses of ecological devastation, the apparent offer of libertarianism is doubled – a coherent narrative of the self and the possibility of making spaces and places capable of insuring winners from future conflagrations or social upheaval. Libertarian ideas of individual and corporate liberty are harnessed to a broader project, to unleash the (wealthy) individual from the shackles of government, regulation, taxation and obligations to community in which forms of social association are seen as threatening a diminution of the self. Cities are the arenas in which struggles around these ideas are ultimately played out and where libertarian thinking is embodied in the infrastructures, buildings, and offshore or virtual spaces facilitating it. Despite political rhetoric from some admonishing the frequently left-wing and cosmopolitan populations of cities, it is the city where fortunes are made and circulated, and much libertecture can be seen as an attempt to detach these winnings from the surrounding urban environment and its social, political and economic realities.

Libertecture appears to have important effects. First, it may help to cement value systems among adherents as an identifiable

space showcasing the power and influence of this set of ideas. Second, it may be appealed to by ideological adherents as examples of the flourishing and social value of these ideas. Finally, given the espoused function of much libertecture, it seems a clear risk that these spaces may help to further amplify spatial divisions and social inequalities by separating elites from a degraded or even wasteland urban and global condition beyond its borders and networks. Critical urban studies needs to engage with and challenge such examples of contemporary urbanism because, in reality, libertecture works precisely against ideas of public value and public space, thus militating against the cohesive and sustainable urban communities required to promote more just cities.

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ORCID iDs

Rowland Atkinson https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9801-9380
Liam O'Farrell https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5984-844X

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