

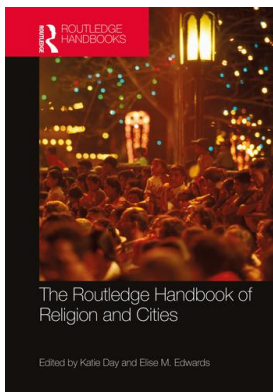
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11

A FEMINIST THEO-ETHIC OF JUSTICE-SEEKING-LOVE FOR SMART URBANITES

Samantha Cavanagh

In 2017, Waterfront Toronto¹ issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) from private corporations for an innovations and funding partner to help develop a 12-acre parcel of publicly owned land in Toronto, Canada. The proposed site for development is along the eastern waterfront of the city, and it has been lying dormant as a brownfield and parking lot for decades. In response to this RFP, Sidewalk Labs—an urban innovations firm affiliated with Alphabet Inc. (a parent company to Google)—submitted a vision of a mixed-use and mixed-economy community for roughly 5,000 residents. Sidewalk proposed a plan which included the extensive use of sensors and cameras embedded into the built environment in order to track and more effectively respond to weather conditions, traffic patterns, energy output, and trash disposal. The plan also incorporated raincoats for buildings, shielding the sustainably built timber structures from snow and ice; self-driving cars; affordable housing; and a zero emissions “green” microgrid. In short, they proposed to build a smart neighborhood where sustainable and equitable development would transpire “from the internet up.”² In May 2020, Sidewalk withdrew their proposal in light of the economic downturn caused by COVID-19.

There is no agreed-upon definition of smart neighborhoods, smart cities, or smart urbanization (SU), but shared claims are discernible. As Martina Fromhold-Eisebith clarifies, “a smart city is first and foremost characterized by the strategic, systematic, and coordinated implementation of modern ICT (information and communication technologies) applications in a range of urban functional fields.”³ Smart urbanism includes the use of SMART tools—or “Self-Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology”—within the infrastructure and governance of a city. Smart urban interventions embed networking systems into the built environment so that the city, and to varying degrees the inhabitants of a city,⁴ produce data that can be monitored and analyzed in order to (among other claims) optimize city services.

While the notion of the smart city is consistently centered around the use and integration of specific software and hardware technologies into the built environment, it is also widely employed (and often named) as an anthropological and ecological project, geared toward building cities that are more socially just and environmentally sustainable. Smart urbanism (SU) is being practiced across the globe as a solution to the ongoing and emerging problems for twenty-first-century urban life and governance. SU discourse and practice demonstrates “an eschatological optimism concerning the convergence between urban and IT developments.”⁵ It

has become a beacon of promise, but also a site of significant criticism. Looking to the example of Sidewalk Labs, I will argue that all urban inhabitants, and Christians in particular, ought to be concerned about the vision of human life and city building that this SU project sought to articulate within the City of Toronto.

In this chapter, I examine SU from a feminist theo-ethical perspective, which is to say, I approach the material practices and discursive logics of smart urbanization with concerns that are normative for this discipline. Feminist Christian social ethicists seek to understand what shapes our lives by examining specific contexts, complex standpoints, the relationship between the public and the private, ideological frameworks, and background conditions so that Christians, and all those who are called to pursue justice and love in public, might become better equipped to participate in the liberatory transformation of communities.⁶ I will examine smart city initiatives with concerns for how smart city practices foster or hinder just conditions between us.

Feminist theological ethics for smart urbanism

For Christian feminist social ethics, effective political democracy is regarded as normative for seeking justice; that is, democratic systems and democratic accountabilities are used as ethical guideposts for moral-political decision-making. As feminist theological-ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda argues, “what corrodes democracy is suspect from a perspective of Christian ethics.”⁷ The normative stance on democracy, however, necessitates that democracy be always critically examined and resisted as a “mythological single and universally normative theory and form.”⁸ The primary democratic goods that ought to function as normative for Christian ethics in all contexts, including the urban, are the meaningful participation of all who are included within its purview and political accountability to all of those who are impacted by this form of governance.

To work toward democratically just conditions in these ways is to behave lovingly in public. Rather than considering justice and love as distinct or complementary moral norms, I proceed in this examination of smart city practices with the affirmation that love and justice flow out of and into one another. Following Moe-Lobeda’s proposal for a “justice-seeking-love,”⁹ I understand the norms of justice and love to be inherently bound up together as one. To seek justice in the urban context is to practice love; to act into and out of love in the urban public realm is to work for more-just cities. Christians in the urban context ought to be concerned with fostering just conditions in the city, and, in this case, with ensuring that the arrangements and procedures of smart technologies are being used justly and for just ends. In doing so, we contribute to building cities that are more loving—a direction aligned with Jesus’ moral invitation and invocation to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Justice-seeking-love requires that all urban inhabitants have what they need to survive and thrive, proper representation within urban governance, and the opportunity for meaningful involvement in building cities “more after their hearts desire.”¹⁰ To utilize smart technologies lovingly and justly, significant participation and input from all who will be impacted by these interventions must be ensured, the wellbeing of the most vulnerable among us must be a priority, and effective oversight of smart innovations by our democratically elected officials must be guaranteed. These are the criteria I will be employing as I engage and assess the logics and material arrangements of one smart city example, the case study of Sidewalk Labs’ plan for Toronto.

The sources I will draw upon to support this engagement and assessment include materialist sociology, Marxist urban theories, and selections from the unfolding news cycle that emerged in response to Sidewalk Labs’ plan for smart urbanization in Toronto. I engage these distinctly

non-religious sources with the overarching theo-ethical concern for justice and love for diverse urban life; I turn to these sources to gain the critical knowledge necessary for understanding SU in this context and in order to assess what kinds of social arrangements were embedded within their proposal.

Public–private partnerships (P3s) for smart urbanism

To concretize my examination of the wide and diverse set of practices and material arrangements that are included within the designation of the smart city, I evaluate the case study of Sidewalk Labs, and their retracted proposal for a smart neighborhood in Toronto, Canada, the city in which I reside. In considering this example, the concerns and stakeholders are not limited to those at the local level; enmeshed in this representative case are a multi-national conglomerate, a sister corporation in Google, three levels of government, and SU practices and theories that (materially and discursively) span scalar regions. Although the Sidewalk Labs' Toronto project known as Quayside was proposed for a particular municipality in Canada, the intent of the project was clearly oriented toward developing tools and strategies to be exported to cities around the world. Toronto was being proposed as a living urban laboratory for Sidewalk's broader corporate ambition to develop and deploy smart city technologies that they could market to other contexts.

In selecting this example, my engagement of smart city technologies will primarily be centered around issues that can arise within public–private partnerships (P3s) for smart city interventions. Partnerships between public and private sectors are frequent within smart city practices, since the public sector simply cannot keep pace with private tech corporations in the research and development of smart tools and practices, and because private corporations can more swiftly effectuate these approaches and tools. Sidewalk, like other smart urban technology firms and corporations, identifies these problems in the public realm of city building as opportunities for development.

The private tech sector needs the public sphere as a field (or, in this case, a laboratory) for smart urban technology development. To develop smart urban technology at all, the private tech sector requires data from urban life. These collaborative relationships between public and private sectors for smart city interventions ought to be closely monitored, for the values, rationales, and goals are often (or ought to be) distinct for private- and public-democratic entities. P3s for SU must be scrutinized to ensure that the city does not become privatized, democratic processes are not trumped, and city governance is not commandeered for private gain.

From the lens of Christian feminist theological ethics, it is incumbent upon all inhabitants who are impacted by city building through P3s to engage in such scrutiny, since P3s have the capacity to circumvent our moral agency as urban inhabitants by delimiting democracy. This, in effect, damages our moral-spiritual imaginations and faculties for building urban spheres where norms of love and justice can become translated into practices that respect and protect diverse human, and other-than-human life. Publicly owned land within urban centers ought to be maintained as assets held in common so that we can continually press for these spaces and places to respond to the needs and desires of urban inhabitants. Privatization of the city must be resisted so that just conditions might be lovingly pursued.

Private corporations for the public good?

Sidewalk's corporate goal is to "reimagine cities to improve quality of life."¹¹ However, we must actively inquire into whether or not this corporation, and the private sector more broadly, can

be truly motivated by the public good, or made responsible for the public good. Sidewalk is an urban technology company founded in 2015 as a Google corporation before Google became a subsidiary of Alphabet. Sidewalk emerged out of Google as its founders considered “all the things you could do if someone would just give us a city and put us in charge.”¹² Sidewalk Labs and Google have been presented as separate corporations, although they are both owned by Alphabet (which is run by Google’s founders). As vocal Sidewalk critic and digital privacy advocate Bianca Wylie explains,

Alphabet has a history of merging its companies, and pieces of its companies, into Google—and then back out again. Proximity to Google’s technical proficiency is pulled out when it’s appealing, such as when questions of data security are raised, or when economic development claims are made, then walked back when it’s not.¹³

The clear distinctions between these corporations simply do not exist; in order to assess the trustworthiness of Sidewalk, we also must consider that it is a byproduct (with ongoing and foundational connections) of Google, and thereby also evaluate the reputation of Google itself.

While Google’s corporate code of conduct formerly included the motto “don’t be evil,”¹⁴ its track record is rife with human rights violations and harmful behavior. That is, their corporate conduct continues to institutionalize egregious patterns of relating within their institution, as well as within the communities that use and are used by its tools. The following are but a handful of examples.

In 2018, 20,000 Google employees staged a walkout in 50 cities across the world. Employees at every level left their workplace in order to “demand an end to the sexual harassment, discrimination, and the systemic racism that fuel this destructive culture.”¹⁵ To cover up a culture of misconduct, allegations against executives at Google have frequently resulted in large severance packages for those accused, enabling abuse and unethical behavior to continue within this context.¹⁶ Of the seven organizers of this walkout, four have since resigned—two claiming that Google retaliated against them for their organizing.¹⁷ Second, since 2017, Google has held a contract with the United States Department of Defense, assisting with Project Maven, where they were developing (and continue to develop, despite stating an end to this project in 2018) AI surveillance tools for drone warfare technology.¹⁸ Finally, but certainly not conclusively, in Project Dragonfly, Google planned to launch a censored search engine in China, which would weed out broad categories of information to users including sites related to human rights, religious freedom, peaceful protest, and democracy. Inside sources say this project, which was supposed to have been suspended because of the internal and external backlash it received once it was made public, is in fact still in development.¹⁹

In each of these examples, Google’s orientation toward financial gain as the bottom line is clear. The ideals that undergird Google include the commodification of everyday life through the collection and capitalization of users’ data. Google accepts and hides harm done to its employees, and some of the projects and tools they develop participate in anti-democratic and militaristic conditions around the world. These offenses and practices are frequently hidden from the view of the casual Google user, many of whom rely on the good that Google offers to their lives as a near-monopoly search engine.

Google’s wrongdoings as sin and evil

In the language of Christian ethics, these patterns of relating are evil. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda offers the perspective that sin and evil are that which disorient us “from right relationship with

God, which then leads to disorientation from right relationship with self, others, and all of creation.”²⁰ Sin and evil exist in the form of individual wrongdoings, but more so, liberative and feminist theological ethics are concerned with the structural shape of sin. The sins that Google enables and perpetuates include individual acts of wrongdoing, but the insidiousness of their behavior takes place within the globalized structures of the military–industrial complex, sexist and misogynist abuse culture, and totalitarianism.

As feminist theologian Ivone Gebara argues, the everydayness and hiddenness of structural evil is what helps to perpetuate it; evil transpires because sinful patterns of relating can become “so mixed up in our existence that we can live in it without even taking account of it as evil.”²¹ Our dependence on Google in light of their stranglehold on the internet through the reaches of its search platform, operating systems, and tools, corporate relatives and subsidiaries has already rendered this corporate force entirely mixed up in our everyday life. As Gebara suggests, our dependence on social structures and institutions that perpetuate evil lead many of us to accept these sinful conditions as a matter of fate.²² Because of Google’s ubiquitous presence in virtual life, it can feel impossible to opt out of and contest.

For liberative Christian ethics and feminist theological ethics more specifically, a frequent first methodological and practical step in doing the work of resisting evil is to recognize it as such. Knowing about Google’s ongoing history of burying sexual assault, as well as their track record of creating technologies for anti-democratic practice and militarism, allows us to name this corporation as harmful to our neighbors, and it allows us to be able to more critically assess them as a potential partner in SU. The values Google operates by and the sinful patterns of relations they enact and perpetuate are in direct contradiction to Christian norms of justice-seeking-love.

Sidewalk's “Toronto Tomorrow” plan

After being granted the bid to Waterfront Toronto’s RFP,²³ Sidewalk Labs underwent two years of public consultation, research, and planning. In June of 2019, Sidewalk Labs completed and presented its Master Innovation and Development Plan (MIDP) entitled *Toronto Tomorrow: A New Approach for Inclusive Growth*, which was a 1,524-page document detailing the complex vision. Before Waterfront Toronto came to any final decisions regarding what they were open to exploring from the MIDP, Sidewalk Labs withdrew from the Quayside project in May 2020 as a result of global financial uncertainty caused by COVID-19. While the MIDP is now defunct, it remains an important artifact for cities considering P3s for SU. Within their proposal, we can glean insights into the intentions and ideological underpinnings of Sidewalk Labs, who will almost certainly pursue other urban contexts for partnerships in the future.

What is most immediately striking about the MIDP is that, while Waterfront Toronto issued a call for proposals to develop a 12-acre parcel of land, Sidewalk Labs MIDP was for an additional 153-acre allotment, wherein an “IDEA District” (an acronym for “innovative design and economic acceleration”) would also be built. Included within the MIDP were: a promise to create thousands of affordable housing units, plans for a timber manufacturing plant, and a new transportation system linking this section of the city by light-rail transit (which would have required un-budgeted municipal and provincial funding to build). For these smart features to work effectively, Sidewalk claimed that specialized regulators and governance bodies would need to be developed to ensure environmental compliance, the meeting of performance goals, and the optimal integration into the interconnected service provision structures of the neighborhood. These regulator entities would have required exemptions from municipal and provincial regulations, the capacity for self-financing with operating costs generated by user fees,

and a clear reliance on Sidewalk Labs for the technical expertise and infrastructure required for fitting into the proposed grid.²⁴ In effect, they advocated for a privatization of what ought to be publicly managed services by inserting themselves “directly into [Toronto’s] public infrastructure and governance.”²⁵

Some of the pro-social promises that Sidewalk made in the MIDP simply did not stand up to analysis and critique. Take, for instance, Sidewalk’s plan to provide 40% below-market housing in light of the housing affordability crisis in this city. As Sidewalk rightly recognized, “no issue is more pressing in Toronto right now than housing affordability.”²⁶ In Toronto, 47% of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing, and this is projected to continue increasing.²⁷

While Sidewalk committed to building an “affordable, inclusive community with 40% of units at below-market rates,”²⁸ below-market rate is “still unaffordable for most Torontonians.”²⁹ As former Toronto chief planner Jennifer Keesmaat argues, below-market rent in a city with skyrocketing costs of living does not amount to affordable housing. Using market rate as a measure for affordability occludes the real and pressing issue that many people in Toronto simply cannot afford market rent. If this municipal land is to be used to respond to the housing affordability crisis in this city, the conditions for actually existing rental affordability need to be established.

Digital privacy advocates have perhaps been the loudest among critics of Sidewalk’s plan. Early on in their planning process, Ann Cavoukian, Ontario’s former privacy commissioner, resigned from her role as an advisor to Sidewalk, citing Sidewalk’s inability to guarantee that personal identifiers would be stripped from collected data. In light of this criticism, Sidewalk proposed that the data collected within Quayside would be held in a “civic data trust” and not be sold to third parties without explicit consent.³⁰ However, the MIDP included no developed plans to guarantee data security within this untested and undeveloped civic data trust model. Due to this lack of clarity, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CLAA) launched court action to halt Sidewalk’s plans before Sidewalk pulled out of the partnership entirely.

Resisting Sidewalk by naming ideological underpinnings

As advocated for in feminist theo-ethical materialist methods, understanding and critiquing the ideologies behind the logics and social practices of our day is critical for resisting and transforming unjust and dehumanizing conditions.³¹ Locating the conceptual agendas behind Sidewalk’s plans is crucial for challenging their harmful social practices. Neoliberalization and surveillance capitalism are two of the intersecting ideological foundations behind this iteration of SU.

Supporters of Sidewalk’s plan warned that if Toronto did not seize this urban innovation opportunity, the city would fail to thrive in the competitive global (and ever-increasingly urban) marketplace. Influential urban theorist Richard Florida argued that “Toronto needs to compete with the best of the best”; it must catch up with other leading tech cities in its commitment to and support of high-tech innovation, which in turn would introduce significant tax revenue and employment opportunities for this city.³² There is a distinctly entrepreneurial and neoliberal paradigm to this argument that assumes that capital wellbeing is synonymous with building a good city. Of course, cities must be concerned with financial stability. But is competing to be the best or the wealthiest city the most appropriate and responsible goal to have? While smart technologies are proposed as ecological and pro-social solutions to inefficient urban systems, the neoliberal use of these tools must be questioned. We must understand, critique, and resist neoliberalization’s relentless prioritization for the interests of private property owners, multi-national corporations, and financial capital over the needs of diverse urban inhabitants (and especially cultural and racial minorities, as well as all others living in poverty). We must resist having all

areas of our lives wrapped up into a “grid of economic intelligibility,” as Foucault describes neoliberal governance and rationality.³³

In connection with such neoliberalization is the logic at work in the use of data for corporate gain. As social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff argued, Sidewalk’s plan was the latest frontier in “surveillance capitalism,” in which the data from human experience is collected to ameliorate digital services, but also for the purposes of constructing behavioral predictions that can anticipate “what you will do now, soon, and later.”³⁴ Rather than exploiting labor, as is the case with previous forms of capitalism, surveillance capitalism “feeds on every aspect of every human’s experience.”³⁵ Surveillance capitalism takes aspects of what used to be private life and seeks to more fully integrate this information into the marketplace. How and where people move in space, the biological functions of the human body, and interactions among people are all subject to being mined for the valuable data they produce. Effectively, our behavior is what is being commoditized.

Zuboff contends that once data is collected, it is analyzed for the purposes of being turned into “prediction products”; by being able to more accurately predict people’s actions, corporations can use these insights (and sell these insights to countless third parties) to optimize their business tactics. Further, Zuboff maintains that data is not merely used to gain understanding for predictive market purposes, but is also employed in order to impose “programmed control.”³⁶ Zuboff suggests that behavior modification through the gathering and deployment of data transpires through subliminal cues used to shape behavior, through “herding” techniques, whereby remote orchestration of tools and systems delimits choices, and through “conditioning” strategies, where digital reinforcements are used over time in order to be able to reliably predict and produce particular behaviors that the company is seeking to elicit.³⁷

Zuboff warns that corporate-led smart urbanization “claims the city as its laboratory and the lives of citizens as its free raw material for data creation, ownership, computation and monetization.”³⁸ She argues that residents’ data would be monitored in order to optimize the smart technologies that Sidewalk hoped to test out in Quayside for the purposes of future sales to other sites. Leaders in ICT echoed these warnings. For instance, Jim Balsillie, the co-founder of Research in Motion (makers of BlackBerry), called Sidewalk’s project “a colonizing experiment in surveillance capitalism attempting to bulldoze important urban, civic and political issues.”³⁹

While neoliberal urbanization constructs and organizes social relations as market relations (whereby all social interactions are framed within the grid of economic intelligibility), the ideological arrangements of surveillance capitalism transform the data that human subjects produce into marketable goods. As Zuboff suggests, “we are not surveillance capitalism’s ‘customers,’” but rather the sources of their surplus: “the objects of a technologically advanced and increasingly inescapable raw-material-extraction operation.”⁴⁰ Whereas neoliberal ideology treats individuals as enterprises unto themselves, surveillance capitalism utilizes and, as Zuboff contends, controls the behavior of individuals for corporate gain. Sidewalk’s plan proposed to privatize city space for profit—a move in line with the spatial practices of neoliberalization—by using surveillance technologies that turn inhabitants into “citizen sensors”⁴¹ who use services, and, in so doing, produce lucrative data for corporate extraction.

While their project is now defunct, we ought to remain concerned about the vision of urban life proposed in Sidewalk’s plans because this is likely not the last we’ve heard of Sidewalk Labs (as well as other P3s for SU). Cities ought not be treated as laboratories for corporately owned urban infrastructures, and a corporate body ought not own the solutions to affordable housing shortages, effective waste and water management, and ecological sustainability. As Robert Park and David Harvey note, in building the city, we build and re-build ourselves;

the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold.⁴²

What sorts of systems and relationships will be fostered in data-driven, corporately planned, and predominantly privately funded smart city initiatives? These matters must remain central to considerations of P3s for SU, since it is not merely our neighborhoods that are at stake but our very notions of urban inhabitation and city life.

Feminist theological anthropologies for smart urbanism

As urban Christian inhabitants, we must resist actions and ideologies that reduce life to a matter of financial exchange. Echoed throughout the Christian tradition is an insistence on the sacredness of all life, and human life in particular (for better and certainly for worse), given that we are created in the image and likeness of God.⁴³ While there is wide diversity within Christian attitudes toward human life, there is a dominant and reverent awareness that each of us are “infinitely precious to God and made for an eternal destiny.”⁴⁴ In order to fulfill that destiny, Christians look to Jesus Christ as the paradigmatic human life after which we seek to model our own. That is, we come to understand what living in God’s likeness entails; indeed, what it means to be fully human, through Jesus. Reflecting on the meaning and purpose of human life are concerns that are included within doctrines of *theological anthropology*.

Feminist theologies and theological ethics have offered particular contributions to what it means to be born in the likeness of God, and directed into the right relationship with all of creation by following Jesus. Among these contributions is the proposition for a distinctly relational theological anthropology. For instance, eco-feminist theologian Sallie McFague offers the model of the whole cosmos as “created in the image of God,” and that, together, in all of our “mind-boggling diversity,” we make up “the body of God.”⁴⁵ All human and other-than-human life transpires within this interconnected and holy web of relation, and the moral imperative for each of us as humans includes cultivating behavior that is respectful of this irrevocable kinship. Relational anthropologies thus frequently result in a requisite ethic of mutuality and/or solidarity.⁴⁶ As feminist social ethicist Beverly Harrison suggests, “our life is part of a vast cosmic web, and no moral theology that fails to envisage reality in this way will be able to make sense of our lives or our actions today.”⁴⁷ As creatures constituted by relationship, our birthright and responsibility includes living out our belovedness as creatures made in God’s likeness by building structures, systems, and indeed cities, which respect and protect the wellbeing of all our neighbors (broadly understood). In these ways, we participate in becoming like Christ, “making the body of God healthier and more fulfilled.”⁴⁸

Against Sidewalk’s regard for human life as a collection of “automated behavioral sensors”⁴⁹ that can be monitored for corporate gain, relational anthropologies and the ethical imperatives that emerge out of them offer a moral-spiritual vision of human life as co-participating in a sacred whole, and accordingly, that our lives ought not be subject to corporate surveillance and profiteering. In order to cultivate our full humanity in the city, we must resist and transform those conditions that are harmful to ourselves and our neighbors, and continually work to share spaces, resources, and responsibilities equitably so that all have what they need to thrive within this holy web of urban relation. Such a sacred vision for human life underlines the flagrant disrespect that is built into techniques of neoliberal urbanization and surveillance capitalism.

Interconnected life in the city, however, is clearly not identical for all inhabitants. The “total sociality of all things”⁵⁰ does not mean that all threads within the web experience life equally

or alike. Throughout Christian feminist social ethics, there have been correctives to essentializing and universalizing claims about the nature and purpose of human life, including claims around an ontologically relational anthropology. For instance, Christian social ethicist Traci West argues for supplanting conceptual anthropologies organized around abstracted notions such as relationality by insisting that contextual particularity and embodied experience are irreducibly constitutive of human lives in communities. West suggests that what ought to be the focus for understanding personhood are particular institutional practices which concretize and structure diverse human experience.⁵¹ From West and others,⁵² we are encouraged to consider that relationality is always manifested within a specific set of eco-social and bio-political arrangements; any consideration of human life that fails to take account of particular circumstances and intersections obscures how differently human life is experienced, and how divergently we are all positioned within the structures that shape our lives in common.

The insistence that context and particularity always matter within a relational theological anthropology surfaces questions we must ask of SU and the ideologies of neoliberal urbanization and surveillance capitalism, such as: who will financially benefit from this arrangement? How will the data of the people who live, work and visit the neighborhood be used, by whom, and toward what ends? Any thorough consideration of the use of smart technologies (privately funded or otherwise) in the built environment also needs to assess the likelihood of collected data being used to unjustly monitor specific groups of people. As Kitchin et al. probe, “what systems and structures of inequality are (re)produced within smart urbanism?”⁵³ How will we each be rendered within neighborhoods built from the internet up? Effective and responsive smart urban management and planning will require due consideration for the ways in which individuals and groups are uniquely (and very likely inequitably) impacted within SU.

Conclusion

The cautions I have raised are not necessarily about the inherent dangers in the use of smart technology in cities. Our data *can* be used toward justice-loving urban ends. As Nancy Odendall recognizes, many civil society organizations are using collected data in order to make the “invisible (the informal, the marginalized) ‘visible’ through documentation practices.”⁵⁴ Collected data can be used in order to “exert pressure on the state for change,” when it is put in the hands (and devices) of various communities.⁵⁵

Rather, the issues I am concerned with are primarily political, and they are of theo-ethical import; do we want to cede the power of urban planning and city building to corporations (who view human behavior as a product) without effective and meaningful—that is to say, democratic—inhabitant and governmental engagement? Do we want to let a corporation (with little experience and an ominous track record) build our cities, especially when their anthropologies and business models are based on turning our very lives into commodities?

Using language, norms, and methods appropriate to feminist theological ethics, I have sought to draw attention to the material, moral, and spiritual dangers involved in public-private partnerships for SU. Looking at Sidewalk’s plan from this lens has led me to believe that, in order to contribute to justice in the city, we must persistently contest the corporatization of urban space and the commodification of human life that was exemplified in their proposal. A key moral-spiritual responsibility for urban inhabitants confronting P3’s for SU is to continuously insist on effective democratic processes as we consider smart tools and practices for justice-loving urban futures. Smart city technologies should not be put in place in order to monitor and profit from inhabitants’ lives; they should be used to construct cities more after our justice-loving hearts’ desires, where the city is built for the wellbeing of all who inhabit it in mind.

While such a vision may seem impossible to realize, utopian urban imaginings help us to give shape to better (i.e. more just) urban futures. As Rob Kitchin posits, utopian urban thinking “creates hope and new desire lines, makes it clear that the future is contingent rather than a teleological inevitability.”⁵⁶ Feminist theological ethics can participate in such critical future imagining by emboldening us with a vision of a city where justice and love are extended across our urban web of relation; they can also help to equip us with some of the necessary moral-spiritual tools (naming sin and evil and insisting on ideological critique, for example) required in order to press for spatial and structural justice in our cities.

Notes

- 1 Waterfront Toronto is a quasi-public development corporation created by three levels of government—Canada, Ontario, and the City of Toronto. These national, provincial, and municipal governments fund it, while it functions with an unelected and primarily private sector board.
- 2 Dan Doctoroff, “Reimagining Cities from the Internet Up,” *Medium*, November 30, 2016, accessed November 1, 2019. <https://medium.com/sidewalk-talk/reimagining-cities-from-the-internet-up-5923d6be63ba>.
- 3 Martina Fromhold-Eisebith, “Cyber-Physical Systems in Smart Cities—Mastering Technological, Economic, and Social Challenges,” in *Smart Cities: Foundations, Principles, and Applications* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), p. 3.
- 4 I use the term “urban inhabitants” rather than citizens of the city in light of the fact that many who live in cities are not provincial or national citizens and in order to reflect the fact that the category of “citizenship” is divisive, while inhabitant allows for shifting and variously positioned belonging. One can inhabit a city illegally and temporarily.
- 5 Maroš Krivý, “Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism: The Smart City and the Society of Control,” *Planning Theory*, Vol. 17 (2018): p. 9.
- 6 For these and other basepoints in feminist Christian social ethics, see Elizabeth Bounds, Pamela Brubaker, Mary Hobgood. “Feminist Ethics and Public Policy,” *Welfare Policy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), pp. 12–17.
- 7 Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 46.
- 8 Moe-Lobeda, p. 47.
- 9 Moe-Lobeda, p. 11.
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