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From UBI to UBU: The Case for Universal Basic Urbanism

The political forms prevailing in the United States and much of the global north for the past two centuries have been tied to the capacity of capitalism (along with varying forms of state intervention) to sustain full-time employment in the formal sector for a significant majority of households. As proponents of Universal Basic Income (UBI) have pointed out, within the next several decades, machine automation in manufacturing, service, administrative, food processing, and even agricultural tasks will likely produce skyrocketing rates of unemployment throughout the world. UBI has been proposed—and tested in several pilot projects—as a way of distributing of monthly dividends to all citizens (more or less), regardless of economic need.[1] However, apart from the economic devastation that automation will likely wreak upon countless persons, there is the question of how conditions of large-scale unemployment might fundamentally alter the political fabric of society. When a vast number of individuals become surplus to capital's needs, they risk losing political capital precisely at the moment when they would most urgently need it. This essay suggests that one way to contest an erosion of popular political power is to shift focus away from individuals' rights toward the rights of (and to) the city—that is, toward collective, locally nuanced, and small-scale forms of self-determination.

In light of the increasing automation of labor, many states and municipalities across the globe have entertained proposals for UBI. Andrew Yang, during his recent bid for the US presidency, helped usher the concept of UBI into mainstream American discourse with his “Freedom Dividend,” which promised to deliver \$1,000 a month to each non-incarcerated adult citizen. [2] While scores of scholars, journalists, and policymakers have debated the virtues of UBI relative to more targeted forms of welfare, these discussions assume that the basic unit to benefit from such programs—the target recipient—is the individual citizen or family. Thus, the federal state bears a direct relationship to the individual, overleaping intervening scales of governance.[3] In representing the individual as either a sovereign subject—albeit supported by state dividends (in the case of UBI)—or else as a demographic-statistical subject (in the traditional welfare state), these modes of redistributing wealth neglect alternatives that eschew top-down relations of power between the federal state and the individual. In the interests of establishing collective (rather than individual) forms of self-determination, I propose that the urban, rather than the individual, serve as the recipient for “basic income.”

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[1] Pilot programs of varying scales have been enacted by both private and public institutions during the past decade in rural, urban, and suburban areas. Sites of pilot programs include (but are not limited to) Stockton, California (a small city east of the Bay Area); Ontario; Finland; several rural villages in India; and various rural and urban sites in Kenya. Most completed pilot studies found basic income to produce reasonably favorable results, with more benefit in global-southern areas than in the global north. There is a large literature on the topic. For a general assessment of programs and potentials in the global south, see Abhijit Banerjee, Paul Niehaus, and Tavneet Suri, “Universal Basic Income in the Developing World,” *Annual Review of Economics* 11 (August 2019): 959–83. For a more critical assessment of current UBI proposals, pointing to its relationship to Silicon Valley capitalism, see E. Fouksman and E. Klein, “Radical Transformation or Technological Intervention: Two Paths for Universal Basic Income,” *World Development* 122 (October 2019): 492–500.

[2] Andrew Yang, “The Freedom Dividend Defined,” [link](#). See also Matt Stevens, “Andrew Yang on Universal Basic Income,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2019, [link](#).

[3] Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes how fascist and other authoritarian governments seek to establish direct relationships (albeit fictive, abstract relationships) between the state and the individual. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's New Deal, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).

By “urban,” I don’t refer exclusively to cities but to all small-scale bounded spatial domains: e.g., rural counties, suburban townships, and urban city-council districts. How “basic income” would differ from existing forms of municipal expenditure lies first in the guarantee of substantial yearly federal funds and, second, in the reliance on a combination of direct and representative democracy at the local scale to determine how a municipality’s basic income be spent. Taking a cue from UBI, what I call “universal basic urbanism” (UBU) would operate on the premise that adults might be entrusted to envision and implement better ways of existing in the world. Unlike UBI, however, UBU does not reinforce settler-colonial legacies of possessive individualism but rather sees the local collective as a crucial unit within processes of self-determination.[4] In this latter respect, UBU could be modeled on participatory budgeting programs, which have recently made their way north from Latin America and which typically involve local volunteer or elected delegates developing proposals to be submitted to referendum, with varying degrees of centralized coordination across local municipalities.[5] What would distinguish UBU from those existing models, apart from the massive infusion of federal funds (a significant difference) and the inclusion of non-urban municipalities, is mostly contextualization—that UBU would be focused on issues related to the growing precarity of employment. That is, it would make sense to orient UBU through principles supporting the needs of a growing precariat. Similar to participatory budgeting, UBU is not conceived as an economic panacea or substitute for other forms of welfare assistance, urban-economic planning, or political contestation of inequality. Like many basic income proposals, UBU is intended to supplement existing (and perhaps future) social programs in light of growing job insecurity, to say nothing of catastrophes such as global pandemics.

As an object of review, this essay refers to Yang’s proposed Freedom Dividend, along with supplemental texts such as Yang’s *The War on Normal People*, without, however, evaluating in detail the pros and cons of Yang’s or similar proposals or pilot programs, as there exists a large body of scholarly and popular literature on the topic.[6] Instead, I use the Freedom Dividend as a springboard from which to offer three main justifications for reorienting the concept of basic income away from individuals and toward the urban:

The social-political: UBU is conceived as a way of resisting UBI’s biopolitical and neoliberal logic. Rather than merely maintaining a large portion of the population at subsistence levels, UBU would promote new and existing grassroots initiatives to develop job-training and employment opportunities, along with social institutions, platforms, and spaces of exchange helping people mutually support each other’s efforts to balance work, domesticity, and leisure. The political processes of community-building involved in UBU might also constitute a social value in and of itself, leading to greater organization of popular politics and their influence at all levels of governance.

The urbanist: In the US, the built environment—rural as well as urban—largely developed around an industrial economy; a related gender-, racial- and class-based division of labor; and structures of formal employment such as a forty-hour work week (and the workday commute). All of this entailed a complex of infrastructures and architectures mediating relations between the domains of paid labor, domestic labor, consumption, and social practices, concomitant with urban, suburban, and rural relations. Following the post-Fordist

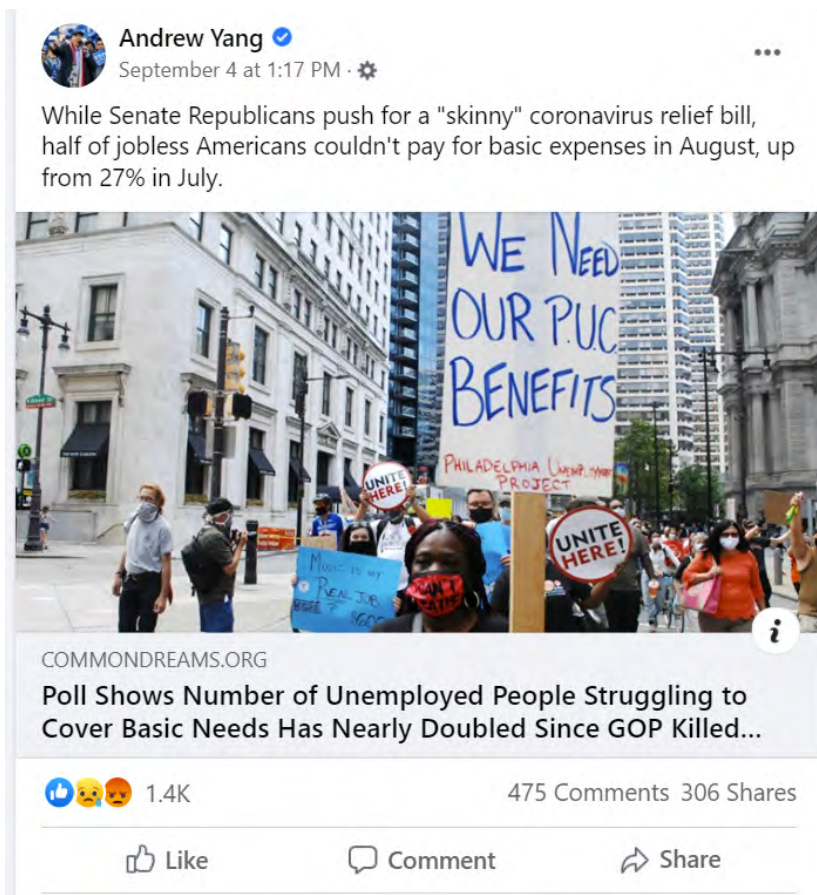
[4] C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

[5] Ganuza and Baiocchi argue that the democratic potential of participatory budgeting has been weakened as it has been transposed beyond Latin America without larger institutional transformations, rendering it a mere policy “device” rather than an “instrument” capable of reshaping relations between “political society, civil society, and the state.” Ernesto Ganuza and Gianpaolo Baiocchi, “The Power of Ambiguity: How Participatory Budgeting Travels the Globe,” *Journal of Public Deliberation* 8, no. 2 (December 2012): 2. See also Chapter 3 in Baiocchi and Ganuza, *Popular Democracy: The Paradox of Participation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017). For an evaluation of the successes and limitations of participatory budgeting in Brazil, see R. N. Abers, *Inventing Local Democracy: Grassroots Politics in Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000). See also Baiocchi, “A Century of Councils: Participatory Budgeting and the Long History of Participation in Brazil,” Chap. 1 in *Beyond Civil Society: Activism, Participation, and Protest in Latin America*, ed. Sonia E. Alvarez, et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

[6] Andrew Yang, *The War on Normal People* (New York: Hachette Books, 2018). Literature on UBI is vast—and authored more by proponents than detractors—but notable works advocating for UBI include Phillippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Annie Lowrey, *Give People Money: How a Universal Income Would End Poverty, Revolutionize Work, and Remake the World* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018); Brian McDonough and Jessie Bustillo Morales, *Universal Basic Income* (London: Routledge, 2020). For a critical perspective, see Fouksman and Klein, “Radical Transformation.” For single-authored books and edited compilations with more ambivalent viewpoints, see Bill Jordan, *Automation and Human Solidarity* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pilot, 2020); Lei Delsen, ed., *Empirical Research on an Unconditional Basic Income in Europe*; Larry Liu, Richard K. Caputo, eds., *Political Activism and Basic Income Guarantee: International Experiences and Perspectives Past, Present, and Near Future* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019).

flight of manufacturing to the global south, poorer Americans and women have remained sorely underserved by industrial-based geographic and economic configurations of work, housing, and social services. In the decades to come, with increasing underemployment and with related in-migrations, municipalities need to significantly rethink the spatial distribution of land, resources, and services to serve a postindustrial, semi-automated society.

The numerical: Simply put, the Freedom Dividend’s proposed \$12,000 per year per adult citizen is inadequate to secure even the rudimentary needs of a household with no other income, while this same amount would be superfluous for wealthy residents. When pooled into local community pots, however, that same federal expenditure (or even half of Yang’s proposed budget) could fund significant, structurally transformative improvements benefiting those who most require assistance.



Post from Andrew Yang’s Facebook page, September 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/33cxm6u>.

A Social-Political Alternative to Biopolitics

What worth does the human have to the state (and to capital) once her/his labor-power no longer possesses value on the market? For roughly a century, political enfranchisement in the US was largely bound up with labor relations—suffrage and civil rights movements, for example, often gaining significant traction during wartime labor shortages.[7] Without the bargaining chip of labor-power, how does the “working class” wield political leverage?

[7] Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, “The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World,” the *Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 4 (December 2005). See also Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

That is, what is a “working class” *without work*? Increasingly, throughout the post-Fordist era, humans’ value to capital (and to the state) has also consisted in so-called purchasing power, with UBI effectively serving to redistribute purchasing power among a citizenry. We thus find a form of possessive individualism updated for the twenty-first century: even if bereft of all other property, one might still possess consumer power (rather than labor power) as a meager form of political capital.[8]

In his brief explanation of the Freedom Dividend, Yang poses the rhetorical question—to assuage libertarian sensibilities—of whether UBI constitutes communism or socialism. “No,” he answers:

...THE FREEDOM DIVIDEND REPRESENTS NEITHER OF THESE CONCEPTS AND ACTUALLY FITS SEAMLESSLY INTO CAPITALISM. IT IS PROJECTED TO BOOST THE ECONOMY BY \$2.5 TRILLION IN EIGHT YEARS.

REALLY, THE UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME IS NECESSARY FOR THE CONTINUATION OF CAPITALISM THROUGH THE WAVE OF AUTOMATION AND WORKER DISPLACEMENT. MARKETS NEED CONSUMERS TO SELL THINGS TO.[9]

But what possibilities exist for democracy among a class of subsistence consumers? This is not to suggest that people struggling to survive cannot engage in formal political discourse and activity as well as micropolitical practices; it is simply to say that growing economic precarity makes it increasingly urgent to contest the expanding relegation of people to the material conditions of mere survival.

At stake in any program of wealth distribution are interrelated questions of inclusion/exclusion and equality/inequality. That is, wealth redistribution asks that a society negotiate the terms of citizens’ mutual responsibility toward each other, along with questions of who belongs (and doesn’t) to those relationships and how so. Joseph Stiglitz has pointed to a strengthened sense of national community as one of the positive outcomes of state-sponsored welfare.[10] However, popular support for welfare in the US has long been stymied by racism, xenophobia, and the dominant theology of meritocracy, suggesting that a sense of national community is not only an outcome but also a *precondition* for a robust welfare state.

To contend with this impasse, the Freedom Dividend effectively proposes to short-circuit difficult political debates around ethno-racial, gender, and economic inequality by determining in advance the rules of social exclusion and monetary distribution—i.e., determining who is left out of the “universal” part of “universal basic income.” Hence, race- and class-based discrimination is folded into the Freedom Dividend: first, through its proposed exclusion of incarcerated citizens and non-citizen immigrants (even while those persons’ Value-Added-Tax payments contribute to UBI’s budget); second, through its neglect of child-rearing costs, a policy that discriminates especially against single, lower-income parents, who are typically women. (Per Yang’s proposal, a poor single parent of several children would receive only \$12,000 per year, whereas a wealthy childless couple would receive \$24,000 per year.) The

[8] According to C. B. MacPherson’s concept of “possessive individualism” (which he reads into early-modern English political theory), a free man in market society was deemed to possess political rights on the basis of his exclusive ownership of himself and his capacities—including, most notably, the capacity of saleable labor power. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*.

[9] Yang, “The Freedom Dividend Defined.”

[10] Joseph E. Stiglitz, “The Welfare State in the Twenty-First Century,” Chap. 1 in *The Welfare State Revisited*, eds. José Antonio Ocampo and Stiglitz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

exclusion of children from basic income calculations tacitly echoes racist Reaganite allegations that basing welfare benefits on the costs of childrearing encouraged “welfare queens” to excessively procreate. Leveraging terms like “normal people,” Yang does not readily conceal these biases, essentially seeing “normal” as a norms-abiding, hardworking citizen.[11] By contrast, because UBU does not target the individual but rather local political-geographic domains, its benefits would be more likely to extend to all people, regardless of their immigration or incarceration status, as it would build programs and institutions with public benefits. Hence, children of incarcerated persons might be assisted by UBU-sponsored programs, and more robust social programs might await persons released from incarceration. UBU would allow parents (especially low-income parents) to petition for programs to assist in child-related needs so that the greater needs of parents—relative to people without children—aren’t neglected. While it cannot be assumed that participation necessarily lends itself to social justice, inclusion, and egalitarianism (especially given the neoliberal uses of the term *participation*), UBU is conceived as a way of submitting these issues to democratic political debate, guided by principles supporting people and families without adequate resources.

In terms of democratic politics, UBI’s shortcomings lie not only in its social exclusions but in its notable absence of a specific positive agenda or clearly articulated values (e.g., education, health, housing, social justice, environmental care)—agenda and values normally determined through channels of political negotiation. This circumvention of a precise social agenda is symptomatic of an ongoing neoliberal shift from the paradigm of social engineering and welfare management to the paradigm of “smartness,” according to which the world’s overwhelming complexity is cited as justification for abdicating clearly articulated goals.[12] UBI proposals might, at a first glance, seem to challenge the logics of techno-humanitarian management by privileging individual agency over philanthropic programs. However, in eschewing specific social welfare initiatives, UBI proposals imply that societal ills are too complex to parse and that the nation is too diverse (and divided) to ratify a common social agenda. In light of this complexity, political process is abandoned, and citizens are credited with the “smartness” to *individually* adapt to unforeseeable circumstances and catastrophes when provided with a minimal income. Effectively, the risks and wreckage of capitalism, devolving upon the precariat, are rendered not only permissible thanks to UBI but even optimal (UBI would “boost the economy by 2.5 trillion dollars”—but for whose benefit?).[13] Devoid of a succinct socio-political vision determined by a body politic, UBI is essentially a biopolitical strategy for managing population in a *laissez-faire* fashion, albeit reprogramming the invisible hand to scatter some largesse as a simple, efficient technique of *managing* the growing epidemic of poverty (i.e., keeping it within “permissible” boundaries so as to defer deeper structural reform). UBU, on the other hand, associates a robust democracy with an affluence of public goods rather than private dividends and, concomitantly, with public rather than private processes of deliberation and planning.

[11] Yang explains that “having a PhD is not normal, but neither is being a junior high school dropout,” as if PhD holders and junior high school dropouts did not need or deserve the kinds of support that “normal people” require. Yang, *The War against Normal People*: 18.

[12] Orit Halpern, Robert Mitchell, and Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “The Smartness Mandate: Notes toward a Critique,” *Grey Room 68* (Summer 2017): 106–129.

[13] Yang, “The Freedom Dividend Defined.”

An Urbanist and Ruralist Alternative to the Neoliberal City

Ruined factories, sprawling suburbs, congested business districts, and tangled highways are artifacts attesting to the territorial organization of industrial and post-Fordist forms of work. A century ago in Euro-America it was still generally believed that urban planning could organize territory into ideal relationships—between work and leisure, between wage labor and domestic labor, between neighbors, between cars and pedestrians, between the poor and wealthy, and between city and country. Increasingly since the mid-twentieth century—especially with the shift of manufacturing from the global north to south—the project of envisioning ideal cities and territories (however misguided in many cases) has largely given way to neoliberal forms of development devoid of a strong urbanist vision. Urban complexity becomes a pretext for renouncing large state-led planning initiatives, instead leaving urban transformation to private developers.

Rather than serving as a pretext for abandoning guiding principles, the fact of urban complexity might be dealt with through small-scale local initiatives since complexity is, after all, an issue of scale. To identify the urban as the proper recipient for basic income is to offer a third way between neoliberal urbanism and the centralized top-down planning projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is, moreover, to acknowledge that the city as we know it was shaped by structures of employment, habitation, and commuting whose usefulness can no longer be taken for granted. How do people inhabit urban and suburban space when they no longer have jobs and when vast spaces of retail have been abandoned in favor of e-tail?

High unemployment and precarious employment urge us to consider the creation of new kinds of urban and rural commons. Cities, suburbs, and countryside will need to accommodate burgeoning small-scale, entrepreneurial activities, such as itinerant vending, gig work, and small-scale agriculture, requiring transfers of space to new shared uses. UBU could thus act as a belated corrective to the 1934 National Housing Act (NHA), which helped transfer public tax revenues to white homeowners. White flight to the suburbs was financed with federally backed low-interest mortgages linked to redlining practices and often further entangled with neighborhoods' restrictive racial covenants. Now, rather than funneling federal tax revenues toward private white property ownership (and attendant forms of segregation, urban disinvestment, homelessness, and suburban sprawl), UBU could reinvest in neighborhoods bankrupted by the NHA and its lasting legacies, promoting the transfer of private wealth and landownership back into public wealth—into infrastructures, amenities, and land uses to benefit a public. For starters, UBU funds could be used to purchase back private land (perhaps vacated brick-and-mortar malls and their parking lots) and convert it back into public commons, which might support urban agriculture, recreation, education, and informal economic activity.

In considering how neighborhoods could better serve citizens under conditions of rising unemployment, it might be useful to think of local, place-based analogs for online job-networking services, if we are to resist the monopolization of social relations by large, for-profit digital apps which now mediate (and usually extract large fees for) all manner of informal employment such as babysitting, home renovations, dog-walking, food delivery, and taxi rides. We

might also reimagine cities no longer as centripetal structures built around a downtown, a forty-hour workweek, and a gendered division of paid versus unpaid (domestic) labor. Rather, cities could be organized around dispersed nodes for coordinating and accommodating the needs of casual laborers, parents, children, and the elderly (to name just a few).[14] New community work centers could serve as sites for multigenerational cooperation, allowing people to connect socially (as many will be lonely without a formal workplace and routine) while also offering opportunities for job networking, job training, and services tailored to increasingly flexible forms of labor: e.g., flexible forms of childcare; a less centripetal, small-scaled transit system (perhaps with van routes to supplement existing metropolitan transit); and basic amenities for people without a fixed workplace: lockers, basic shelter, and restrooms.[15] Such expanded community centers might also foster new mini-downtowns, potentially attracting new commercial enterprises and helping sustain existing ones.

[14] On forms of urbanism supporting (especially female) working parents, see Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).

[15] Massimiliano Mollona, in his ethnography of contemporary Sheffield, notes the role of a particular local pub in helping job seekers make contacts and learn of opportunities and resources and even providing informal daycare services. See Chapter 2 in Massimiliano Mollona, *Made in Sheffield: An Ethnography of Industrial Work and Politics* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).



Casual construction laborers seeking work, Home Depot, Glendale, California. Photograph courtesy of the author.

In some respects, centers for organizing casual labor already exist informally, such as in Home Depot parking lots where day laborers gather for hire, but those spaces are devoid of basic services like public restrooms, shelter from extreme weather, or mechanisms to discourage exploitation of vulnerable workers, including translation services. Conversely, there exist some formal but nonphysical platforms supporting casual laborers, such as the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) in Los Angeles which hosts a nonprofit website connecting construction laborers to prospective clients, mediating disputes and thus providing some security against exploitation while obviating clients' recourse to profit-based job-networking apps.[16] Services such as CARECEN could be formalized, made architectural, expanded, and improved to provide decent conditions for workers while promoting a public, local alternative to transnational, corporate-owned software platforms.

[16] For more information on CARECEN see: [link](#).

As a counterpart—or perhaps component of—new spaces supporting casual and flexible labor, sites for leisure will also need to be developed since leisure time in cities and suburbs is currently organized around privately owned sites of consumption, often inaccessible to low-income households. We could easily envision many local initiatives enacted with better funding and

democratic processes—community health programs, financial cooperatives, and technical cooperatives (i.e., public maker spaces); and a more equitable redistribution of land to support low-income persons with small-scale enterprises including agriculture. These are merely a few provisional suggestions concerning how an infusion of federal funds, along with greater democratic power to determine how they get spent, might allow localities to better confront rising unemployment and resist corporate capitalism with smaller-scaled forms of economic organization. Regardless of specific programs and priorities that municipalities might ratify, this is simply to say that we might actively *plan* for a future of automation rather than leave individuals to fend for themselves in neoliberal fashion while allowing city “planning” to remain largely the purview of real-estate developers. In essence, UBU constitutes an eversion of New Deal-era federal programs. Whereas the New Deal coordinated macroscopic nationwide programs to penetrate and radically transform dispersed and widely varying localities, UBU envisions small-scale, locally initiated programs to cumulatively effect large-scale social, cultural, and economic change.

Strength in Numbers: Actualizing the “Common Self”

An optimistic view of the Freedom Dividend might regard it as a support to individuals’ capacities for political involvement, self-determination, and pursuit of community betterment since people would—in theory—be freed from long hours of drudgery (if, that is, \$12,000 per year could liberate most people from excessive toil and long commutes while still paying for offspring’s college tuitions).[17] A pessimistic view, on the other hand, could interpret the Freedom Dividend as a bribe to secure mass-compliance with the incipient transformations of capital and the heavy social toll these will exact. Although the truth likely lies somewhere between these two interpretations, \$2.8 trillion per year is still a hefty price tag for a program that: 1) would still leave us with a vastly inequalitarian society; and 2) would largely funnel federal dividends back into corporate profits by stimulating consumer spending. UBI would certainly help people, but many would nevertheless remain (or become) impoverished, homeless, overworked (or overly idle and isolated), and without access to decent schools, housing, health care, or higher education. However, \$12,000 per year per adult, if pooled into a community pot, could bring about more fundamental structural change.

To use Los Angeles (where I reside) as a numerical example: Within the city boundaries, a total population of almost four million is split into fifteen city-council districts. City Council District No. 10 in central Los Angeles comprises several neighborhoods with a diverse range of nationalities, languages, races, and income levels, tending however toward lower- and middle-income families with a significant number of noncitizen immigrants and incarcerated persons (that is, persons who wouldn’t receive the benefits of the Freedom Dividend). Of the tenth district’s roughly 245,000 persons, approximately 75 percent are eighteen or older. Hence, if the \$12,000 per adult per year in Yang’s proposed formula were channeled into a shared local budget, this district would receive about \$2.2 billion each year in addition to normal municipal allocations. To put this in perspective, the operating budget last year for the entire city of Los Angeles was \$9.9 billion. Moreover, to redress rampant

[17] On this optimistic viewpoint concerning the political effects of basic income, see Van Parijs and Vanderborght, *Basic Income*. It should be kept in mind that these optimistic endorsements of UBI often come from a European perspective, and in most of Europe, free or affordable higher education and health care have already laid foundations for greater economic egalitarianism relative to the United States, so UBI might have different effects.

inequality, it would make sense to adjust UBU payments according to a given locality's deviation—positive or negative—from national (or perhaps regional) median income levels so that poorer areas receive more than wealthier ones.

This is not to naively suggest that UBU funds would always be used wisely, justly, or with care for the neediest (but, then again, neither would Freedom Dividends); nor is it to unduly romanticize the local by neglecting long histories of municipal-based racial and class-based injustice. Instead, it is simply to hypothesize: that needs and priorities often vary from one locale to another (e.g., between rural and urban areas; between areas with older versus younger populations), thus requiring local-based initiatives; that small-scaled democratic forums might better foster civil debate than our national system whereby most debate is delivered to us through divisive and specious forms of broadcast and social media. That is, at a local level, dissensus is more likely to be socially productive rather than socially destructive; that individual—rather than urban—income is less likely to provide the kinds of social and municipal transformations that will be required by rising levels of unemployment and low wages, along with the rising costs of housing and higher education.

In other words, this is not an attempt to idealize localism or communitarianism, given that majoritarian politics can be unjust at any scale. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century in the United States and beyond, the federal state sometimes—though certainly not always—proved less bigoted than smaller localities in arbitrating racial discrimination. However, not only has this tendency begun to shift with the rising power of ethno-nationalist demagoguery; moreover, with UBI we are not dealing with voting rights, gun rights, private property rights, policing, or other such legal instruments of racial injustice. We are talking, rather, about redistributing wealth such that—with some basic guidelines—it be directed toward public goods instead of private property.

A last point I will make is that rising unemployment prompts us to consider new forms of personhood. What I mean is that a long-standing capitalist ideology of meritocracy has defined a person's value largely in terms of material wealth and occupational status rather than in terms of—say—one's social relations and fulfillment of obligations.[18] Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of a "common self" (*moi commun*) might be useful in considering a move from UBI to UBU. According to Rousseau, a body politic enters into the social contract as each person cedes "his" natural freedom and personal possessions to "the sovereign" so that those goods might then redound back upon the self in the form of collectively and legally sanctioned rights and real estate.[19] In this process, the self is translated into a shared or common self. This concept is laden with utopian-dystopian implications, suggesting, at one extreme, a potentially fascist relationship between the self, sovereign authority, and the masses. In this respect, the common self is constituted by purely abstract and affectively imagined social bonds, with aesthetics (e.g., in the form of music, speeches, tweets, jingoism, propagandistic imagery, and rallies) creating fictitious ethno-racial bonds between the individual and the masses and especially between the individual and the state (i.e., as personified by a charismatic leader). On the other hand, the common self might be understood as something neither abstract nor innate to the condition of being a citizen but rather formed through lifelong processes of voluntarily apportioning the self into actual social relationships, bonds, and obligations.[20]

[18] Jean and John Comaroff discuss how existing notions of selfhood can be premised on evolving social relations rather than on Euro-American traditions of "possessive individualism." See Chapter 2 in Jean and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[19] See Chapters VI–IX in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. and trans. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press).

[20] See Chapter 2 in Jean and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa*.

Insofar as UBI strengthens the direct bond between the federal state and the individual, circumventing smaller scales of governance, it does little to combat the current fascist sensibilities in the US regarding the national “common self.” (While Yang is certainly no fascist, one could easily imagine a fascist demagogue implementing UBI to shore up populist credentials.) Basic Urbanism, on the other hand, is linked to the actualization of the “common self” through processes of deliberation and collective organization at the municipal scale. Unlike UBI, UBU inherently challenges federal authoritarianism by its local, democratic nature in which the federal state serves only to redistribute money to municipalities.

To conclude then, we might briefly consider the ways urbanism has functioned in the production of affective bonds between subjects and sovereign power. In the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century, city planning was often guided by strong legible interventions, often showcasing the power of the state through sublime representation of architectures and infrastructures. [21] In the last decades of the twentieth century, city planning has increasingly depended on private developers, often with the result of public spaces being appropriated or otherwise transformed in the interests of private development. [22] It is in hopes of counteracting the powers that state and private developers have long wielded over local planning that UBU is proposed—as a democratic way of reconverting private goods back into public ones. This reinvestment in urbanism is especially incumbent as a growing number of people become disenfranchised by the current conditions of the city, suburbs, and countryside.

[21] See various contributions in Peter J. Bloom, Stephan F. Miescher, and Takyiwaa Manuh, eds., *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014). See also Chapter 5 in Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals*.

[22] See Rosalyn Deustche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).