The Urbanization of Consciousness

Capitalist urbanization occurs within the confines of the community of money, is framed by the concrete abstractions of space and time, and internalizes all the vigor and turbulence of the circulation of capital under the ambiguous and often shaky surveillance of the state. A city is an agglomeration of productive forces built by labor employed within a temporal process of circulation of capital. It is nourished out of the metabolism of capitalist production for exchange on the world market and supported out of a highly sophisticated system of production and distribution organized within its confines. It is populated by individuals who reproduce themselves using money incomes earned off the circulation of capital (wages and profits) or its derivative revenues (rents, taxes, interest, merchant’s profits, payments for services). The city is ruled by a particular coalition of class forces, segmented into distinctive communities of social reproduction, and organized as a discontinuous but spatially contiguous labor market within which certain distinctive quantities and qualities of labor power may be found.

The city is the high point of human achievement, objectifying the most sophisticated knowledge in a physical landscape of extraordinary complexity, power, and splendor at the same time as it brings together social forces capable of the most amazing sociotechnical and political innovation. But it is also the site of squalid human failure, the lightning rod of the profoundest human discontents, and the arena of social and political conflict. It is a place of mystery, the site of the unexpected, full of agitations and ferment, of multiple liberties, opportunities, and alienations; of passions and repressions; of cosmopolitanism and extreme parochialisms; of violence, innovation, and reaction. The capitalist city is the arena of the most intense social and political confusions at the same time as it is a monumental testimony to and a moving force within the dialectics of capitalism’s uneven development.

How to penetrate the mystery, unravel the confusions, and grasp the
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contradictions? The question is important for two reasons. Firstly, we know, as Lefebvre puts it, that capitalism has survived into the twentieth century through the production of space and that it has been an increasingly urbanized space that has been produced. A study of the urban process tells us much, therefore, about the mechanisms of capitalism’s successful self-reproduction. Secondly, increasing urbanization makes this the primary level at which individuals experience, live out, and react to the changes going on around them. To dissect the urban process in all of its fullness is to lay bare the roots of consciousness formation in the material realities of daily life. It is out of the complexities and perplexities of this experience that we build elementary understandings of the meanings of space and time; of social power and its legitimations; of forms of domination and social interaction; of the relation to nature through production and consumption; and of human nature, civil society, and political life.

Curious ways of thinking, seeing and acting arise out of the confusions of that experience. These cannot be interpreted directly by appeal to polarized or even complex class structures. Nor can they be dismissed as false. I shall, however, insist that they are fetishistic; common sense representations of daily experience obscure inner meanings, even though the surface appearance to which they respond is real enough. If it appears that decaying housing produces crime and that the automobile produces the suburb, then we have to recognize the material correlations between such things, even though the social forces that produce them remain hidden. And for purposes of daily life it is often sufficient and even necessary to accept the surface appearances as the basis for action. To live in the suburbs without a car is as foolish as strolling in a slum oblivious of the higher probability of criminal behavior. The consciousness produced by a fetishistic reading of daily urban life is not bourgeois or capitalist. It exists on a quite different plane. Failure to demystify it can, however, lead to actions fraught with all manner of unintended consequences. Avid defenders of capitalism can undermine what they most desire to defend, while socialists can end up supporting that which they decry.

Within that confusion, all kinds of other sentiments, illusions, and distortions can flourish. The ferment of discontent and opposition, of understandable and entirely reasonable misrepresentations, of unintended consequences, is always part of the urban brew. There lies an extraordinary though often latent energy for social transformation. Capitalist urbanization gives rise to forces that, once put in place and set in motion, can just as easily threaten as support the perpetuation of capitalism. We have, in short, to confront the urbanization of consciousness as a key political problem.

It is the virtue of thinkers like Simmel, Wirth, and Sennett to address that problem directly rather than leaving it, as do Marx, Weber and Durkheim, for example, on the periphery of their thought. Their defect is that they get so enmeshed in surface appearances that either they fail to penetrate the fetishisms or they produce partial rather than integrated interpretations. Simmel (1971), in his famous essay, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” could not get much further than the alienated individualism and limited coordinations of action in space and time. Wirth (1964), though more complex, could not free himself from the ecological presuppositions of the Chicago school. Compared to that, the peripheral vision of a Marx or a Weber at least provides a grounding for interpretation in some overall conception of civil society and its mode of production or organization. The problem is to build into the Marxian perspective the kinds of detailed sophistication that writers like Simmel and Wirth achieved. The urbanization of consciousness has to be understood in relation to the urbanization of capital.

The strategy I propose for attacking that question is simple enough perhaps overly so. I begin with five primary loci of power and consciousness formation. [Individualism] attaches to money uses in freely functioning markets. [Class] under capitalism reflects the buying and selling of labor power and the social relations embodied in the sociotechnical conditions of production under conditions of surplus value extraction. [Community] as we shall see, is a highly ambiguous notion that neverthe less plays a fundamental role in terms of the reproduction of labor power, the circulation of revenues, and the geography of capital accumulation. The state exists as a center of authority and as an apparatus through which political-economic power is exercised in a territory with some degree of popular legitimacy. [The family] (to which I should add all other forms of domestic household economy), finally, has a profound effect upon ways of thought and action simply by virtue of its function as the primary site of social support and of reproduction activities such as child-rearing.

I now want to modify this conception in two very important ways. First of all, no one locus of power and consciousness formation in this nominalist schema can be understood independently of the urbanization of capital; nor can the latter be understood without the former. The task for historical materialist interpretation of the urban process is, therefore, to examine how the ways of seeing, thinking and acting produced through the interrelations between individualism, class, community, state, and family affect the paths and qualities of capitalist urbanization that in turn feed back to alter our conceptions and our actions. Only in that way can we understand the urbanizing dynamic through which capitalism survives, in spite of all of its internal contradictions, as a viable mode of production and consumption.

How is an urbanized consciousness produced, and with what political
effects? Consider, firstly, the relation between money and capital, the communities of which intersect to define much of what the urbanization process and the urban experience are about. Money, I showed in chapter 6, functions as a concrete abstraction, imposing external and homogeneous measures of value on all aspects of human life, reducing infinite diversity to a single comparable dimension, and masking subjective human relations by objective market exchanges. The achievement of urbanization, as Simmel so correctly observes, rests on an increasing domination of the cash nexus over other kinds of human interactions and as such promotes exactly that kind of alienated individualism that Marx and Engels highlight in the Communist Manifesto. Money used as capital, however, subsumes all production processes as well as labor and commodity markets under a single, class-bound, profit-seeking logic. Marx shows us that such a mode of production has to expand, that it must simultaneously engage in continuous revolutions in productive forces and in the social relations of production through reorganizations of the division of labor. Here lies much of the dynamic force that produces vast, high-density urbanization and heterogeneity of the sort that Wirth describes.

Money and capital therefore confront us as double alienations, the compounding of which should surely produce energy of revolt sufficient to dispose quickly of both. Yet the alienations can also confound and confuse each other. Class-bound political movements against the power of capital hesitate or fail if they appear to threaten real and cherished, though necessarily limited liberties given by possession of money in the marketplace. Even the poorest person can relish the kind of liberty that even the minuscule amount of money power can give. Workers may even connive or accede to their own exploitation in production in return for increased money power that gives them greater market freedoms and greater ability to control a portion of their own space (through home or car ownership) and their own time (so-called “free” time).

The sense of class derived out of the experience of earning money runs up against the experience of limited but important individual freedom in the spending of that money. The urban condition is typically one in which that clash looms large. The liberty and diversity of choice that come with the possession of money in the city’s market place provides a locus for experience, thought, and action very different indeed from that which attaches to the massing of a proletariat in the work places of a capitalist city. The separation of place of residence from place of work symbolizes the break as does the shift of a role from a seller of labor power to buyer of commodities. Since every effort is made to conceal the history of commodities behind the mask of fetishism (advertising, for example, rarely indicates any truth as to how commodities are produced), the separation between the two worlds of production and consumption becomes complete. Capitalists caught in the throes of violent and often debilitating class struggle have learned to use these confusions and separations creatively. It was the genius of Fordism and of the New Deal (with its Keynesian strategies of state management and its support for trade union consciousness) to offer greater market freedoms in return for diminished class struggle in production. The effect as we saw in chapter 1, was to change the face of capitalist urbanization dramatically and to likewise change the relations between individualism, class, community, family, and the state, in urban contexts.

Consider, secondly, the consciousness of community. The communities of money and capital are communities without propinquity in the broadest sense. The particular kinds of communities we call cities, towns, or even neighborhoods are in contrast, definite places constructed by a way of definite socioeconomic and political process (see, for example, chapter 9).

From the standpoint of the “communities” of money and capital, such places are no more than relative spaces to be build up, torn down, or abandoned as profitability dictates. But from the standpoint of the people who live there, such places may be the focus of particular loyalties. We see again conflicting material bases for consciousness formation and political action. Individuals can internalize both aspects. A pensioner might want maximum return on pension fund investments but struggle against the abandonment of his or her community that the crass logic of profit maximization might imply.

That tension can be resolved in ways advantageous to capital. In chapter 5 I showed how local “growth machines” and ruling class alliances, attempt to attract capitalist development and to defend a local economy against unemployment and the devaluation of assets. This defines much of what local politics is about. Interurban competition — a process in which place-bound loyalty to community and community boosterism has an important role — helps to structure the uneven geographical development of capitalism in ways conducive to overall accumulation. The efficient geographical articulation of capitalism depends on innumerable communities evolving corporatist strategies toward capitalist development. But in so doing, cities have to advertise and sell themselves as prime locations for production, consumption and command and control functions. The production of an urban image, through, for example, the organization of spectacles of the sort described in chapter 9, becomes an important facet of interurban competition at the same time as it becomes a means to rally potentially alienated populations to a common cause.

Images of knowable and affective communities can also be marketed as commodities. That technique is often used in association with speculative
housing development. Examples can be found as long ago as the seventeenth century and abound in the nineteenth century (cf. Warner's 1962 study of Boston and Dyos's 1961 study of Camberwell). But the phenomenon became more general after 1945. The Keynesian style of urbanization depended upon the strong mobilization of the spirit of consumer sovereignty in an economy where purchasing power was broadly though unevenly distributed among households. The sovereignty, though fetischistic, was not illusory. It allowed individuals to mobilize all kinds of marks of distinction through differentiations in consumption as a response to the bland universalisms of money (cf. Simmell 1978 above, chapter 6). New kinds of communities could be constructed, packaged, and sold in a society where who you were seemed to depend more and more on how money was spent rather than on how it was earned. Living spaces could be made to represent status, position, and prestige in ways that made Weberian concepts of consumption classes look legitimate. The search to produce and control symbolic capital (see chapter 9) has become an even more salient feature in the organization of urban life in recent years with movements like gentrification, post-modernism and urban revitalization gaining pace. Furthermore, the degraded relation to nature in production has increasingly been supplanted by a relation to nature packaged as a consumption artifact. Suburbanization typically promised access both to nature and to community, each packaged as a commodity (Walker 1981).

None of this was necessarily antagonistic to monetized individualism or to traditional forms of organization of household economies and family life. The desire to enhance or preserve the value of personal property and access to life chances suggests economically rational forms of community participation for individuals and households (Olson 1965). But the outcome is a particular kind of community, totally subservient to monetized individualism and family property relations. Such communities could also function as breeding grounds for different types of labor power and hence as sites of basic processes of class reproduction (see chapter 4).

Community, it transpired, could be constructed in ways entirely consistent with capital accumulation. Demand-side urbanization meant a shift in relations. Greater emphasis was put upon the spatial division of consumption relative to the spatial division of labor so as to generate the surface appearance of consumption classes and status groupings (identified by life-style or mere position in social space) as opposed to class definitions achieved in the realm of production. The social spaces of distraction and display became as vital to urban culture as the spaces of working and living. Social competition with respect to life-style and command over space, always important for upper segments of the bourgeoisie, became more and more important within the mass culture of urbanization, sometimes even masking the role of community in processes of class reproduction. It also meant new relations to the state, the individual, and the family in a society where consumer sovereignty was mobilized to ensure consumption for consumption's sake to match capitalism's incessant drive toward production for production's sake and accumulation for accumulation's sake. The qualities of the urban experience and the conditions for consciousness formation shifted accordingly, as did the whole dynamic of capitalist urbanization.

Yet it is also within these spaces that active community building can take place in ways deeply antagonistic to the individualism of money, to the profit-seeking and class-bound logic of capital circulation, and even to particular views of the family and the state. Utopian movements (anarchist, feminist, socialist, ecological) abound, as do religious attempts to define an alternative sense of community. Urban uprisings like the Paris Commune, the Watts and Detroit rebellions of the 1960s, and the vast swathe of urban social protest movements (Castells 1983) testify to the powerful urge to escape the dominations of money power, capital, and a repressive state. Such movements are not confined to the underprivileged either. As consumers, even upper echelons of the bourgeoisie may be forced to seek collective protection against the ravages of some greedy developer. Peculiar kinds of consumer socialism, using local government power to check growth machine politics and the destruction of the environment, can take root in even the most affluent of areas (like Santa Monica or Santa Cruz). Consumer sovereignty, if taken seriously, presupposes, after all, a certain popular empowerment to shape the qualities of life directly and to drive beyond the pathologies of urban anonymity, monetized individualism, a degraded relation to nature, and profit maximization. But that also means the creation or imposition of a culture of community solidarity and bonding that goes far beyond that tolerable to pure individualism or the pure logic of capital accumulation. The seeds of conflict then are scattered across the social landscape.

Alternative communities find it hard, if not impossible, to survive as autonomous entities. They cannot seal themselves off from the rest of the world (though some try by moving to remote regions). It is hard to keep the "dissolving effects" of monetization at bay. The community domination of a particular place often entails the imposition of a repressive rigidity in the functioning of social relations and moral codes. There is, therefore, much that is repressive about this sort of community (Sennett 1970). New England townships may have been models of community, but they were also bastions of intolerance. Compared to that, the dissolving effects of money and the anonymity of urban life may appear as well-received; and the incoherences of entrepreneurial capitalism, positively stimulating.
The construction of community within the frame of capitalist urbanization contains a tension. Movements against the power of concrete abstractions like money, capital, space and time may spiral into fierce struggles to create an alternative kind of community (see chapter 6). But there are also processes of community construction and community empowerment that integrate only too well into the dynamics of capital accumulation through the production of space. How the tension between these two dimensions of community formation is resolved cannot be exactly predicted in advance, but the historical record indicates how frequently they intersect. The capitalist selling of community as an opportunity for self-realization sparks alternative movements, while the latter can be coopted and used for the selling of community and proximity to nature as consumption goods. All kinds of intermediate mixes are possible. A community may be organized as a sophisticated coping mechanism that wards off the worst aspects of class domination and alienated individualism but in so doing merely makes the domination of money and capital more acceptable. But capitalists, in seeking to promote community for exactly such reasons, can also help create centers of guerrilla warfare against their own interests. Community, therefore, has always to be interpreted as a specific resolution of this underlying tension worked out in the context of relations to the family, the individual, class, and the state, under specific conditions of urbanization.

The family (or household economy) is a very distinctive locus of power and consciousness formation. The intimacy and affectivity of social relations and the importance of gender and child-rearing make for very special qualities of daily experience. The problem has been to unravel its relations to the other loci of consciousness formation. Engels (1942) argued, for example, that the family as a reproductive unit (as well as its internal structure) could be understood only through its relation to a dominant mode of production as well as to forms of state power. Marx (1967, 490) even went so far as to predict the rise of less patriarchal and more egalitarian family forms through industrialization and the increasing participation of women in the labor force. Simmel more closely replicated the argument in the Communist Manifesto that the family disintegrated with monetization and became entirely subservient to the individualism of bourgeois interests. But such arguments are controversial and still not resolved.

The rise of the family as an economic unit independent of community predates the rise of capitalism though not of monetization or, probably, of private property relations. It was later characterized by increasing privatization and the insulation of individuals (particularly children) from external influences, making reliance on the protective powers of community even less pressing. The transition of “family production economies” into “family wage economies” occurred with capitalist industrialization and urbanization, but was nowhere near as disruptive of traditional relations as Marx or Engels thought (Tilly and Scott 1978, 227–32). Indeed, the family, with some internal adjustment, managed to preserve itself as an institution at the same time as it played a vital role in the adaptation of individuals to conditions of wage labor and the money calculus of urban life (Tilly and Scott 1978; Hareven 1982; Sennett 1970; Handlin 1951). But it has been subject to considerable external pressure. While it may protect individuals against the alienations of money, it is perpetually threatened by the individualism that money power promotes (arguments over money still being a primary cause of family break-up). It becomes an object of bourgeois and state surveillance (Donzelot 1977) precisely because its insulated environment can become a breeding ground for all kinds of social relations antagonistic to money and to capital. Paradoxically, the family through its protections helps mollify such antagonisms, making for a most interesting intersection with the functions of community. To the degree that the latter provides a framework for coping, adaptation, and control, so the emphasis upon the family may diminish. But the more the capitalist form of community prevails (consistent with accumulation and monetized individualism), the more important the family may become as a protective milieu outside of the cold calculus of profit and the class alienations of wage labor. The family can also substitute for community as a primary agent for the reproduction of differentiated labor power and hence of basic class relations. Family authority structures may also be imported into and replicated within the organization of the labor process, thus making family relations a vehicle for class domination. But, again, it is by no means necessarily a passive agent in this regard. Family ambition helps shape social space at the same time as it can be an agent of transformation of class and employment structures.

Though the family may persist as a vital institution, its meanings and functions shift in relation to changing currents within the urbanization of capital. Tilly and Scott (1978), for example, discern a further shift, most pronounced since World War II, toward a “family consumer economy” specializing in reproduction and consumption. Pahl (1984) shows, however, that families have increasingly used that consumption power not only to protect and command space (through home and car ownership) but also to create new forms of household production, using capital equipment and raw materials purchased from the market but arranged according to their own personal tastes, divisions of labor, and temporal rhythms of production. The same phenomenon—the resurgence of household production systems—can be observed at the lower end of the social scale where it has, however, a quite different meaning; households lacking market power are forced to
household production as a pure strategy for survival (Redclift and Mingione 1985).

The family therefore exists as an island of relative autonomy within a sea of objective bondage, perpetually adapting to the shifting currents of capitalist urbanization through its relations to individualism, community, class, and the state. It provides a haven to which individuals can withdraw from the complexities and dangers of urban life or from which they can selectively sample its pleasures and opportunities. But it is a haven perpetually buffeted by external forces — the loss of earning power through unemployment, squabbles over money rights, the sheer attractions of monetized individualism compared to patterns of familial repression, and the need to orient child-rearing practices to labor market ends are major sources of disruption in family life. The consciousness created behind bolted and barred doors tends, of course, to be inward looking and often indifferent to a wider world. It may encourage withdrawal from struggles to control money, space, and time as sources of social power through community or class action. From this standpoint the family appears to pose no threat to capitalism. But the consciousness forged out of affective family relations can be dangerous if it spills outward as a basis for moral judgment of all aspects of civil society. How to square the values and virtues of family life with the destructive force of money and capital is ever an interesting conundrum for bourgeois ideology. A common difficulty on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years has been to reconcile government policies favorable in individualism and entrepreneurialism with the protection of family virtues.

Consider, finally, the state as a power base and locus of consciousness formation. In the context of the communities of money and capital, the legitimacy of the state has to rest on its ability to define a public interest over and above privatism (individualistic or familial), class struggle, and conflictual community interests. It has to provide a basic framework of institutions backed by sufficient authority to resolve conflicts, impose collective judgments, pursue collective courses of action, and defend civil society as a whole from external assault and internal disintegration. The gains from its interventions are real enough — all the way from mundane matters of sewage disposal and the regulation of traffic flow to more general procedures for countering market failure, articulating collective class interests, protecting against abuses (community intolerance, excessive exploitation, the abuse of family authority), and arbitrating between warring factions. The gains provide a material basis for legitimate pride in and loyalty to the local or national state and to its symbols and representatives. The state loses legitimacy when it becomes or is seen to become captive to some particular individual, community, or class interest, or so totally inefficient as to yield no effective gains to anyone. I say "seen to become" because that state has at its disposal all manner of means for promoting and sustaining its legitimacy through control over information flow and outright propaganda, none of which is innocent in relation to consciousness formation. Furthermore, particular interests form within the state apparatus. The bearers of the scientific, technical, and managerial expertise that the state relies upon may use the state apparatus as a vehicle to express their power and so project a bureaucratic-managerial and technocratic consciousness onto the whole of civil society in the name of the public interest. The techniques, ideologies, and practices of "urban managerialism" are, many rightly argue, fundamental to understanding the contemporary urban process (Pahl 1977; Saunders 1981). The state, therefore, is not only a focus of place-bound loyalties but also an apparatus that propagates specific ways of thinking and acting.

But the state ought not to be viewed too statically, as a perpetual and unchanging locus of authority independent of the elements of individualism, class, family and community. State practices and policies have to adapt to shifting relations between these other loci. They must also react to the changing dynamic of capitalist development and urbanization. The class alliances that form around issues of urban governance, for example, are fluid in their composition and by no means confine their field of action to formal channels. Indeed, the latter are often institutionalizations of long-established practices of collective decision making on the part of some ruling-class alliance (see chapter 5). The history of local government reform movements, of annexations and interjurisdictional coordinations, illustrates how capitalism's urban dynamic is matched by transformations in political and administrative practices. Even the rise of professionalism (political and administrative) and of managerial and technocratic modes of thought can be seen as both a response to and a moving force in the drive to find rational coordinations for the uses of money, space, time, and capital under increasingly chaotic conditions of capitalist urbanization. When the paths of capital circulation are dominated by the pure individualism of money and the traditional solidarity of communities almost totally dissolves, then a powerful state apparatus becomes essential to the proper management of capitalist urbanization. Conversely, conditions may arise in which a ruling class alliance, faced with burdensome state expenditures, will try to force certain kinds of social provision back into the frameworks of family and community (as, for example, with mental health care in recent years). But even then, the political process of class alliance formation within the urban region take precedence over the particular forms of state power through which that alliance may exercise its influence. When an urban region functions as a competitive unit within the uneven geographical development
of capitalism, it necessarily deploys a mix of informal mechanisms (coordinated by such groups as a local chamber of commerce or a businessmen’s round table) and local state powers (tax breaks and infrastructural investment). The celebrated public-private partnership, rather than pure urban managerialism, is a basic guiding force in the urbanization of capital.

But state action can also be antagonistic to individualism, the family, community, and capital. The dominant rationality embodied in the state apparatus conflicts with the typical modes of behavior and action emanating from other loci. It was, after all, in the name of the public interest that Haussmann reorganized the interior space of Paris only to stir up a hornet’s nest of privatistic responses. It was in the name of that same rationality that Robert Moses took the “meat-ax” to Brooklyn in the 1960s, stirring up, as did many a highway planner, severe community opposition to highway construction through traditional communities. Rational urban planning, even of the socialist variety, often entails the same authoritarianism. A too close coalition between the technocratic rationalism of a managerial elite and the authoritarianism of state power can undermine the legitimacy of both. Whether or not the state can continue to impose its will depends on the strength of the class alliance behind it and the relative power of opposing forces. While the state has a monopoly over institutionalized violence, it is vulnerable to the power of money and capital, as well as to movements of revulsion and revolt centered in the family, the community, or the underprivileged classes. Struggles for control over the state apparatus are therefore paralleled by struggles over what kind of rational action the state is supposed to pursue and what kind of politics the state is supposed to represent and project. The state is both the hope and the despair not only of revolutionary movements (which view it either as the pinnacle of power to be scaled or as the fount of all evil to be destroyed) but of all segments of society, no matter of what political persuasion.

I propose, then, to view the individualism of money, the class relations of capital, the confusions of community, the contested politics and legitimacy of the state and the partially protected domain of the family as the primary material power bases of social life under capitalism. Through our daily experiences of these bases we generate a matrix of conceptions, understandings and predispositions for action which in turn serve to construct the conditions which prevail in each domain. If that matrix tends to support and reinforce the existing order, then we here find a powerful means whereby historical transitions become broadly legislated by historical circumstances rather than by the conscious collective action of individuals seeking to create new social forms.

Paradoxically, such historical determination in no way vitiates the importance of individual freedom and choice. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1977, 79) suggests, “it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know.” To begin with, the five material bases can be so diversely constructed and so differently used and combined in the course of “common sense” actions that social life possesses an almost limitless terrain for experience. Angered by a family feud, for example, an individual can call in the police, spend the family savings on a drunken spree, work twice as hard as normal, or compensate by resorting to the sociality of community. The very next day, that same individual, in trouble with the police, might invoke class privileges or rally community and family to his or her cause. Through the infinite variety of such practices individuals become adjusted and contribute to broader processes of historical replication and transformation of which they are not aware. We all help to build a city and its way of life through our actions without necessarily grasping what the city as a whole is or should be about. This suggests that there is a “hidden hand” of history around which an immense diversity of freely undertaken practices and common sense notions necessarily coalesce.

The unstable contradictions within each base together with the unpredictable manner in which the power sources get combined, guarantee different outcomes from essentially similar objectives. Individuals and groups, furthermore, may construct the different power bases quite differently (see chapter 9) and then use the power so accumulated for very special purposes. Women, for example, may seek to build community of a very special sort and use community for collective purposes which are quite different from those typically pursued by men. Minorities of all sorts can combine the different possibilities in ways that reflect their own wants and needs, utopian or even nihilistic desires. Social action produces quite disparate life styles, cultural forms, political practices and socio-economic conditions out of a quite limited set of possibilities. This lends an air of unpredictability to paths of social change.

This style of analysis has the virtue of helping us understand the confusion of urban and social political movements under capitalism without conceding their total lawlessness. It helps explain the peculiar mix of satisfactions and disappointments; of fragmented ideologies and states of consciousness; the curious cross-cutting of labor struggles, community struggles, and struggles around the state apparatus or the family; and the seeming withdrawal of individuals and families from matters of broader social concern. It helps put in perspective the active moments of sudden participation and revolutionary fervor and of equally sudden fading and collapse of political movements that seemed to have such a broad and solid base. It also helps in understanding the often extraordinary dissonance between opinions expressed and actions taken.
The Paris Commune (see chapter 6 and *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, chapter 3) illustrates the confusions. The egalitarian individualism of the radical petite bourgeoisie (with its money concerns) was certainly in evidence, but then so was the quest for community outside of the rule of money and capital. A powerful wing of the workers' movement looked to the free association of producers and consumers through mutual cooperation and federalism as the path to social progress, and many within the women's movement concurred because they sought ways fundamentally to modify the family economy. A different kind of class consciousness, internationalist and seeking to combat the community of capital by building a class movement with a universal perspective was particularly evident within the new leadership of the Paris branch of Working Men's International Association. Republican revolutionaries, Jacobin by tradition, looked to a strong centralized state as the prime lever of social and political liberty, while the Blanquists viewed Paris as the revolutionary hearth from which revolution of the greatest purity would diffuse and liberate France from its capitalist and bourgeois chains. Moderate republicans, in contrast, simply wanted self-government for Paris, the right to command a local state apparatus that had so much command over them. Many women (and some men) saw the Commune as an occasion to build new kinds of family relationships based on free union and cooperative forms of household production and mutualist forms of exchange. And traditional family loyalties brought men and women together on the same barricades.

The alliance of forces ran the gamut from the rank individualism of money, self-government, household autonomy under conditions of equality between the sexes, the self-management of production and consumption in relation to human need rather than profit, and decentralized and centralized versions of revolutionary socialism, to the purest statism possible. Under such conditions the political confusions of the Commune are understandable. Should the Commune respect the spaces of private property in both production and consumption as well as money power (the Bank of France) as counterweights to the absolutism of state power? Should it use arbitrary police power to ensure discipline and counter subversion? Should it centralize or decentralize authority — and if so, how? That all died on the same barricades can be explained only by the ways in which different identities and states of consciousness fused in a given historical moment into a political movement to defend a particular space against those who represented the power of money and the power of capital unalloyed. Yet, in the iconography of the Commune, it is all too frequently forgotten that this was a distinctively urban event. Its multidimensionality can be comprehended only in terms of the urbanized consciousness that it expressed.

Academics, though not prone to die on barricades, exhibit similar confusions. Neoclassical economists privilege entrepreneurial and consumer sovereignties based on the individualism of money; Marxists, the productive forces and class relations necessary to the extraction of surplus value; Weberians, class relations constructed out of market behaviors, urban managerialism, and the organization of the local state; feminists, patriarchy, family, and women at work; representatives of the Chicago school, the ecology of communities in space; and so on. Each particular perspective tells its own particular truth. Yet they scarcely touch each other and they come together on the intellectual barricades with about the same frequency as urban uprisings like the Paris Commune. The intellectual fragmentations of academia appear as tragic reflections of the confusions of an urbanized consciousness; they reflect surface appearances, do little to elucidate inner meanings and connections, and do much to sustain the confusions by replicating them in learned terms.

Does this mean that we have to abandon Marx for some eclectic mix of theoretical perspectives? I think not. By appropriate use of the marxian meta-theory we can understand the links between divergent theoretical concerns and come to grips with the hidden historical hand within the confusions of social change. There are three steps towards fulfillment of that objective. The first, already sketched in, looks at some simple generative principles that underlie the diversity. The five material bases of power (and their contradictions) identify the sources of social change. The second considers how the circulation of capital constructs the different power bases, the interrelations between them and the consciousness that flows therefrom in specific ways. In the third step, we extend the Marxian theory to encompass the production of space and of urbanization and show how those processes in turn affect the circulation of capital as well as the powers which attach to individualism, class, community, family, and state. The general import is that ways of thinking and doing tend to so order capacities and motivations as to limit the range, though not the diversity, of social action. Such limits, exceeded only at moments of breakdown and revolution, constrain the possibilities to change history according to conscious design precisely because consciousness can express only what practical experience teaches.

Consider, first, how the circulation of capital impinges upon the divergent power bases. The circulation of capital can be described as a series of transitions of the following sort: money is used to buy commodities (labor power and means of production), and these are combined in production to create a new commodity that is sold on the market for the original money plus a profit. Schematically, we can depict the circulation of capital thus:
Most of the goods which support our daily consumption are produced in this way. A capitalist economy is an aggregate made up innumerable and intersecting circulation processes of this type. From Marx, we know that a capitalist system has to grow (if all capitalists are to earn positive profits); that it is necessarily founded on the exploitation of labor power (understood technically as the difference between what labor gets and what it creates); and that this always implies class struggle of some sort. We also know that the system is technologically dynamic, provoking perpetual revolutions in labor processes, systems of distribution and consumption, space-relations, and the like. It is also unstable and crisis prone (see Harvey 1982; 1985).

We should also note how each transition in this circulation process is spatially constrained: the buying and selling of commodities entails a movement (incurring costs) across space and the buying and selling of labor power on a daily basis is contained within a geographically defined labor market (within commuter fields). Production and consumption occur at particular places and their organization as well as the link between them entails some kind of spatial organization. Fixed physical and spatial infrastructures are required if spatial frictions are to be minimized.

Consider how the various material power bases are implicated in the circulation process of capital. To begin with, the individualism of money has its being at each and every moment of exchange. Since money is predominantly used to buy commodities and money is gained either by selling labor power or organizing capital circulation for profit, then the aggregate power of individualism in the market is fixed by the circulation of capital, modified, of course, by the degree to which money power is drawn off to support the other material power bases of state, family, etc. The alienations and freedoms which attach to this moment in circulation (the fact, for example, that laborers have to work in order to live even though they chose what they work for, that they can freely chose what they buy in the market place but only among commodities which capitalists produce) are real enough and deserve examination in their own right, no matter whether we are dealing with laborers expending their wages or entrepreneurs making investment decisions. This is, as it were, the moment of maximum individual liberty and freedom of decision. What we cannot do, and this was Simmel’s most glaring error (see chapter 6), is to abstract the money moment of exchange from the rules of capital circulation. Within the latter constraints, however, it is possible to promote powerful conceptions of individual liberty and freedom, of bourgeois constitutionality, and even to erect entrepreneurialism and individualism into a guiding ideology and mythology. Concentration on that moment of capital circulation alone defines an exclusive set of theoretical concerns (such as those expressed in Adam Smith or neo-classical micro-economics).

But the circulation of capital is at base founded on a class relation. At its simplest, this means a relation between buyers and sellers of labor power and a perpetual struggle between them over wage rates and conditions of labor. In its details, of course, this relation is complicated and the lines of struggle fractured by the fact that labor requirements come in many shapes and forms, that labor qualities and skills are highly differentiated and that failure to organize collectively or the existence of labor surpluses (Marx’s industrial reserve army in part created by the technological and organizational decisions of capitalists) puts laborers in an disadvantageous bargaining position. The conflict in labor markets between individualism and mechanisms for the expression of class interests is always strong and no simple formula exists to determine which interest will prevail. Aggregate requirements for, say, balancing consumption and production tend, however, to put pressure for the formation of some kind of equilibrium wage rate, around which a range of specific wage rates tend to cluster depending upon skills, relative scarcities, technical requirements and differential organization of class and intra-class interest. The class relation and the class struggle element here come to the fore as central if not determinant features within capitalism’s dynamics, regulating the volume of money available to be spent as individual wages, collective goods, and the like. An equilibrium condition of that class struggle from the standpoint of capital accumulation is one in which the intensity and productivity of labor and the total wage bill serve to balance aggregate output with effective demand.

Consumption together with the social reproduction of labor power occurs for the most part within the household or community supported, at least in recent times, by strategic interventions from the state. The circulation of revenues (wages, interest, rents, etc.) is essential to the circulation of capital, since goods produced have to be consumed by someone who can pay for them. This circulation of revenues provides abundant opportunities for different structures of distribution and secondary forms of exploitation (e.g. shopkeepers or landlords versus consumers) to arise. Perhaps as compensation for the alienations of monetized individualism, the search for expressive means to mark individualism (through, say, fashion) or to shape symbolic capital in the realms of consumption can lead to the formation of consumption classes and distinctive communities of consumption. Seen from the standpoint of the circulation of capital, the diversity of
consumption communities or of individual or family lifestyles must somehow cluster to shape an aggregate demand for output that matches continuously increasing productive capacity. Since innovations in production require parallel innovations in consumption, so the competition over life-styles, symbolic capital, and the expressive order in general are essential to the dynamics of capitalism.

The reproduction of labor power within spatially structured labor markets depends on household and family action and the social infrastructures of community, both supported out of the circulation of capital and revenues. The quantities, qualities and value of labor power depend crucially on the nature of family household economies and community structures. Resources generated through the circulation of capital flow into the support of these material power bases and get used in ways that tend in turn to support the circulation of capital. Again, the range of individual or community choice is considerable. But at the end of the day labor power has to be reproduced so as to supply the needs of a capital circulation process that generates the resources to ensure familial and communal conditions of reproduction. While the opposition between these two spheres is a constant source of conflict, agitation and dissonance, any rupture between them indicates a condition of crisis or revolution that must (one way or another) be surmounted as a matter of survival.

The state, finally, has to be omnipresent within (and not external to, as many theories of the state seem to propose) all facets of this circulation process. It has to guarantee the systems of legal and contractual obligation and property rights of constitutional rule and non-violent reciprocities of market exchange through its monopoly over legalized and institutionalized forms of violence. It uses its powers of taxation to sustain itself out of the circulation of capital. The state is always disciplined by money, credit and financial requirements and cannot form an autonomous sphere of authoritative power. Since money is both political and economic, however, the state’s regulation of and policy towards money puts it at the center of political-economic life. At the same time, the state has to adopt (by active policy or default) some kind of accumulation strategy to compensate for market failure, ensure long-term (public) investments and regulate the money supply. It also intervenes in class struggle, in the family and community, and regulates individual liberties as to ensure the appropriate reproduction of labor power and the stability of institutions of power in civil society. As a territorial entity, the state becomes a primary agent in the uneven geographical development of capitalism and consolidates its powers through appeal to territorial-based class alliances (see chapter 5) which integrate the production of places within the relative spaces of an increasingly global capitalist economy. To the degree that capitalism survives through the production of space, the corporatist (sometimes bordering on mercantilist) behavior of territorially based class alliances (including those that arise within urban regions) is a key to understanding the self-perpetuation of capitalism. Inter-spatial competition between states, city regions, and localities in turn becomes a vital expressive dimension to consciousness formation, provoking nationalism, regionalism and localisms within a universal and global framework. Political and geopolitical theoretical concerns come to the fore.

All the elements I have described – individual, class, community, family and state – can be given an explicit interpretation in relation to the dynamics of capital accumulation through an appropriate expansion of the Marxian meta-theory. Furthermore, it is possible to see how and why the different power centers might cohere or cluster around the rule-bound requirements of the capital accumulation process without surrendering freedom of manoeuvre and of action. Both theoretical preoccupations and social practices become more readily explicable. The accumulation of capital is, however, the driving force and it is precisely from that quarter that the hidden hand of history operates. Within a capitalist society all other power centers draw their sustenance from and are ultimately accountable to processes of capital accumulation except under conditions of breakdown and revolution. To the degree that the accumulation of capital is, as Marx puts it, "the historical mission of the bourgeoisie," we do indeed have to appeal to a meta-theory of class relations, even though actual, daily-life and specific class relations exist as one power center in a matrix also occupied by individuals, communities, families, and state apparatuses. From this it follows that the hidden hand of history cannot be identified simply in terms of this or that hegemonic class interest as it is constituted in a given time and place. Here, too it is precisely because capitalists as subjects do not, to reiterate Bourdieu’s formulation, “strictly speaking know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know.”

This second step in the argument locates the orientations of different power centers within an overall theory of a capitalist mode of production. The argument has been schematic, but nevertheless useful from the standpoint of identifying the sorts of inner connexions we might look for in tracking the historical and geographical dynamics of a socio-economic system such as capitalism. But now I want to take a third step and look more closely at the urban context since it is there that former connexions between the rules of capital accumulation and the ferment of social, political and cultural forms can be identified. In so doing, I reiterate that the urban is not a thing but a process and that the process is a particular exemplar of capital accumulation in real space and time.

In chapter 5 I showed how the history of the urban process could be
framed in terms of the relations between money, time and space under conditions of commodity exchange and capital accumulation. The imperatives of the latter impel changes in our experience of space and time. If the urban experience is at root a particular experience of space and time, then it, too, is subject to powerful forces of change. This has implications for cultural as well as for social and political life. Berman (1982) argues, for example, that the culture of modernity derives from a “certain experience of space and time” while Bradbury and Macfarlane (1976) provide an account of the origins of modernism as a cultural force that dwells strongly upon its urban origins. Jameson (1984) has more recently argued that the rise of post-modernism (see chapter 9) is associated with a crisis in our experience of space and that it, too, has strong urban associations. The urban origins of cultural ferment such as post-modernism is similarly asserted by Chambers (1987):

Post-modernism, whatever form its intellectualizing might take, has been fundamentally anticipated in the metropolitan cultures of the last twenty years: among the electronic signifiers of cinema, television and video, in recording studios and record players, in fashion and youth styles, in all those sounds, images and diverse histories that are daily mixed, recycled and “scratched” together on that giant screen which is the contemporary city.

It was, furthermore, one of Simmel’s most powerful contributions to recognize how the organization of space and time and the objective social relations between individuals that urbanization promoted, altered the conditions of mental and cultural life in profound ways.

There is, it seems, a widespread if rather subterranean acceptance of the general significance of the organization of time (labor and leisure time, turnover time, etc.) and space in shaping the expressive worlds of cultural and political life. Pursuing the matter further, I shall propose a connexion not only between capital accumulation and the production of space but also between what I shall call a “hierarchy of spatialities” within the city form.

The space of the body (and all that this implies) is the space of the individual whose spatial movements and gestures make up, for us, one irreducible element of social action in time and space. Many writers (Foucault, for example) have concentrated on the body as the ultimate source of power. The motivations and aspirations of individuals can be explored with the tools of psychology and psycho-analysis, ethnography and linguistics. Individual movements in space and time (which can be tracked and mapped like those of any other bodies) give meaning to the city’s spaces and places. Every time I walk the city, I construct and reconstruct it for myself. Individual activities, furthermore, always lie at the nexus of both production and reproduction. Yet the individual space in modern society is always vulnerable to and invaded by the social power of money. The latter, as a universal source of social power appropriable by private persons, becomes the prime individual means to both practical and expressive ends at the same time as we carry our relation to the world of global production in our pocket. Herein lies a link between the personal and other significant spatialities of social action. The space of the family also has special attributes. It is typically partitioned in ways that have much to say about individual gender roles and age, money power and its penetrations into the realms of social relations, with distinctive impacts upon the sense of security and insecurity, oedipal relations and fears of “the other.” The external relations of individual within the household likewise express spatial powers of access touched by money power. The collecting together of household units for the reproduction of labor power creates an entirely different level of spatial differentiation — that of neighborhood and community — within the urban frame. Here, too, money is the prime resource to purchase location and associated life chances (see chapter 4) the construction of neighborhood and community spaces takes on different aspects depending upon who is engaging in the constructing and why (see chapter 9 below). The spaces of work are organized as micro elements (office, shop floor, posts, etc.) within macro-complexes (factories, office blocks, urban agglomerations) all of which bear the marks of class relations of domination as well as those of hierarchically ordered labor powers, occupations and managerial skills. The money attached to practices in such spaces can be re-cast in communities as so many different expressive domains of status and prestige. The hierarchial orderings of administrative and political space (wards, districts, urban units, regions, nations as well as informally established zones of influence) completes a system of spatial orderings of the five power centers which we have identified as fundamental to social life under capitalism. And all of them are linked together by an intricate network of transport and communications. The city’s spaces are organized, interlinked and structured according to a distinctive social logic.

The role and functioning of the different power centers cannot be separated from the spaces they occupy. The construction of the system of spatialities becomes a prime means to articulate power systems. Practices and experiences within these spaces provide the grist for consciousness formation. Forbidden spaces, feared spaces, ignored spaces, redundant spaces contain the materials of our own ignorance in the same way as shared spaces, comfortable or challenging spaces, needed spaces, become the proving ground for defining who or what we are.

The spaces of the city are constructed through the mobilization of the sources of power in particular configurations. Once constructed, the spatial
reproduction dissolve into a dynamic of uncertainty. A complicated, labyrinthine and in any case perpetually shifting text such as that presented by a city's spaces cannot be read unambiguously. It is open to all manner of interpretations and misinterpretations precisely because its rules of composition cannot be understood in advance of what experience teaches. Learning the language of a city's spaces is, for most of us, at best a partial experience (the veteran cab driver is probably the most learned of us all) and in any case subject to our own conjunctural needs, wants and passions. The symbolic securities of the city's text are open to disruption by an unstable semiotic of desire. This is the fundamental force to which Lefebvre so frequently points in his search to identify how a city's spaces might be liberated in ways that surmount the bounded and restrictive spaces of state and capital, even of community, family and monetized individualism.

Configurations of individuals, families, communities, classes, and state apparatuses within a spatialized hierarchy which itself is open to fetishization or misinterpretation, does not produce an effect automatically consistent with capital accumulation. Sharp discontinuities and conflicts erupt within the urban process. Tensions of this sort form the basis for odd configurations of personal and political consciousness that conceal as much as they reveal of underlying dynamics. It is all very well to insist, as Marxists and even sensible bourgeois are wont to do, that the system has to be understood as a totality. But most economic agents have neither the opportunity nor the luxury (even if they had the predisposition, experience and education) to penetrate the fetishisms of daily life. And even if they did, their reflections (as many a radical thinker finds) are hard to translate into actions that do much more than address immediate needs and hence support the fetishisms rather than dissolve them.

Where, then, does this leave those of us who, for whatever reason, look to the transformation of capitalism into some saner, less life-threatening mode of production and consumption? We know that capitalism has survived into the twentieth century in part through the production of an increasingly urbanized space. The result has been a particular kind of urban experience, radically different qualitatively and qualitatively from anything that preceded it in world history. Capitalism has produced a "second nature" through the creation of built environments and spatial forms and flows. It has also produced a new kind of human nature through the production of social spaces and interrelations between the different loci of consciousness formation. But these second natures, though produced out of the capitalist mode of production and circulation, are not necessarily consistent with capital accumulation and its dominant class relations. Indeed, with time they may become barriers. The urban process then appears as both fundamental to the perpetuation of capitalism and a primary
expression of its inner contradictions. Capitalism has to confront the consequences of its urban structurations at each moment in its history. The produced second natures become the raw materials out of which new configurations of capitalist activity, new productive forces, and new social relations must be wrought.

The search for alternatives has to confront exactly that situation and be prepared to transform, not only that vast constructed second nature of a built environment shaped to accommodate capitalist modes and spatial divisions of both production and consumption, but also an urbanized consciousness. Failure to do so has, I suspect, lain at the root of many of the difficulties of socialist attempts to transform capitalism. Socialism has to show that the creative destruction of revolution is in the long run more creative and less destructive than that inherent in capitalism. It has to find a path toward a radically different kind of urban experience – one that confronts the multiple sources of alienation and disaffection while preserving the minimal liberties and securities achieved. A study of the urbanization of capital and of consciousness helps identify some of the traps into which proposals for social transformation can all too easily fall. It can also help avoid the multilayered fetishisms that attach to the daily experience of urban living and suggest a political way to confront the hidden hand of history.

Can a coordinated attack against the power of capital be mounted out of the individualism of money, the more radical conceptions of community, the progressive elements of new family structures and gender relations, and the contested but potentially fruitful legitimacy of state power, all in alliance with the class resentments that derive from the conditions of labor and the buying and selling of labor power? The analysis of the conditions that define the urbanization of consciousness suggests that it will take the power of some such alliance to mount a real challenge to the power of capital. But there is no natural basis of such an alliance and much to divide the potential participants.

Consider, for example, the distinction between money and money used as capital. Failure to make that distinction has led many Marxists to view the abolition of price-fixing markets and of price signals as a precondition for the abolition of class relations in production. It has taken the experience of totally centralized planning, with its highly rationalized, disciplined, and repressive coordinations of production and consumption in a universalized space and time, to suggest that perhaps the equation of money and capital was an error and that blind control of money uses amounted to the abolition of the modicum of admittedly constrained individual freedom that bourgeois society has achieved. The space of the body cannot be absorbed within that of the state without enslavement. The bourgeoisie has pioneered a path toward greater individual liberty. The problem is to liberate that individual liberty from its purely capitalist basis. The price system is the most decentralized of all decision-making mechanisms for coordinating the social and geographical division of labor with a degree of individual liberty unrealizable in centralized planning or collective community control. Individuals plainly value the limited freedoms given by money uses, and price coordinations yield a more open kind of urban society than that which might otherwise arise.

The problem, therefore, is to get beyond the pure money basis of bourgeois individualism, to curb the use of money power to procure privileged access to life chances, without falling prey to the repressions of community or the authoritarian state. The argument that private property offers one of the few protections against the arbitrariness of the state or the repressive intolerance of community must also be accorded a certain weight. But social democracy, which has shown itself sensitive at least to certain of these issues, has never been able to contain the forms of domination that arise when private property and money power are combined as capital. Nor has it ever dealt with the alienated individualism that pure money coordinations produce except through welfare statism. The path to socialism has to run the gauntlet of such complicated oppositions and change the hierarchy of spatialities that dominate contemporary urban life.

Nor can the present spatial division of labor and of consumption be totally abandoned without almost total destruction of the material bases of contemporary life. The spatial organization of production can, however, be severed from the roving calculus of profit. Some balance should be struck between respect for the history, tradition, and accumulated skills of working communities and innovative probing for new techniques and more efficient spatial configurations. Abundant sentiment can be mobilized behind that idea. The search for less oppressive sociotechnical conditions and social relations of production is, after all, what class struggle in the workplace is all about. Yet it is hard to define the exact meaning of such a project in a world of such intricate interdependence that money power cannot help but dominate as a concrete abstraction that rules our lives. One first step is to curb interurban competition and facilitate interurban cooperation. Beyond that lies the problem of determining some acceptable and dynamic balance between centralization and decentralization of economic decision making. The power of finance capital and the state with respect to production has to be redefined and controlled in ways that promote codevelopment rather than competition.

On the surface, the spatial division of consumption appears an easier issue to address. The direct reorganization of the urban landscape to redistribute access to social power and life chances is essential. Those forms of interurban
competition that generate subsidies for the consumption of the rich at the expenses of the social wage of the poor also deserve instant attack. But this is, I suspect, a more dangerous arena than most socialists are wont to admit. The experience of demand-side urbanization (see chapter 1) bit deep into political consciousness. It played upon the fuzzy boundary between the selling of community and the striving for real community, real cultural and personal freedoms exercised collectively. The mass merging of consumerist narcissism and the desire for self-realization has been an important aspect of the urbanization of consciousness. It is a volatile mix, dangerous to provoke and hard to confront. Yet it increasingly appears as one of the key problems and opportunities for political mobilization. Here exists a major base for political agitation, a guerrilla base from which to mount a broader war, but one which is in perpetual danger of degenerating into mild forms of localized consumer socialism that feed rather than heal dissension. The problem is to sever the tight connection between self-realization and pure consumerism. That battle has to be fought if socialism is ever to stand a chance in the advanced capitalist world.

Failure to win battles of this sort leaves us at the mercy of an urban process that internalized capitalist principles of production for production’s sake, accumulation for accumulation’s sake, consumption for consumption’s sake, and innovation for innovation’s sake. It also presages a future of accelerating creative destruction and abandonment that will implicate more and more people and places.

Emile Zola closes La Bête Humaine with a terrifying image. Engineer and fireman, locked in mortal combat out of their own petty jealousies, tumble from the train to be severed limb from limb beneath its juggernaut wheels. The train, driverless and ever accelerating, rushes toward Paris, while the soldiers it carries, intoxicated and drunk with excitement at the prospect of the grand war with Prussia to come, bellow the loudest and bawdiest of songs with all their energy and might. It was, of course, the Second Empire careering toward war with Prussia and the tragedy of the Commune that Zola sought to symbolize. But the image has perhaps a broader application. The global urbanization of capital entrains a total but also violently unstable urbanization of civil society. The consequent urbanization of consciousness intoxicates and befuddles us with fetishisms, rendering us powerless to understand let alone intervene coherently in that trajectory. The urbanization of capital and of consciousness threatens a transition to barbarism in the midst of a rhetoric of self-realization.

If the urbanization of capital and of consciousness is so central to the perpetuation and experience of capitalism, and if it is through these channels that the inner contradictions of capitalism are now primarily expressed, then we have no option but to put the urbanization of revolution at the center of our political strategies. There is enough supporting evidence for that. Any political movement that does not embed itself in the heart of the urban process is doomed to fail in advanced capitalist society. Any political movement that does not secure its power within the urban process cannot long survive. Any political movement that cannot offer ways out of the multiple alienations of contemporary urban life cannot command mass support for the revolutionary transformation of capitalism. A genuinely humanizing urban experience, long dreamed of and frequently sought, is worth struggling for. Socialism has therefore to address the problem of the simultaneous transformation of capitalism and its distinctive form of urbanization. That conception is, of course, ambiguous. But I prefer to leave it so. Unraveling its meanings is what contemporary political-economic life has to be about.