

# MEGACITIES LECTURE 4



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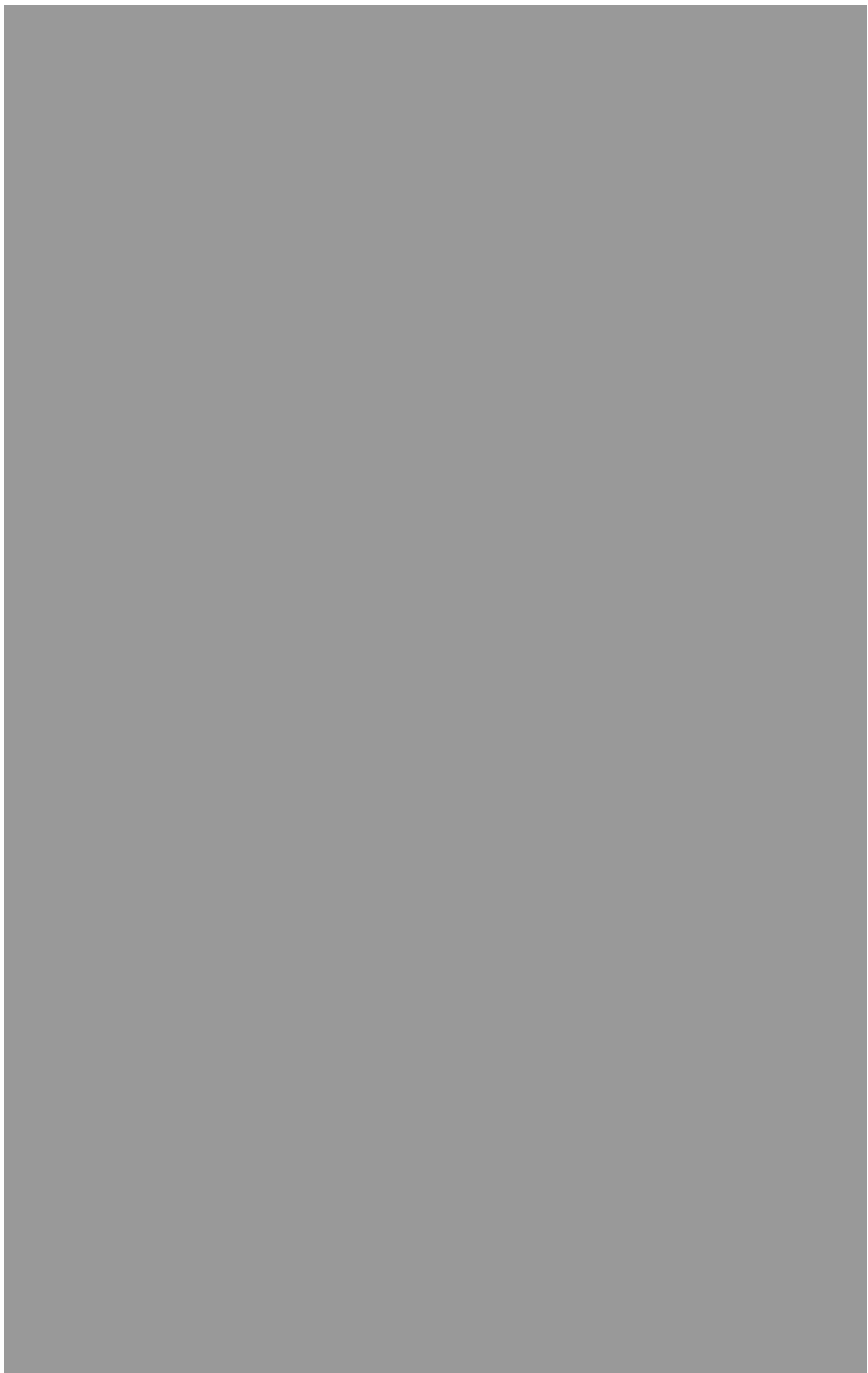
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## **PART I POSSIBLE URBAN WORLDS**

### **THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF URBANIZATION**

At the beginning of this century, there were just sixteen cities in the world with more than a million people. Most were in the advanced capitalist countries and London, by far the largest of them all, had just under seven million. At the beginning of this century too, no more than seven percent of the world's population could reasonably be classified as "urban" (Berry, 1990). By the year 2000 there may well be as many as 500 cities with more than a million inhabitants while the largest of them, Tokyo, Sao Paulo, Mumbai and possibly Shanghai (though the list is perpetually being revised both upwards and downwards), will perhaps boast populations of more than twenty million trailed by a score of cities, mostly in the so-called developing countries, with upwards of ten million. Sometime early next century, if present trends continue, more than half of the world's population will be classified as urban rather than rural.

The twentieth century has been, then, *the* century of urbanization. Before 1800 the size and numbers of urban concentrations in all social formations seem to have been strictly limited. The nineteenth century saw the breach of those barriers in a few advanced capitalist countries, but the latter half of the twentieth century has seen that localized breach turned into a universal flood of massive urbanization. The future of most of humanity now lies, for the first time in history, in urbanizing areas. The qualities of urban living in the twenty-first century will define the qualities of civilization itself.

But judging superficially by the present state of the world's cities, future generations will not find that civilization particularly congenial. Every city now has its share (often increasing and in some instances predominant) of concentrated impoverishment and human hopelessness, of malnourishment and chronic diseases, of crumbling or stressed out infrastructures, of senseless and wasteful consumerism, of ecological degradation and excessive pollution, of congestion, of seemingly stymied economic and human development, and of sometimes bitter social strife,

varying from individualised violence on the streets to organised crime (often an alternative form of urban governance), through police-state exercises in social control to occasional massive civic protest movements (sometimes spontaneous) demanding political-economic change. For many, then, to talk of the city of the twenty-first century is to conjure up a dystopian nightmare in which all that is judged worst in the fatally flawed character of humanity collects together in some hell-hole of despair.

In some of the advanced capitalist countries, that dystopian vision has been strongly associated with the long-cultivated habit on the part of those with power and privilege of running as far from the city centers as possible. Fuelled by a permissive car culture, the urge to get some money and get out has taken command. Liverpool's population fell by 40 percent between 1961 and 1991, for example, and Baltimore City's fell from close to a million to under 700,000 in the same three decades. But the upshot has been not only to create endless suburbanization, so-called "edge cities", and sprawling megalopoli, but also to make every village and every rural retreat in the advanced capitalist world part of a complex web of urbanization that defies any simple categorization of populations into "urban" and "rural" in that sense which once upon a time could reasonably be accorded to those terms. The haemorrhaging of wealth, population and power from central cities has left many of them languishing in limbo. Needy populations have been left behind as the rich and influential have moved out. Add to this the devastating loss of jobs (particularly in manufacturing) in recent years and the parlous state of the older cities becomes all too clear. Nearly 250,000 manufacturing jobs lost in Manchester in two decades while 40,000 disappeared from Sheffield's steel industry alone in just three short catastrophic years in the mid 1980s. Baltimore likewise lost nearly 200,000 manufacturing jobs from the late 1960s onwards and there is hardly a single city in the United States that has not been the scene of similar devastation through deindustrialization.

The subsequent train of events has been tragic for many. Communities built to service now defunct manufacturing

industries have been left high and dry, wracked with long term structural unemployment. Disenchantment, dropping out, and quasi-legal means to make ends meet follow. Those in power rush to blame the victims, the police powers move in (often insensitively) and the politician-media complex has a field day stigmatising and stereotyping an underclass of idle wrong doers, irresponsible single parents and feckless fathers, debasement of family values, welfare junkies, and much worse. If those marginalised happen to be an ethnic or racially marked minority (particularly of immigrants), as is all-too often the case, then the stigmatization amounts to barely concealed racial bigotry coupled with the kind of xenophobia that has Turkish immigrants in Berlin physically controlled out of much of the central city. The only rational response on the part of those left marginalised and excluded is urban rage, making the actual state of social and even more emphatically race relations (for all the official rhetoric on political correctness) far worse now than it has been for several decades.

But is this a universal tale of urban woe I tell? Or is it something rather more confined to the specific legacies of old style capitalist industrialisation and the cultural predilections of the anti-urban anglo-saxon way of life? Central cities throughout continental Europe are, for example, undergoing a singular revival. And such a trend is not merely confined to a few centers, like Paris with its long-standing process of embourgeoisement accelerated by all of the *grands projets* for which the French are justly famous. From Barcelona to Hamburg to Turin to Lille, the flow of population and affluence back into the city centers is marked. But, on inspection, all this really signifies is that the same problematic divisions get geographically reversed. It is the periphery that is hurting and the soulless *banlieu* of Paris and Lyon that have become the centers of riot and disaffection, of racial discrimination and harrassment, of deindustrialization and social decay. And if we look more closely at what has been happening in the anglo-saxon world, the evidence suggests a dissolution of that simple "doughnut" urban form of inner city decay surrounded by suburban affluence (made so much of in the late 1960s), and its replacement by a complex checkerboard of segregated and protected wealth in an urban

soup of equally segregated impoverishment and distress. The impoverished “outer estates” of Glasgow are interspersed with affluent commuter suburbs and the now emerging socio-economic problems of the inner suburbs in many US cities have forced the wealthy seeking security either further out (the urbanization of the remotest countryside then follows) or into segregated and often highly protected zones and gated communities wherever they can best be set up.

But is there anything radically new in all of this? Or have we, when we look at the parallel conditions of late nineteenth century urbanization been here before? The answer is, I fear, both yes and no. Many of the dystopian elements - the concentrated impoverishment and human hopelessness, the malnourishment and chronic diseases, the ecological degradation and excessive pollution, the seemingly stymied human and economic development, and the more than occasional bitter social strife - were all too familiar to our nineteenth century forebears. Any reading of Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861), Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1902-3) Mearns’s *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883), Jack London’s *People of the Abyss* (1903) or Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) will immediately disabuse us of the idea that social conditions are now dramatically worse. And in the United States, the speed and heterogeneity of urban social change, that took Chicago from a trading post to a polyglot multicultural emporium of 1.5 million people in two generations, was something quite extraordinary at the time and probably every bit as stressful as anything that has happened since. Indeed, the impression is that contemporary urban ills in at least the advanced capitalist world pale in comparison with what our forebears saw, even allowing for the sometimes exaggerated horror and feigned outrage of the nineteenth century muckrakers and moralists.

But what does seem to have been different then was the reaction of a newly empowered bourgeoisie as it began to swim in the hitherto uncharted waters of large-scale urban sloth and disaffection that seemed to threaten its power, its health, sanity and economic well-being, as well as its new-

found aesthetic sensibilities for cleanliness and order. Nineteenth century thinkers and politicians therefore took the urban problematic very seriously indeed. And the result was not only an outpouring of thoughtful commentary on “general propositions pertaining to urban development and society” and on key urban determinants “of a new way of life,” (Lees, 1991, 154) but also a massive movement of urban reform that took moralists like Octavia Hill and Jane Addams into the very heart of urban darkness and bore forward architects, planners, social theorists and commentators of all political persuasions on a vast wave of energy directed towards finding rational and even “city beautiful” solutions to the problems of the great cities of those days. Olmstead, Haussmann, Geddes, Ebenezer Howard, Daniel Burnham, Camillo Sitte, Otto Wagner, Garnier, Raymond Unwin, all rode forth as saviors of the modern city, bursting with ideas as to what it might mean to “make no small plans” (as Daniel Burnham put it) and to re-shape the whole city to the needs of efficiency, cleanliness, and, at least in some respects, to human needs. And while the utopian and anarchist dreams of writers like Edward Bellamy (whose *Looking Backward* spawned a whole political movement) and Kropotkin were never destined to be realised in any literal sense, they added to the ferment and became a powerful ingredient within a heady brew of progressive bourgeois reformism.

There are plenty of contemporary critics, of course, who, armed with their techniques of deconstruction and of Foucauldian analysis, might look back upon this period with jaundiced eye as a classic case of progressive reformism disguising capitalist plans for capital accumulation and speculative land development, a mask for concealing bourgeois guilt, paternalism, social control, surveillance, political manipulation, deliberate disempowerment of marginalised but restive masses, and the exclusion of anyone who was “different.” But it is undeniable that the aggregate effect was to make cities work better, to improve the lot not only of urban elites but also of urban masses, to radically improve basic infrastructures (such as water and energy supply, housing, sewage and air quality) as well as to liberate urban

spaces for fresh rounds of organised capital accumulation in ways that lasted for much of the twentieth century. Compared to the best of the “gas and water municipal socialism” of those days, one would have to say that the often blase attitude (to borrow a phrase of Simmel’s concerning one of the most powerful mental attributes of modern urban life) towards the degeneration of our cities leaves much to be desired. There are obvious exceptions to this judgement, of course, since it is largely anchored in my own experience in the English-speaking world. But even in cities like Barcelona, that are often touted as a model of social engineering and social concern (albeit through mechanisms of developer capitalism) there is plenty of room for critical commentary.

But here, the difference between then and now comes more clearly into play. For at the end of the nineteenth century the ideal of some sort of aggregate human progress, though driven by the capitalist passion for “accumulation for accumulation’s sake and production for production’s sake” (to use Marx’s phrase), seemed to have at least some semblance of a hopeful future attached to it as capitalist industry became more organised and as the political economy of urbanization became seemingly more manageable by reorganizations in urban governance (the London County Council was set up in 1888 and Greater New York in 1898). As the fate of whole metropolitan regions became more closely attached to the fate of successful capital accumulation, so bourgeois reformism in city hall became integrated into hegemonic strategies for capitalist development. “The large urban centers,” Lees (1991, 153) correctly observes, “embodied modernity and the future” and “stood for industry, centralization, and for rationality.” For all the populist and often anti-urban rhetoric to the contrary, the coevolution (often dialectical and oppositional) of industrialization and urban politics seemed set fair to dictate a happier future for city dwellers.

Compared to that the contemporary divorce, manifest most dramatically in the dismal history of massive deindustrialisation, between highly mobile and compulsively “downsizing” corporate manufacturing interests and urban

life, would, therefore, have looked most unusual to our forebears. The corporate enemy has largely moved out of town and corporations don't seem to need cities or particular communities any more. The upshot is to leave the fate of the cities almost entirely at the mercy of real estate developers and speculators, office builders and finance capital. And the bourgeoisie, though still mortally afraid of crime, drugs, and all the other ills that plague the cities, is now seemingly content to seal itself off from all of that in urban or (more likely) suburban and ex-urban gated communities suitably immunised (or so it believes) from any long term threats, secure in the knowledge that urban protests can be repressed by main force and so never become real revolutions. Having lost the fear of imminent revolution that so preoccupied the nineteenth century bourgeois, all that is left is an occasional shiver of media-instilled fear as the riots taking place on the other side of town play live on television screens in terrifyingly comfortable living rooms. In recent years, the affluent also seem to have shed much of their guilty conscience. The extraordinary impact of Harrington's *The Other America; Poverty in the U.S.A* when it was published in 1962 (and the subsequent "war on poverty" and massive attempts to confront "the urban crisis" in the United States) would not be possible in today's world where tendentious biological explanations of racial differences in IQ and criminality make front page news and total disillusionment with anything that smacks of redistributive welfarism reigns. So what if an urban "underclass" (that dreadful term invented as reincarnation of what our forebears often referred to by the much more threatening name of "dangerous classes") kills itself off through crime and drugs and Aids and all the rest? And just to pile indignity upon indifference, a largish segment of the bourgeoisie now maintains that cities (in the traditional sense) are in any case irrelevant, that the civilization to which we can aspire in the twenty-first century is one "without cities." The "death of the city" (like the supposed "death of the author and the subject") becomes a significant enough trope in contemporary discourse to be a signal of a shift in the human imaginary as well as in institutions and politics. When attitudes of that sort become current, it is hardly surprising that innovative thinking on urban issues focusses either on how

best to escape the consequences of the largely urban concentrations of those poor “that will always be with us,” or on how to immunise and secure bourgeois interests from the infectious plague of surrounding urban ills. Oscar Newman (1972), who coined the term “defensible space” as the answer to urban crime, may well now be one of the most influential of all thinkers about urban design in the United States.

Some astute urban commentators on nineteenth century urbanization well understood the limits of what bourgeois reformism could ever be about. The only way the bourgeoisie has to confront its socio-economic problems, Engels observed, is to (a) move them around and (b) render them as invisible as possible. It is worth in this regard recalling the two key quotes and asking what if anything has truly changed:

“In reality the bourgeoisie has only one method of solving the housing question after *its* fashion - that is to say, of solving it in such a way that the solution continually reproduces the question anew....The scandalous alleys disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighborhood! The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere! The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place produces them in the next place also. As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist, it is folly to hope for an isolated solution of the housing question or of any other social question affecting the fate of the workers. The solution lies in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production....”

And:

“With the exception of (the) commercial district, all Manchester proper, all Salford and Hume...are all unmixed working people’s quarters stretching like a girdle, averaging a mile and a half in breadth around the

commercial district. Outside, beyond this girdle, lives the upper and middle bourgeoisie, the middle bourgeoisie in regularly laid out streets in the vicinity of working quarters...the upper bourgeoisie in remoter villas with gardens...in free wholesome country air, in fine comfortable homes, passed every half or quarter hour by omnibuses going into the city. And the finest part of the arrangement is this, that the members of the money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the labouring districts without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the left and right. For the thoroughfares...suffice to conceal from the eyes of the wealthy men and women of strong stomachs and weak nerves the misery and grime which form the complement of their wealth..."

While the technological, social, political and institutional context has changed quite radically since Engels's time, the aggregate effective condition has in many respects worsened. The barricades and walls, the segregations and separations, that now mark the living conditions of many advanced capitalist cities hardly deny the truths that Engels depicted. Here is how David Widgery (1991, 219) describes the devastating effects of the urban apartheid recently created by the construction of that fantastic monument to financial capital, Canary Wharf in London's East End:

"The fortified wall which had once circled the docks was not so much torn down as rearranged as a series of fences, barriers, security gates and keep-out signs which seek to keep the working class away from the new proletarian-free yuppie zones....Mrs Thatcher's chosen monument may be the commercial majesty of Canary Wharf topped out only two weeks before her resignation in November 1990, but I see the social cost which has been paid for it in the streets of the East End: the schizophrenic dementing in public, the young mother bathing the newborn in the sink of a B-and-B, the pensioner dying pinched and cold in a decrepit council flat, the bright young kids who can get dope much easier than education, wasted on smack."

And if this urban apartheid seems an oddity just reflect on this: “over 32 million people in the United States currently live in a residential community association” and “more than half of the housing currently on the market in the fifty largest metropolitan areas in the United States and nearly all new residential development in California, Florida, New York, Texas, and suburban Washington, D.C. is governed by a common-interest community, a form of residential community association in which membership is mandatory.” It all sounds innocent enough until the regulatory and exclusionary practices of such community associations are brought under the microscope. When that is done it hard not to conclude with Knox (1994, 170) that these associations constitute “a web of servitude regimes that regulate land use and mediate community affairs in what often amounts to a form of contracted fascism.” All that seems to have changed, then, is the particular manner, institutionalisation and location of that moving around that Engels spotted and the particular strategies of confinement and concealment. The irony here, as Mike Davis (1990, 224) remarks in *City of Quartz* is that “as the walls have come down in Eastern Europe, they are being erected all over (our cities)”. And modern technologies of surveillance, telecommuting and the construction of cyberspace do not necessarily help. Social justice within the urban form is proving, evidently, as elusive as ever, even for those who still have the temerity to be concerned about it.

But all of these problems of the advanced capitalist world pale into insignificance compared to the extraordinary dilemmas of developing countries, with the wildly uncontrolled pace of urbanization in Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Cairo, Lagos, Mumbai, Calcutta, Seoul, and now Shanghai and Beijing. On the surface there seems to be something different going on here, even more than just that qualitative shift that comes with the quantitative rapidity and mass of urban growth that has Mexico City or Sao Paulo experiencing in just one generation what London went through in ten and Chicago in three. Air pollution and localised environmental problems, for example, assume a far more chronic character in developing country cities than they ever did even at the most appalling states of threats to public health in the nineteenth century

cities of Europe and North America. Gated compounds for the rich patrolled by armed guards are everywhere. Experts far better informed than me believe that “the present situation in Third World large cities is quite different from the one experienced in the course of fast urbanization in Europe and the United States” (Sachs, 1988, 341) and I am inclined to bow to that opinion. But I do so with an important caveat: it is vital for us to understand how, why and in what ways these differences have arisen for it is, I believe, only in such terms that we will better understand the prospects of urban living in the twenty-first century in *both* the advanced capitalist and the developing world. Sachs is absolutely right, of course, to maintain that “the only progressive interpretation of historical experience is to consider past experiences as antimodels that can be surpassed.” But surpassing is not a matter of simple inversion or antidote. It is about learning to mobilize progressive forces and impulses for change around an alternative vision of urban futures. We can best get some sort of purchase on these questions by returning to the historical-geographical issue of how cities did or did not grow in the past. What, for example, *were* the constraints to urban growth that kept cities so limited in size and number in the past and what happened sometime before and after 1800, that released urbanization from those limitations?

The answer is, I think, relatively simple in its basics. Up until the 16th or 17th centuries, urbanization was limited by a very specific metabolic relation between cities and their productive hinterlands coupled with the surplus extraction possibilities (grounded in specific class relations) that sustained them. No matter that certain towns and cities were centers of long-distance trade in luxuries or that even some basic goods, like grains, salt, hides and timber could be moved over long distances, the basic provisioning (feeding, watering and energy supply) of the city was always limited by the restricted productive capacity of a relatively confined hinterland. Cities were forced to be “sustainable” to use a currently much favored word, because they had to be. The recycling of city nightsoils and other urban wastes into the hinterland was a major element in that sustainable pattern

of urbanization, making medieval cities seem somewhat of a virtuous bioregionalist form of organization for many contemporary ecologists (though what now looks virtuous must have smelled putrid at the time - "the worse a city smelled," notes Guillerme (1988,171), "the richer it was"). From time to time the hinterlands of cities got extended by forced trade and conquest (one thinks of North African wheat supply to imperial Rome) and of course localised productivity gains in agriculture or forestry (sometimes a short-run phenomena that lasted until such time as soil exhaustion set in) and the variable social capacity to squeeze surpluses from a reluctant rural population typically made the constraints on urban growth elastic rather than rigid. But the security of the city economy depended crucially upon the qualities of its localised metabolic support system, in which local environmental qualities (the breeding grounds of pestilences, plagues and diseases of all sorts that periodically decimated urban populations) as well as food, water and energy supply - particularly firewood - figured large. It is worth remembering in this regard that in 1830 most of the supply of fresh dairy products and vegetables to a city like Paris came from within a relatively restricted suburban zone if not from within the city confines itself. Before 1800, the "footprint" (again to use a currently favored term) of urbanization on the surface of the earth was relatively light (for all the significance cities may have had in the history of politics, science, and civilization): cities trod relatively lightly on the ecosystems that sustained them and were bioregionally defined.

What changed all this, of course, was the wave of new technologies (understood as both hardware and the software of organizational forms) generated by the military-industrial complex of early capitalism. Capitalism as a mode of production has necessarily targetted the breaking down of spatial barriers and the acceleration of turnover time as fundamental to its agenda of relentless capital accumulation (Harvey, 1982; 1989a; 1989b). The systemic capitalist rationale behind this distinctive historical geography is important to appreciate along with its contradictions:

*First:* capitalism is under the impulsion to accelerate turnover time, to *speed up* the circulation of capital and consequently to revolutionise the time horizons of development. But it can do so only through long term investments (in, for example, the built environment as well as in elaborate and stable infrastructures for production, consumption, exchange, communication, and the like). A major strategem of crisis avoidance, furthermore, lies in absorbing excess capital in long-term projects (the famous “public works” launched by the state in times of depression, for example) and this *slows down* the turnover time of capital. There is, consequently, an extraordinary array of contradictions that collect around the issue of the time-horizon (the temporalities) within which different capitals function (the time-horizon of finance capital, for example, is hard to match with the requirements of long-term urban and environmental development).

*Second:* capitalism is under the impulsion to eliminate all spatial barriers, but it can do so only through the production of a fixed space. Capitalism thereby produces a geographical landscape (of space relations, of territorial organization and of systems of places linked in a “global” division of labor and of functions) appropriate to its own dynamic of accumulation at a particular moment of its history, only to have to destroy and rebuild that geographical landscape to accommodate accumulation at a later date. Reductions in the cost and time of movement over space therefore run up against the building of fixed physical infrastructures to facilitate the activities of production, exchange, distribution and consumption. More and more capital is embedded in space as landed capital, as capital fixed in the land, creating a “second nature” and a geographically-organized resource structure that more and more inhibits the trajectory of capitalist development in the midst of greater facility of movement. This tension becomes even more emphatic as the institutions of place become strongly articulated and loyalties to places (and their specific qualities) become a significant factor in political action. The production of territorial organization (the formation of local and metropolitan government systems for example) understood as a process makes territorialization, de-territorialization and re-

territorialization a continuous feature in the historical geography of capitalism.

Many if not all of the major waves of innovation that have shaped the world since the sixteenth century have been built around revolutions in transport and communications - the canals, bridges and turnpikes of the early nineteenth century; the railroad, steamboat and telegraph of the mid nineteenth century; the mass transit systems of the late nineteenth century; the automobile the radio and telephone of the early twentieth century; the jet aircraft and television of the Fifties and Sixties; and most recently the revolution in telecommunications. Each bundle of innovations has allowed a radical shift in the way that space is organised and therefore opened up radically new possibilities for the urban process. Breaking with the dependency upon relatively confined bioregions opened up totally new vistas of possibilities for urban growth. Cronon shows, for example, how the rapid urbanization of Chicago in the nineteenth century realized these new possibilities so that the footprint of that city across the whole of the American mid-West and West became ever larger as its metabolic-ecological relations changed and as it itself grew in a few years into one of the largest cities in the world. And within the city, as Platt (1991) so brilliantly shows in his Chicago-based study of *The Electric City*, the progress of electrification allowed the construction of radically new and dispersed urban forms.

Each round of innovation breaking the barriers of space and time has provided new possibilities. The steam engine, to take just one highly significant historical example, liberated the energy supply of cities from relatively inefficient and highly localised constraints, at the same time as it freed local hinterlands from a chronic conflict over whether to use the land for food or firewood (contemporary students now find it very odd, for example, that one of the closer rings of production with which von Thunen surrounded his city in *The Isolated State* of the early nineteenth century is given over to forestry). But the steam engine could only accomplish its revolutionary role to the degree that it was in turn applied to the field of transport and communications: the coal had to

be shunted around. It was and is, therefore, the total bundle of innovations and the synergism that binds them together that is really crucial in opening up new possibilities.

And in this, seemingly quite small things can figure large in what created possibilities for city growth. The military engineers and mathematicians of the eighteenth century, for example, in using water flow as a form of fortification learned that networks were far more efficient in moving water than direct pipes and channels: this recognition (and the study of the mathematics of networks that went with it) had immense significance once it was applied to cities in the nineteenth century: a given head of water flowing down one pipe can provision no more than 5,000 people but that same head of water when flowed around a network can provision twenty times that. This is a useful general metaphor for urban growth possibilities: the development of an interrelated and ultimately global network of cities drawing upon a variety of hinterlands permits an aggregate urban growth process radically greater than that achievable for each in isolation.

Since the mid Sixties, to take another example of a phase in which innumerable innovations (including the necessary mathematical knowledges) have bundled together to create a new synergism of urbanizing possibilities, we have witnessed a reorganization in spatial configurations and urban forms under conditions of yet another intense round in the reduction of spatial barriers and speedup in turnover time. The “global village” of which Marshall McLuhan speculatively wrote in the 1960s has become, at least in some senses, a reality. McLuhan thought that television would be the vehicle but in truth it was probably the launching of the sputnik that presaged the break, ushering in as it did a new age of satellite communication. But, as in other eras, it is less a single innovation than the total bundle that counts. Containerization, jet-cargo systems, roll-on-roll-off ferries, truck design and, just as important, highway design to support greater weights, have all helped to reduce the cost and time of moving goods over space, while automatic information processing, optimization and control systems, satellite communication, cellular phones and computer technologies, all facilitate the

almost instantaneous communication, collation and analysis of information, making the micro-chip as important as the satellite in understanding the forces that now shape urban life.

These new technological and organizational possibilities have all been produced under the impulsions of a capitalist mode of production with its hegemonic military-industrial-financial interests. For this reason I believe it is not only useful to think of but also important to recognise that we are all embroiled in a global process of capitalist urbanization or uneven spatio-temporal development even in those countries that have nominally at least sought a non-capitalistic path of development and a non-capitalistic urban form. The manner and particular style of urbanization varies greatly, of course, depending upon how these capitalist possibilities are proposed, opposed and ultimately realised. But the context of possibilities is very definitely a capitalist production. And the sense of new possibilities continually opening up gives rise to that modernist style of utopian thinking about technopoles, multifunctionopolises, and the like that parallels that dystopian imagery about the city which I began by invoking.

There are, it seems to me, two basic perspectives from which now to view the conflicting ways in which such possibilities are being taken up. Firstly, we can look upon urbanization (and the lures of city construction and destruction) in terms of the forces of capital accumulation. Capital realizes its own agenda of "accumulation for accumulation's sake, production for production's sake" against a background of the technological possibilities it has itself created. Urbanization in the advanced capitalist countries, for example, has not in recent history been about sustaining bioregions, ecological complexes, or anything other than sustaining the accumulation of capital. In the United States, to take the paradigmatic case, capital accumulation through suburbanization and all that this entailed (from the vast associated water projects of the American West, the highway systems, the construction complexes, to say nothing of the automobile, the oil and rubber industries, etc.) was central to the post-war economic success of the United States, even though it produced its

nether side in the form of derelict and deserted central cities. The point to emphasise here is not so much the technological mix but the active realization of opportunities for direct capital accumulation by way of that technological complex of possibilities. The exhaustion of those possibilities (for example, the relative saturation of the market for new automobiles) makes capital accumulation more difficult, as every large multinational auto producer now recognises. The auto industry now looks, therefore, upon those unsaturated markets in China, India, Latin America, and the deliberately “underurbanized” world of the former Soviet bloc as its primary realm of future accumulation. But that means re-shaping the urban process in those regions to the not particularly environmentally friendly (or even economically feasible) system that for several decades supported economic growth in the United States. While that prospect may send shivers down every mildly ecologically conscious spine, any inability to pursue it will produce even worse *frissons* of horror in the boardrooms of every transnational autocompany if not the whole capitalist class.

The particular dialectic of attraction and repulsion that capital accumulation exhibits for different sites within the web of urbanization varies spatiotemporarily as well as with the faction of capital concerned. Financial (money) capital, merchant capital, industrial-manufacturing capital, property and landed capital, statist capital, and agro-business capital - to take the most familiar factional breakdown of the capitalist class configuration (the other being local, national and multinational capitals) - have radically different needs as well as radically different ways in which to explore the possibilities of exploiting the web of urbanization for purposes of capital accumulation. Tensions arise between the factions because they each have quite different capabilities for and interest in geographical movement - varying from the relatively fixed-in-space capital of property, landed and “local” small-scale capital and the instantaneous capacities for movement of transnational finance. Much of the creative destruction we are now witnessing within the urban process has to be understood in terms of such internal contradictions within the dynamics of overall capital accumulation. But the other

part of it comes from the increasingly ruinous competition between places (be they nation states, regions, cities or even smaller local jurisdictions) as they find themselves forced to sell themselves at the lowest cost to lure highly mobile capital to earth.

One of the peculiar and counterintuitive consequences of this process has, however, been the reassertion of the importance of monopoly power. It is not merely the fact that competition (as Marx long ago remarked and as the Microsoft example so recently demonstrates) always ends up in monopoly or oligopoly, though this has obvious relevance to understanding how a few urban centers (usually dubbed “global cities”) have emerged to dominate and control the world of global finance. But it also leads cities to cultivate “monopoly rents” as attractions for highly mobile capital by selling the uniqueness of their location, their culture (frequently produced and invented at will with tremendous emphasis upon so-called “culture industries”), their urban qualities of life (infrastructure and aesthetics) and the security of their real estate markets (booming office and housing rents and values). Such locational monopolies are attractive lures for finance capital for obvious reasons.

But the other perspective from which to view the recent history of urbanization is in terms of popular (if not “populist”) seizure of the possibilities that capitalist technologies have created. To some degree this is about the vast historical migrations of labor in response to capital, from one region to another if not from one continent to another. That formulation basically made most sense in the nineteenth and even the early twentieth centuries (though there were always exceptions such as the flood of Irish overseas in the wake of the potato famine that may have been prompted by conditions of imposed agrarian capitalism but which was hardly a “normal” migration of rural population in search of urban liberties and waged labor). But the flood of people into developing country cities is not fundamentally tied to the pulls of employment attached to capital accumulation or even to the pushes of a reorganising agrarian capitalism destructive of traditional peasantries (though there are many segments of the world

where that process is very strongly in evidence). It is a far more populist search to take advantage of capitalist produced possibilities no matter whether capital accumulation is going on or not, and often in the face of economic conditions that are just as, if not more appalling than those left behind. And while one of the effects may be to create vast "informal economies" which operate both as proto-capitalist sectors and as feeding grounds for more conventional forms of capitalist exploitation and accumulation (see Portes, Castells and Benton, 1989), the explanation of the movement in itself can hardly be attributed to the machinations of some organised capitalist class action.

The continuing flow of Asiatic and African populations into European countries and the Asiatic and Latino flows into North America exhibit similar qualities producing some wonderfully instructive contrasts right in the heart of capitalist cities. Within earshot of Bow-Bells in London, for example, one finds the extraordinary power of international finance capital moving funds almost instantaneously round the world cheek-by-jowl with a substantial Bengali population (largely unemployed in any conventional sense) that has built a strong migratory bridge into the heart of capitalist society in search of new possibilities in spite of rampant racism and increasingly low-wage, informal and temporary working possibilities. Here, too, the industrial reserve army that such migratory movements create may become an active vehicle for capital accumulation by lowering wages but the migratory movement itself, while it may indeed have been initiated by capital looking for labour reserves (as with guest workers and migrant streams from the European periphery), has surely taken on a life of its own. The massive forced and unforced migrations of peoples now taking place in the world, a movement that seems unstoppable no matter how hard countries strive to enact stringent immigration controls, will have as much if not greater significance in shaping urbanization in the twenty-first century as the powerful dynamic of unrestrained capital mobility and accumulation. And the politics that flow from such migratory movements, while not necessarily antagonistic to continued capital accumulation are not necessarily consistent with it either, posing serious questions as to whether urbanization

by capital accumulation will be anywhere near as hegemonic in the future as it has been in the past, even in the absence of any major organising force, such as a powerful socialist or pan-religious (fundamentalist) movement, that seeks to counteract the manifest injustices and marginalisations of the capitalist form of urbanization by the construction of some alternative urban world.

Populist migrant flows, furthermore, have the habit of producing populist political movements (both for, against and even within the migrant streams). Social movements in the city then take on all sorts of colorations, capable of producing vast waves of inter-communal violence (such as the killings and burnings that shook Mumbai in 1992-3, the recent intercommunal violence in Northern Nigeria and skinhead attacks against Turkish immigrants in Germany). Trying to understand how these volatile migratory and populist movements map onto the dynamics of capital accumulation is one of the most serious political and theoretical challenges of our time.

## **THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS**

In all of this I am struck again and again by the difficulty of designing an adequate language, an adequate conceptual apparatus to grasp the nature of the problem we seem to be faced with. I worry that last year's conceptual tools and goals will be used to fight next year's issues in a dynamic situation that more and more requires pro-active rather than remedial action. I am not alone in this worry. Nor is this an entirely new dilemma. As Sachs (1988, 343) observes of urban politics and policies in the past:

“Urbanists, like economists and generals, were ready for the last battle they won.....The social rhetoric of the charter of Athens served more as a screen to hide their fascination with new building materials, industrialized construction methods, and spatial and architectural aestheticism rather than as a pointer to look at the real person in the streets.....In their conceptions of society and human needs, most postwar urbanists demonstrated the same mix of naivete, dogmatism, and lack of interest

in empirical evidence about people's lifestyles as the protagonists of the discussions held in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s."

Are we, then, in danger of repeating the error that Keynes long ago pointed to when he remarked on how we have a strong penchant for organising our present lives in accordance with the defunct vision of some long dead economist?

In thinking through this problem, I think it important first to recognise that as a physical artefact, the contemporary city has many layers. It forms what we might call a *palimpsest*, a composite landscape made up of different built forms superimposed upon each other with the passing of time. In some cases, the earliest layers are of truly ancient origin, rooted in the oldest civilisations whose imprints can be discerned beneath today's urban fabric. But even cities of relatively recent date comprise distinctive layers accumulated at different phases in the hurly burly of chaotic urban growth engendered by industrialisation, colonial conquest, neocolonial domination, wave after wave of migration, as well as of real estate speculation and modernisation. Think, for example, of how the migratory layers that occupy even the rapidly expanding shanty-towns of cities in developing countries quickly spawn identifiable physical layers of more and more permanent and solid occupancy.

In the last two hundred years or so, the layers in most cities have accumulated ever thicker and faster in relation to burgeoning population growth, massive voluntary and forced relocations of populations, strong but contradictory paths of economic development, and the powerful technological changes that liberated urban growth from former constraints. But it is nevertheless, as Jencks (1993) points out, one of the oddities of cities that they become more and more fixed with time, more and more sclerotic, precisely because of the way they incrementally add things on rather than totally shedding their skins and beginning all over again. Planners, architects, urban designers, - "urbanists" in short - all face one common problem: how to plan the construction of the next layers in the urban palimpsest in ways that match future

wants and needs without doing too much violence to all that has gone before. What has gone before is important precisely because it is the locus of collective memory, of political identity, and of powerful symbolic meanings at the same time as it constitutes a bundle of resources constituting possibilities as well as barriers in the built environment for creative social change. There is rarely now a *tabula rasa* upon which new urban forms can be freely constructed.

But the general charge of searching for a future while respecting the past all too frequently internalises the sclerotic tendencies in urban forms into even more sclerotic ways of thinking. It is precisely here that we need to heed Marx's warning that in moments of crisis we are always in danger of conjuring up the spirits of the past, borrowing "names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history" in a "time-honoured disguise" and a "borrowed language." If there is one dominant impression I have of the urban processes that are re-shaping cities particularly in developing countries (Seoul or Sao Paulo, for example), it is simply that of an urban process in which the content transcends the form - social processes literally bursting at the seams of urban form - on a scale never before encountered. How to create the poetry of our urban future in such a situation is the fundamental question.

If I go back to the famous passages of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, it is because they seem particularly appropriate to this situation. When history repeats itself, Marx observed, it occurs first as tragedy and the second time as farce. How, then, can we, to extend Marx's metaphor somewhat, prevent the modernist tragi-comedy of mid-century urbanization being turned into a late twentieth century postmodernist farce?

What can the theoretical perspectives of historical-geographical materialism tell us in this context? From this perspective I take up and re-work five conceptual issues essential to understanding contemporary urbanization.

*1. Locating the urban in fields of social action.*

The “thing” called a “city” is the outcome of a “process” called “urbanization.” A dialectical approach says that (a) processes are more fundamental than things, (b) processes are always mediated through the things they produce, sustain and dissolve and (c) the permanences produced (including ways of thought, institutions, power structures and networks of social relations as well as material objects like the city itself) frequently function as the solid and immovable bases of daily material existence. This style of thought initiates a radical break with late nineteenth century thinking as well as with much of contemporary architecture and social science, in which the dominant view, in spite of all the emphasis upon social relations and processes, was and is that the city is a thing that can be engineered successfully in such a way as to control, contain, modify or enhance social processes. In the nineteenth century Olmstead, Geddes, Howard, Burnham, Sitte, Wagner, Unwin, all reduced the problem of intricate social processes to a matter of finding the right spatial form. And in this they set the dominant (“utopic”) twentieth century tone for either a mechanistic approach to urban form, as in the case of Le Corbusier, or the more organic approach of Frank Lloyd Wright.

The difficulty with so-called “high modernism” and the city was not its “totalizing” vision, but its persistent habit of privileging things and spatial forms over social processes. It presumed that social engineering could be accomplished through the engineering of physical form. This is, as Marin (1984) shows, the fundamental posture of all classical forms of utopianism (beginning with Sir Thomas More): they in effect propose a fixed spatial order that ensures social stability by destroying the possibility of history and containing all processes within a fixed spatial frame. The antidote to such spatial determinism is not to abandon all talk of the city (or even of the possibility of utopia) as a whole, as is the penchant of postmodernist critique, but to return to the level of urbanization processes as being fundamental to the construction of the things that contain them. A utopianism of process (as will be shown in Section II) looks very different from a utopianism of fixed spatial form.

This debate has interpretive and political significance. Do we attribute the difficulties of contemporary life to the contradictions of capitalism, to modernity (or its chaotic nemesis postmodernity), to the traumas of industrialization (and post-industrialism), to the disenchantment of the world that comes with technological and bureaucratic rationality, to social anomie born of marginalization and alienation, to massive population growth, or to that undefinable but nevertheless potent idea of a decline in religious beliefs and associated social values? Or do we argue that there is something inherent in the city (a thing) or urbanization (the process) that gives a distinctive coloration, form, and content to the structuration of contemporary social, economic and political processes and pathologies? I have long argued and continue to argue that understanding urbanization is integral to understanding political-economic, social, and cultural processes and problems. But this is true only if we consider urbanization as a process (or, more accurately, a multiplicity of processes) producing a distinctive mix of spatialised permanences in relation to each other. The idea that a thing called the city has causal powers in relation to social life is untenable. Yet the material embeddedness of spatial structures created in the course of urbanization are in persistent tension with the fluidity of social processes, such as capital accumulation and social reproduction. Instancing social relations through the transformation of material environments makes it hard to change either. Thus do the inherently sclerotic qualities of the things we call cities, coupled with the sclerosis that often reigns in planners' heads, effectively check the possibilities of evolving a different urbanization process. The dead weight of conventional spatio-temporal thinking and actual spatio-temporal forms weighs like a practical nightmare on the thoughts and material possibilities of the living.

Traditional thinking about cities is not entirely unaware of this problem. Haussmann and Robert Moses sought to liberate processes of capital accumulation from the constraints of older spatio-temporal structures. The question of urbanization in the twenty-first century similarly becomes one of defining how space-time, environment and place will be produced within

what social processes and with what effects. Continuous capital accumulation, for example, will produce a quite different set of urban forms from those achieved under some regime seeking an emancipatory, egalitarian and ecologically sensitive politics. Alternative anti-capitalist possibilities are to some degree already present, even though they are the subject of acute contestation and struggle between factions and classes pursuing radically different interests. The issue is not one, therefore, of gazing into some misty crystal ball or imposing some classic form of utopian scheme in which a dead spatiality is made to rule over history and process. The problem is to enlist in the struggle to advance a more socially just and politically emancipatory mix of spatio-temporal production processes rather than acquiesce to those imposed by finance capital, the world bank and the generally class-bound inequalities internalised within any system of uncontrolled capital accumulation. Fortunately, the latter powers, however hegemonic they may be, can never entirely control urbanization (let alone the discursive and imaginary space with which thinking about the city is always associated). Intensifying contradictions within a rapidly accelerating and often uncontrolled urbanization process create all sorts of interstitial spaces in which all sorts of liberatory and emancipatory possibilities can flourish. How and where these social movements within the urban process might be mobilized into a more general anti-capitalist politics is then the crucial question.

## *2. The Place of The City in a Globalizing World*

There is a strong predilection these days to regard the future of urbanization as already determined by the powers of globalization and of market competition. Urban possibilities are limited to mere competitive jockeying of individual cities for position within a global urban system. There seems then to be no place from which to launch any movement capable of grounding the drive for systemic transformations. In the last twenty years, the rhetoric of "globalization" has become particularly important, even replacing within segments of radical thought the more politicised concepts of imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism. The ideological effect of this discursive shift has been extraordinarily disempowering with

respect to all forms of local, urban, and even national political action.

Yet, the process of globalization is not new. Certainly from 1492 onwards, and even before (cf. the Hanseatic League system), the globalization of capitalism was well under way in part through the production of a network of urban places. Marx and Engels emphasized the point in the *Communist Manifesto*. Modern industry not only creates the world market, they wrote, but the need for a constantly expanding market “chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe” so that it “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.” They continue:

“The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country....All old established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature....”

If this is not a good description of globalization then what is? And from this Marx and Engels derived the global imperative “working men of all nations unite” as a necessary condition for an anti-capitalist and socialist revolution.

The bourgeoisie's quest for class domination has always been and continues to be a very geographical affair. "Globalization" is a long-standing *process* always implicit in capital accumulation rather than a political-economic condition that has recently come into being. This does not preclude saying that the process has changed or worked itself out to a particular or even "final" state. But a process-based definition makes us concentrate on *how* globalization has occurred and is occurring. So what kind of process is it and, more importantly, how has it changed in recent years? Some major shifts stand out. To describe them is to describe some of the key forces at work that have changed within the complex dynamic of urbanization, in particular the extraordinary growth of urbanization in many developing countries:

(a). Financial deregulation began in the USA in the early 1970s as a forced response to stagflation and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods System of international trade and exchange. Bretton Woods was a global system so this meant a shift from one global system (largely controlled politically by the United States) to another that was more decentralized, coordinated through the market and resting on fluxes and flows of money. The effect was to make the financial conditions of capitalism far more temporally volatile and spatially unstable. The term "globalization" was, I note, largely promoted by the financial press in the early 1970s as a necessary virtue of this process of financial deregulation, as something progressive and inevitable, opening up whole new fields of opportunity for capital. It was a term embedded in the language of money and the commodity that then entered into public and academic discourses (including my own) without too much attention being paid to its class origins and ideological functions. It describes a spatial condition in which a Singapore Bank can finance a local development in Baltimore without scarcely any mediation from other levels of territorial control (even the nation state). The connection between urbanization processes and finance capital has become, as consequence, much more direct. It is unmediated by other institutional forms of control and much more prone to rapid and ephemeral geographical dispersal across the globe.

Ideologically, it makes it appear as if all urban places must submit to the discipline of free-floating finance.

(b). The cost and time of moving commodities, people and particularly information ratcheted downwards. This brought some significant changes to the organization of production and consumption as well as to the definition of wants and needs. The ultimate “de-materialization of space” in the communications field permitted all sorts of geographical adjustments in the location of industry, consumption, and the like. It is, however, easy to make too much of the so-called information revolution. The newness of it all impresses, but then the newness of the railroad and the telegraph, the automobile, the radio and the telephone in their day impressed equally. These earlier examples are instructive, since each in their own way did change the way globalization worked, the ways in which production and consumption could be organized, politics conducted, and the ways in which social relations between people could become converted on an ever widening scale into social relations between things. Urbanization and the connectivity of urban places through networking across space is indeed changing very rapidly through the use of informational technology. But Castells exaggerates greatly when he argues that everything has thereby been reduced to the spaces of flows.

(c). Production and organizational forms changed. The effect was an increasing geographical dispersal and fragmentation of production systems, divisions of labor, specializations of tasks, albeit in the midst of an increasing centralization of corporate power through mergers, takeovers or joint production agreements that transcended national boundaries. The global television set, the global car, became an everyday aspect of political-economic life as did the so-called “global cities”. The closing down of production in one place and the opening up of production somewhere else became a familiar story - some large-scale production operations have moved four or five times in the last twenty years. Corporations have more power to command space, making individual places much more vulnerable to their whims but the whole network of

urbanization more open to rapid shifts and flows of manufacturing capital.

(d). The world proletariat has almost doubled in the last thirty years. This occurred in part through rapid population growth but also through mobile capital mobilizing more and more of the world's population (including women) as wage laborers in e.g. South Korea, Taiwan, Africa, as well as most recently in the ex-Soviet bloc. Much of this huge global proletariat is working under conditions of gross exploitation and political oppression. But it is geographically differentiated (with financial services and other divisions of labor highly concentrated in certain areas) as well as dispersed across a variety of massive urban concentrations. It is consequently hard to organize even though its conditions would indicate a favorable terrain for widespread anti-capitalist struggle.

(e). The territorialization of the world has changed. State operations have become much more strongly disciplined by money capital and finance. Structural adjustment and fiscal austerity have become the name of the game and the state has to some degree been reduced to the role of finding ways to promote a favorable business climate. The "globalization thesis" here functions as a powerful capitalist ideology to beat upon socialists, welfare statists, nationalists, etc. Welfare for the poor has largely been replaced, therefore, by public subventions to capital (Mercedes-Benz recently received one quarter billion dollars of subventions in a package from the state of Alabama in order to persuade it to locate there). But the power of the nation state has not disappeared. It has been enhanced rather than diminished in certain areas such as labor control, fiscal discipline of state expenditures, and infrastructural investments (both physical, such as transport and communications systems and social such as investments in education for "knowledge-based" activities and industries). The guiding philosophy of state action has increasingly been that of the "public-private partnership" in which public investments are increasingly geared to securing private rather than social interests. In so doing the state ends up often being just as activist in relation to capital accumulation as it ever was. Capitalist development would

not have taken the form it has in Singapore, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, as well as in the traditional heartlands of capitalism without strong state supports.

(f). While individual states lost some of their powers, geopolitical democratization created new opportunities. It became harder for any core power to exercise discipline over others and easier for peripheral powers to insert themselves into the capitalist competitive game. Money power is a "leveller and cynic" empowering whoever commands it wherever they are. Competitive states could do well in global competition - and this meant low-wage states with strong labor discipline as well as authoritarian states with powerful capacities to mobilize public investments for corporate enterprises (like most of the Asian "tiger" economies) often did better than others.

All of these quantitative changes taken together have been synergistic enough to transform processes of urbanization world-wide. But there has been no revolution in the mode of production and its associated social relations. If there is any real qualitative trend it is towards the reassertion of early nineteenth capitalist *laissez-faire* for capital backed by state repression of opposition, coupled with a twenty-first century penchant for pulling everyone (and everything that can be exchanged) into the orbit of capital. The effect is to render ever larger segments of the world's population permanently redundant in relation to capital accumulation while severing them from any alternative means of support.

But the political objection to the globalization thesis, is that it denies the possibility for meaningful action within any one of the places of capitalism (be it the nation state or the city). It undialectically presumes the unalloyed powers of spatial processes of capital flow to dominate places. In response, there are many who now try to put the shoe on the other foot.

### *3. The Communitarian Response*

Faced with the innumerable problems and threats that urban life today poses, some analysts, rejecting the globalization

thesis, have reached for one simple solution - to try and turn large and teeming cities, so seemingly out of control, into urban villages where, it is believed, everyone can relate in a civil fashion to everyone else in an urbane and gentle environment. In this regard, late nineteenth century thinking on cities exercises a particularly baleful influence upon present thinking and practices. The utopian social anarchism of that time has as much to answer for as do the more traditional bourgeois notions that derived as early as 1812 from the Reverend Thomas Chalmers who, in an influential set of writings in Britain, proposed to mobilize "the spirit of community" as an antidote to the threat of class war and revolutionary violence in rapidly urbanizing areas. The merging of these two strains of thought in the work of Patrick Geddes and Ebenezer Howard and its carry over into the planning practices of much of the twentieth century has meant a long continuity in communitarian thinking that is extraordinarily hard to exorcise from any and all thinking about urban processes.

Many contemporary analysts, post Herbert Gans's study on *The Urban Villagers* (1962), believe that cities are mainly constituted as collections of urban villages anyway. Jencks (1993) thinks that even Los Angeles can be dissolved into twenty eight townships and Peter Hall, while admitting the whole idea sounds a bit banal, can cheerfully assert the fundamental truth that London is indeed a collection of villages. The idea of some kind of communitarian solution to urban problems is both attractive and powerful (judging by the innumerable books and articles devoted to the subject). And it is so not only because of nostalgia for some long lost mythical world of intimate village life, ignoring the fact that most of the populist migration out of villages arose precisely because they were so oppressive to the human spirit and so otiose as a form of socio-political organisation. It also appeals because some mythical social entity called "community" can perhaps be re-created and "community spirit" and "community solidarity" is, we are again and again urged to believe, what will rescue us from the deadening world of social dissolution, grab-it-yourself materialism and individualised selfish market-oriented greed that lies at the root of all urban ills. The

Christian base community concept, for example, vital brainchild of the now vastly constrained theology of liberation in Latin America, is even brought into Baltimore as the solution to urban problems (McDougall, 1993). And the idea that the institutions of civil society and of community might even enhance competitive power and be the seed-bed of further economic development has even penetrated into institutions like the World Bank (thanks to the writings of Putnam and others and the highlighting of the experience of institutions like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh).

This ideal would not have the purchase it does were there no truth at all to it. My own guess is that the only things stopping riots or total social breakdown in many cities are the intricate networks of social solidarities, the power and dedication of community organizations, and the hundreds of voluntary groups working round the clock to restore some sense of decency and pride in an urbanising world shell-shocked by rapid change, unemployment, massive migrations and all of the radical travails inflicted by capitalist modernity passing into the nihilistic downside of postmodernity. And there is no question that limited development does and will even further occur as a consequence of community mobilization.

But community has always meant different things to different people and even when something that looks like it can be found, it often turns out to be as much a part of the problem as a panacea. Well-founded communities can exclude, define themselves against others, erect all sorts of keep-out signs (if not tangible walls). As Young points out, "racism, ethnic chauvinism, and class devaluation...grow partly from the desire for community" such that "the positive identification of some groups is often achieved by first defining other groups as the other, the devalued semihuman."

We encounter here a singular, instructive and very important example of how the *a priori* definition of some theoretical object, construed as a natural entity in absolute space, can mislead. The error arises out of the belief that "community," often understood as a naturally occurring entity, indeed exists or can exist (there is a vast literature on how "communities"

get lost and found in the history of urbanization) and that this entity, endowed with causal salving powers, can be put to work as an agent for social change. Even when understood as something socially constructed, communitarianism incorporates mythic beliefs that a “thing” called community can be created as some free-standing and autonomous entity endowed with causative and salving powers, that this “thing” can be internally defined in a manner that can be isolated from “others” and “outsiders”, and that external relations of this thing with other things are contingent and occasional rather than integral and continuous. A more dialectical view would have it that entities like communities, while not without significance, cannot be understood independent of the social processes that generate, sustain and also dissolve them and that it is those socio-spatial processes that are fundamental to social change. I do not mean to assert that the construction of a certain kind of spatio-temporal form designated as “community” has no relevance or interest. Something akin to community can be put in place as a source of comfort and sustenance in the face of adversity, as a zone of political empowerment, as well as a bounded space within which to advance racist, classist and ethnico-religious exclusionism and powerful mechanisms of internal exploitation. But by abstracting from the dialectic of thing-process relations, our vision of the possibilities for social action becomes so restricted by the rhetoric of community as frequently to be self-nullifying if not self-destructive to the initial aims, however well intentioned (as, for example, in the case of trying to import the ideal of Christian base communities as panacea for the conditions of deprivation and marginalization experienced by the African-American population in Baltimore). There are far better ways to understand the relations between “community” and social processes by translating the whole issue into one of the dialectics of space-place relations as one aspect of the overall production of spatio-temporality integral to urbanization processes in general. That may sound unduly abstract and complicated, but the idea that the Roman “*communitas*” or the medieval village can somehow be rebuilt in Mumbai or Sao Paulo appears little less than absurd. This latter is no alternative for the much more tricky problem of

creating a politics of heterogeneity and a domain of publicness that stretches across the diverse spatio-temporalities of contemporary urbanized living. While the rhetoric of communitarianism may provide an ideological antidote to the disempowering effects of an unalloyed globalism, it too fails precisely because it abstracts from the dialectics of place and space and treats one side of the antinomy as a self-sustaining entity endowed with causal powers.

#### *4. From Urban Ecology to the Ecology of Urbanization*

The pervasive and often powerful anti-urbanism of much of the contemporary environmental-ecological movement often translates into the view that cities ought not to exist since they are the highpoint of the plundering and pollution of all that is good and holy on planet earth. The predominant form of radical solutions proposed for ecological dilemmas is a return to some form of ruralised communitarianism. This predominant anti-urbanism is as odd as it is pernicious. It is almost as if a fetishistic conception of "nature" as something to be valued and worshipped separate from human action blinds a whole political movement to the qualities of the actual living environments in which the majority of humanity will soon live. It is, in any case, inconsistent to hold that everything in the world relates to everything else, as ecologists tend to do, and then decide that the built environment and the urban structures that go with it are somehow outside of both theoretical and practical consideration. The effect has been to evade integrating understandings of the urbanizing process into environmental-ecological analysis.

In this regard, it would at first blush seem as if our nineteenth century forebears have something to teach us of great significance. Was it not, after all, a central aim in the work of Olmstead and Howard, to try to bring together the country and the city in a productive tension and to cultivate an aesthetic sensibility that could bridge the chronic ills of urbanized industrialism and the supposedly healthier pursuits of country life? It would be churlish to deny real achievements on this front. The marks of what were done in those years - the park systems, the garden cities and suburbs, tree-lined streets - are now part of a living tradition that define certain

qualities of urban living that many (and not only the bourgeoisie) can and do still appreciate. But it is also undeniable that this ecological vision, noble and innovative though it was at the time, was predominantly aesthetic (and very bourgeois) in its orientation and was easily coopted and routinised into real estate development practices for the middle classes. And there is, to boot, more than a hint that what ought to have been a productive tension between town and country was in fact dominated by a nostalgia for a rural and communitarian form of life that had never existed except in the fertile imaginations of a bourgeoisie seeking to escape the aesthetic and social effects of its own capitalistic practices. The ecological tradition within urban thought, even though it ranks such stellar thinkers as Mumford and Geddes in its midst, has little of deep significance to say about the urbanizing dialectics of social and environmental change. While it certainly paid attention to issues of public health and the living environment, it failed to take on board that other thread of environmentalism that focussed on conditions of work. Its definition of the ecological was far too limited to match today's concerns.

In recent years, however, some attention has begun to be paid, particularly by environmentalists of a more managerial persuasion, to the question of "sustainable" cities and more environmentally friendly forms of urban growth and change. But the separation of urban from environmental analyses (and a cloying nostalgia for the rural and its supposedly well-balanced sense of community) is still far too marked for comfort. The best that the ecologists (as opposed to the environmental justice movement) seem to be able to offer is either some return to an urbanization regulated by the metabolic constraints of a bioregional world as it supposedly existed in what were actually pestiferous and polluted medieval or ancient times, or a total dissolution of cities into decentralised communes or municipal entities in which, it is believed, proximity to some fictional quality called "nature" will predispose us to lines of conscious (as opposed to enforced) action that will respect the qualities of the natural world around us (as if decanting everyone from large cities into the countrysides will somehow guarantee the preservation

of biodiversity, water and air qualities, and the like). And far too much of what passes for ecologically sensitive in the fields of architecture, urban planning and urban theory amounts to little more than a concession to trendiness and to that bourgeois aesthetics that likes to enhance the urban with a bit of green, a dash of water, and a glimpse of sky.

But there are a whole range of ecological issues central to how we should be thinking about our rapidly urbanizing world. The difficulty is that “environment,” means totally different things to different people, depending not only on ideological and political allegiances, but also upon situation, positionality, economic and political capacities, and the like. When the big ten environmental groups in the United States target global warming, acid rain (issues directly connected with urbanization through automobilisation), ozone holes, biodiversity, and the like, they point to serious issues that have relevance at a global scale. Responses to those issues have profound implications for urbanization processes. Attempts to instill a logic of “smart-growth” in the United States has already generated diverse swathes of resistance even though the proposals for an ecological rationalization of land uses and transportation systems are relatively mild (and even anodyne when compared to parallel proposals for land use controls launched in the 1960s in Britain and other European countries). But these are hardly the most important issues from the standpoint of the masses of people flooding into the cities of developing countries. As a result complaints of bias in the environmental agenda being imposed from the affluent nations are becoming more strident:

“It is in some sense ironic that the immediate, household-level environmental problems of indoor air quality and sanitation are often ignored or given slight treatment by activist environmental groups concerned with the environment. Most of the international attention over the past ten years has been focused on issues of ‘the commons,’ or those that threaten global tragedy. But the adverse effects of household airborne and water-carried diseases on child mortality and female life expectancy are of no less global proportions than, say,

the destruction of tropical forests, and in immediate human terms they may be the most urgent of all worldwide environmental problems. Certainly, the immediate threats to the urban poor of hazardous indoor air quality and inadequate sanitation exceed the adverse effects of global warming, or even vehicular pollution.” (Campbell, 1989, 173).

While Campbell adds that “of course, the world needs action on both these and other fronts” the assignment of priorities and the potentially conflicting consequences of striving to meet different environmental objectives defined at radically different scales is perhaps one of the most singular and unthought through problems associated with the rapid urbanization of the contemporary era. Suffice it to say that the integration of the urbanization question into the environmental-ecological question is a *sine qua non* for the twenty-first century. But we have as yet only scraped the surface of how to achieve that integration across the diversity of geographical scales at which different kinds of ecological questions acquire the prominence they do. And while the environmental justice movement has the potentiality to make political fire by rubbing together questions of social justice and ecological modernization, it carries so much freight of communitarianism and religious mythology as to make its take on the urbanization question somewhat ambivalent and even in some respects potentially backward looking.

##### *5. Urbanization as Uneven Geographical Development*

A conceptual impasse looms. Acceptance of the globalization language is disempowering for all anti-capitalist and even moderately social democratic movements. It denies any relative autonomy for urban development, undermines the capacity within individual cities to define new possibilities of urban living, and makes it impossible to envision the modification, transgression or disruption of the trajectory of capitalist globalization/urbanization in general. On the other hand, the communitarian response appears either utopic in the weak nostalgic sense of looking to times past, or else it proposes an illusory isolationist localised politics, supposedly outside of the flux and flow of capitalist accumulation operating

across the face of the globe. When turned into practice it often amounts to class and or racist exclusions of difference. And while communitarianism often incorporates the dream of ensuring ecological balance and sustainable ecological sanity, it undermines the capacity to face realistically the complex issues of environment as these arise at quite different geographical scales, including that of urbanization.

If the languages of “community” and of “globalization” are both to be rejected, then where is there to go? We find ourselves stranded on a terrain where spacetime, place and environment cannot be separated each from the other nor treated as mere abstractions outside of the concrete conditions of history and geography. The theory of historical-geographical materialism is, therefore, ripe for application. This mandates a shift from a language of globalization or communitarianism to a language of “uneven spatio-temporal development” or, more simply, “uneven geographical development.”

At its simplest, this concept focuses on the concrete historical-geographical conditions within which socio-ecological action is possible and the way in which human activity in turn transforms socio-ecological conditions. The concept of uneven geographical development captures (a) the palimpsest of historically sedimented socio-ecological relations in place, (b) the multi-layered and hierarchically ordered mosaic of socio-ecological permanences (power structures, institutions, physical infrastructures, cultural configurations and aspirations) that order space and (c) the often chaotic motion of socio-ecological (particularly under contemporary conditions capital and migratory) flows that produce, sustain and dissolve geographical differences in the landscape over time. Urbanization is a manifestation of uneven geographical development at a certain scale.

This is not a particularly new way to understand the world But it has proven difficult to sustain as a way of thought and politics. Again and again, even when analysts arrive at the moment of understanding the critical ways in which spacetime, place and environment conjoin through the unfolding of socio-

ecological processes, they often tend to slip away into a far more simplified and simplistic rhetoric of social processes occurring *in* space and altering an *external* nature. While the tyranny of this latter conception is frequently acknowledged (consider, for example, the way in which theorists like Poulantzas or Giddens dally with the theme) the only major theoretical statement on the production of uneven geographical development is that by Smith (1990). And while he makes it clear that anti-capitalist movements must plan something “very geographical” if they are to succeed, there are all sorts of political problems to be overcome if this is to be effective.

### **POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES**

There is not a region in the world where manifestations of anger and discontent with the capitalist system cannot be found. In some places anti-capitalist movements are strongly rather than weakly implanted. Localised “militant particularisms” are everywhere, from the militia movements in the Michigan woods (much of it violently anti-corporate and against the capitalist state as well as racist and exclusionary) to the movements of Indian and Brazilian peasants fighting World Bank development projects and the vast array of urban social movements struggling against poverty, oppression, exploitation and environmental degradation in all parts of the world. There is a veritable ferment of opposition within the interstices of the uneven spatio-temporal development of capitalism. This opposition, though militant, often remains particularist (sometimes extremely so), often unable to see beyond its own particular form of uneven geographical development. Such oppositional movements are not even necessarily anti-capitalist let alone pro-socialist (they can just as easily be authoritarian, religious, or neo-fascist as in the cases of Shiv Sena in Mumbai and the Lombardy Leagues in Italy). These movements lack coherence and a unified direction even when their activities can have devastating consequences on the ground (as with the violence that shook Mumbai in 1992-3). Political moves and actions on one terrain may confound and sometimes check those on another, making it far too easy for capitalist processes and interests to divide and rule. Oppositional

struggles are unevenly developed, map themselves onto process of capital accumulation in peculiar and sometimes opaque ways, requiring a far more sophisticated and sensitive approach to wars of position and maneuver than even Gramsci was able to devise.

But while conditions of uneven geographical and historical development may pose particular difficulties for any coherent and international anti-capitalist struggle, they also offer abundant opportunities - an extraordinarily varied and unstable terrain - for political organizing and action. The socialist and anti-capitalist movement has to configure how to make use of such revolutionary possibilities. It has to come to terms with the extraordinarily powerful processes of uneven spatio-temporal development, including those of urbanization, that make organizing so precarious and so difficult. It has to recognize that the traditional objective of socialist movements - the conquest of state power - is insufficient for its purpose and that uniting different factions can never mean suppressing socio-ecological difference. In exactly the same way that Marx saw the necessity that workers of all countries should unite to combat the globalization process at work in his time, so the socialist movement has to find ways to be just as flexible - in its theory and its political practice - over a space of volatile uneven geographical development as the capitalist class has now become.

The work of synthesis has to be on-going since the fields and terrains of struggle are perpetually changing as the capitalist socio—ecological dynamic changes. We need, in particular, to understand process of production of uneven spatio-temporal development and the intense contradictions that now exist within that field not only for capitalism (entailing, as it does, a great deal of self-destruction, devaluation and bankruptcy) but also for populations rendered increasingly vulnerable to the violence of down-sizing, unemployment, collapse of services, degradation in work conditions and living standards, destruction of resource complexes and loss of environmental qualities. It is vital to go beyond the particularities and to emphasise the *pattern* and the systemic qualities of the damage being wrought. “Only connect” is still

one of the most empowering and insightful of all political slogans. The analysis has, furthermore, to be extended outwards to embrace a wide array of diverse and seemingly disparate questions. Issues like AIDS, global warming, local environmental degradation, the destructions of local cultural traditions, are inherently class issues and it needs to be shown how building a community in anti-capitalist class struggle can better alleviate the conditions of oppression across a broad spectrum of social action. This is not, I emphasize, a plea for eclecticism and pluralism, but a plea to uncover the raw class content of a wide array of anti-capitalist concerns.

The primary significance of “globalization” for the anti-capitalist struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, for example, is that the relatively privileged position of the working classes has been much reduced relative to conditions of labor in the rest of the world. Conditions of life in advanced capitalism have felt the full brunt of the capitalist capacity for “creative destruction” making for extreme volatility in local, regional and national economic prospects (this year’s boom town or industrial sector becomes next year’s depressed region or industry). The free market justification for this is that the hidden hand of the market will work to the benefit of all, provided there is as little state interference (and it should be added, - though it usually isn’t - monopoly power) as possible. The effect is to make the violence and creative destruction of uneven geographical development (through, for example, geographical reorganization of production) just as widely felt in the traditional heartlands of capitalism as elsewhere, in the midst of an extraordinary technology of affluence and conspicuous consumption that is instantaneously communicated worldwide as one potential set of aspirations. The political terrain for anti-capitalist organizing in advanced capitalism appears more fertile than ever.

This work of synthesis has, however, to re-root itself in the organic conditions of daily life. This does not entail abandoning the abstractions that Marx and the Marxists have bequeathed us, but it does mean re-validating and revaluing those abstractions through immersion in popular struggles, some

of which may not appear on the surface to be proletarian in the sense traditionally given to that term. In this regard, social theory in general and Marxism in particular has its own sclerotic tendencies to combat, its own embedded fixed capital of concepts, institutions, practices and politics which can function on the one hand as an excellent resource and on the other as a dogmatic barrier to action. We need to discern what is useful and what is not in this fixed capital of our intellect and politics. And it would be surprising if there were not, from time to time, bitter argument over what to jettison and what to hold. Nevertheless, the debate must take place. The language in which the urban problematic is embedded must be transformed, if only to liberate a whole raft of conceptual possibilities that will otherwise remain hidden. Coming to terms with what urban living might be about in the 21st century poses, then, a series of key problems to be simultaneously worked on with a set of parallel myths that deserve to be exploded:

The first myth is that coming up with the resources to confront urban problems depends on the prior solution of economic development and population growth problems. Opposed to this is the idea that cities have always been fundamentally about wealth creation and wealth consumption and that getting things right in cities is the only real path towards economic improvement for the mass of the population. And in that I think we should also include fundamental redefinitions of wealth, well-being and values (including those that affect population growth) in ways that are more conducive to the development of human potentialities as opposed to mere capital accumulation for the select few. If we should be nostalgic about anything from the late nineteenth century it was the political will to forge an urbanization of public policy.

The second myth is that the problems posed by urbanization are essentially a consequence of deeper rooted social processes that can and need to be addressed independently of their geographical setting or spatiotemporal ordering. This view should be strenuously opposed with a vision that sees the production of different spatio-temporal orderings and

structures as active moments within the social process, the appreciation of which will better reveal how what we conventionally understand by urbanization and urban forms might be redefined and factored in as moments of transformation and consequently possible points of intervention in anti-capitalist struggles.

The third myth is that it is merely a matter of finding the right technologies to get a better fix on how to accommodate burgeoning populations within the urban frame. Opposed to this is a recognition that the new technologies produced by the military industrial complex of capitalism have again and again opened up new and broadly capitalist-oriented possibilities for urbanization, but that these possibilities ought nevertheless to be distinguished from the predominant forces (such as capital accumulation or populist appropriation) that realize their own agendas by means of those technologies.

The fourth myth is that often chaotic and frequently problematic forms of social processes can be corrected and controlled by finding the right spatial design. Opposed to this is the understanding that all spatialisations of utopias, from Thomas More through Le Corbusier to the utopic degeneration manifest in Disneyland, cannot erase history and process. Emancipatory politics calls for a living utopianism of process as opposed to the dead utopianism of spatialised urban form.

The fifth myth is that social problems in urbanizing areas are curable only to the degree that the forces of the market are given freer play. Opposed to this is the idea that wealth creation (and redefinition) depends on social collaboration, on cooperation (even between businesses) rather than on some individualised competitive Darwinian struggle for existence. The pursuit of social justice is therefore one important means to achieve improved economic performance and here, at least, communitarian thinking and values and national public policies do have a potentially creative role to play.

The sixth myth is that forces of globalization are so strong as to preclude any relative autonomy for local or particular

initiatives to shift the process of urbanization onto a different trajectory. Only a global revolution can change anything. Opposed to this is the idea that globalization is really a process of uneven geographical and historical (spatio-temporal) development that perpetually creates a variegated terrain of anti-capitalist struggles that need to be synthesised in such a way as to respect the qualities of uneven spatio-temporal development of various “militant particularisms” (such as those to be found in urban social movements) while evolving strong bonds and politics of internationalism.

The seventh myth is that community solidarity can provide the stability and power needed to control, manage and alleviate urban problems and that “community” can substitute for public politics. Opposed to this is the recognition that “community” insofar as it exists, is an unstable configuration relative to the conflictual processes that generate, sustain and eventually undermine it, and that insofar as it does acquire permanence it is frequently an exclusionary and oppressive social form (that becomes particularly dangerous when romanticised), that can be as much at the root of urban conflict and urban degeneration as it can be a panacea for political-economic difficulties.

The eighth myth is that any radical transformation in social relations in urbanizing areas must await some sort of socialist or communist revolution that will then put our cities in sufficiently good order to allow the new social relations to flourish. Opposed to this is the idea that the transformation of socio-ecological relations in urban settings has to be a continuous process of socio-environmental change, a long revolution that must have its roots in contemporary conditions while reaching out to the construction of an alternative society as its long-term goal through short-term actions.

The ninth myth is that strong order, authority and centralised control - be it moral, political, communitarian, religious, physical or militaristic - must be reasserted over our disintegrating and strife-prone cities without, however, interfering in the fundamental liberty of the market. Opposed to this is the understanding that the contemporary

combination of neoliberalism and monopoly power (including that of the state) is self-contradictory. Urbanization has always been about creative forms of opposition, tension and conflict (including those registered through market exchange). The tensions born of heterogeneity cannot and should not be repressed, but liberated in socially exciting ways - even if this means more rather than less conflict, including contestation over socially necessary socialisation of market processes for collective ends.

The tenth myth is that diversity and difference, heterogeneity of values, life-style oppositions and chaotic migrations, are to be feared as sources of disorder and that "others" should be kept out to defend the "purity" of place. Opposed to this is the view that cities that cannot accommodate to diversity, to migratory movements, to new lifestyles and to economic, political, religious and value heterogeneity, will die either through ossification and stagnation or because they will fall apart in violent conflict. Defining a politics that can bridge the multiple heterogeneities without repressing difference is one of the biggest challenges of twenty-first century urbanization.

The eleventh myth is that cities are anti-ecological. Opposing this is the view that high density urbanized living and inspired forms of urban design are the only paths to a more ecologically sensitive form of civilisation in the 21st century. We must recognise that the distinction between *environment* as commonly understood and the *built environment* is artificial and that the urban and everything that goes into it is as much a part of the solution as it is a contributing factor to ecological difficulties. The tangible recognition that the mass of humanity will be located in living environments designated as urban says that the environmental politics must pay as much if not more attention to the qualities of those built and social environments as it now typically does to a fictitiously separated and imagined "natural" environment .

It will take imagination and political guts, a surge of revolutionary fervor and revolutionary change (in thinking as well as in politics) to construct a requisite poetics of

understanding for our urbanizing world, a charter for civilization, a trajectory for our species being, out of the raw materials of this present. In this regard, at least, there is much to learn from our nineteenth predecessors for their political and intellectual courage cannot be doubted. They mobilised their imaginaries and created their own poeties to confront a task in a certain way that had material consequences - both good and bad - under conditions that are now either superceded or threatened with dissolution. If the rhetoric about handing on a decent living environment to future generations is to have even one iota of meaning, we owe it to subsequent generations to invest now in a collective and very public search for some way to understand the possibilities of achieving a just and ecologically sensitive urbanization process under contemporary conditions. That discussion cannot trust in dead dreams resurrected from the past. It has to construct its own language - its own poetry - with which to discuss possible futures in a rapidly urbanizing world of uneven geographical development. Only in that way can the possibilities for a civilising mode of urbanization be grasped.

## **PART II THE SPACES OF UTOPIA**

### **THE BALTIMORE STORY**

I have lived in Baltimore City for most of my adult life. I think of it as my home town and have accumulated an immense fund of affection for the place. But Baltimore is, for the most part, a mess. Not the kind of enchanting mess that makes cities such interesting places to explore, but an awful mess. And it seems much worse now than when I first knew it in 1969. Or perhaps it is in the same old mess except that many people then believed they could do something about it. Now the problems seem intractable.

Too many details of the mess would overwhelm. But some of its features are important to know. There are some forty thousand vacant houses (in a housing stock of 304,000 units) within the city limits (compared to eight thousand in 1970). The concentrations of homelessness (in spite of all those vacant houses), of unemployment and, even more significant, of the employed poor (trying to live on less than \$200 a week without benefits) are everywhere in evidence. The soup kitchen lines get longer and longer and the charity missions of many inner city churches are stretched beyond coping. The inequalities - of opportunities as well as of standards of life - are growing by leaps and bounds. The massive educational resources of the city (Baltimore City has some of the finest schools in the country, but they are all private) are denied to most of the children who live there. The public schools are in a lamentable state (two and a half years behind the national average in reading skills according to recent tests). Some of the finest medical institutions in the world are out of bounds to people who live within their shadow (unless they have the privilege to clean the AIDS wards for less than a living wage or have a rare disease of great interest to elite medical researchers). Life expectancy in the city, in the immediate environs of these internationally renowned hospital facilities, is among the lowest in the nation and comparable to many of the poorer countries in the world (63 years for men and 73,2 for women). The affluent (black and white) continue to leave the city in droves seeking solace, security and jobs in the suburbs (population in the city was close to a million when I

arrived and is now down to around 600,000). The suburbs, the edge cities and the ex-urbs proliferate (with the aid of massive public subsidies to transport and upper income housing construction) in an extraordinarily unecological sprawl (long commutes, massive ozone concentrations in summer, loss of agricultural land). Developers offer up this great blight of suburban conformity (alleviated, of course, by architectural quotations from Italianate villas and Doric columns) as a panacea for the breakdown and disintegration of urbanity first in the inner city and then, as the deadly blight spreads, the inner suburbs.

There has been an attempt of sorts to turn things around in the city. Launched in the early 1970s under the aegis of a dedicated and quite authoritarian mayor (William Donald Schaeffer) it entailed formation of a private-public partnership to invest in downtown and Inner Harbor renewal in order to attract financial services, tourism and so-called hospitality functions to center city. It took a lot of public moneys to get the process rolling. Once they had the hotels (Hyatt got a \$35 million hotel by putting up only half a million dollars of its own money in the early 1980s), they needed to build a convention center to fill the hotels and get a piece of what is now calculated to be an \$83 billion a year meetings industry. In order to keep competitive, a further public investment of \$150 million was needed to create an even larger convention center to get the big conventions. It is now feared that all this investment will not be profitable without a large "headquarters hotel" that will also require "extensive" public subsidies (maybe \$50 million). And to improve the city image, a quarter billion dollars went into building sports stadiums for teams (one of which was lured from Cleveland) that pay several million a year to star players watched by fans paying exorbitant ticket prices. This is, of course, a common enough story across the the United States (the National Football League -deserving welfare clients - calculates that \$3,8 billion of largely public money will be poured into new NFL stadiums between 1992 and 2002).

This is what is called "feeding the downtown monster." Every new wave of public investment is needed to make the last

wave pay off. The private-public partnership means the public takes all the risks and the private take all the profits. The citizenry wait for benefits that never quite materialize. An upscale condominium complex on the waterfront does so poorly that it gets £2 million in tax breaks in order to forestall bankruptcy while the impoverished working class - close to bankruptcy if not technically in it - get nothing.

There is, of course, a good side to the renewal effort. Many people come to the Inner Harbor. There is even racial mixing. People evidently enjoy just watching people. And there is a growing recognition that the city, to be vibrant, has to be a twenty-four hour affair and that mega bookstores and a Hard Rock cafe have as much to offer as Benetton and the Banana Republic. Here and there, neighborhoods have pulled themselves together and developed a special sense of community that makes for safer, more secure living without degenerating into rabid exclusionism. Some of the seedier public housing blocks have been imploded to make way for better quality housing in better quality environments. But none of this touches the roots of Baltimore's problems.

One of those roots lies in the rapid transition in employment opportunities. Manufacturing jobs accelerated their movement out (mainly southwards and overseas) during the first severe post-war recession in 1973-5 and have not stopped moving since. Shipbuilding, for example, has all-but disappeared and the industries that stayed have either "downsized" (Beth Steel employed 30,000 in 1970 compared to less than 5000 now making nearly the same amount of steel) or demanded public subsidies to stay (General Motors - another deserving welfare client - received a massive Urban Development Action Grant in the early 1980s to keep its assembly plant open). Service jobs have materialized to replace perhaps as many as a quarter of a million jobs lost in manufacturing. But many of these are low-paying (with few benefits), temporary, non-unionised and female. The best many households can hope for is to keep their income stable by having two people work longer hours at a lower individual wage. The general absence of adequate and affordable day-care means that this does not bode well for the kids. Poverty

entrapment and gets perpetuated, notwithstanding a campaign (based in the churches) for a “living wage” that struggles to improve the lot of the working poor and protect the many thousands now being pushed off welfare into a stagnant labor market.

The income inequalities grow remarkably along with geographical disparities in wealth and power. For a while the inner suburbs drained wealth from the central city but now they, too, have “problems” though it is there, if anywhere, where most new jobs are created. So the wealth moves, either further out to ex-urbs that explicitly exclude the poor, the underprivileged, the marginalised, or it encloses itself behind high walls, in suburban “privatopias” and urban “gated communities.” The rich form ghettos of affluence, undermine concepts of citizenship, social belonging, mutual support. Six million of them in the United States now live in gated communities as opposed to one million ten years ago (Blakeley, 1997). And if communities are not gated they are increasingly constructed on exclusionary lines so that levels of segregation (primarily by class but also with a powerful racial thread) are worse now in Baltimore than ever.

The second major root of the mess lies in institutional fragmentation and breakdown. City Hall, caught in a perpetual fiscal bind buttressed by the belief that slimmer government is always the path to a more competitive city, reduces its services whether needed or not. The potential for cooperation with suburban jurisdictions is overwhelmed by competitive pressures to keep taxes down, the impoverished and marginalised out, and the affluent and stable in. The Federal Government decentralizes and the State, now dominated by suburban and rural interests, turns its back on the city. Special tax-assessment districts spring up so that neighborhoods can provide extra services according to their means. Since the means vary, the effect is divide up the urban realm into a patchwork quilt of islands of relative affluence struggling to secure themselves in a sea of spreading squalor and decay. The overall effect is division and fragmentation of the metropolitan space, a loss of sociality across diversity and a localised defensive posture towards the rest of the

city that becomes politically fractious if not downright dysfunctional. The particular story of Baltimore appears extreme. In Seattle there are few vacant houses and derelict neighborhoods, but housing prices have skyrocketed producing incredible social distress for the less affluent groups in the population.

The prospects for institutional reform seem negligible. A tangled mix of bureaucratic and legal inflexibilities and rigid political institutional arrangements create a pattern of urban governance that is ossified in the extreme. Exclusionary communitarianism, narrow vested interests (usually framed by identity politics of various sorts - predominantly racial at the populist level though in Baltimore there is a good deal of ethnic rivalry thrown in), corporate profit hunger, financial myopia and developer greed all contribute to the difficulties. New resources are built into the social, political and physical landscape of the metropolitan region so as to exacerbate both the inequalities and the fragmentations (most particularly those of race) There is, it seems, no alternative except for the rich to be progressively enriched and the poor (largely black) to be regressively impoverished.

In the midst of all this spiralling inequality, thriving corporate and big money interests (including the media) promote their own brand of identity politics, with their multiple manifestos of political correctness. Their central message, repeated over and over, is that any challenge to the glories of the free market (preferably cornered, monopolised and state subsidised in practice) is to be mercilessly put down or mocked out of existence. The power of these ideas lies, I suspect, at the core of our current sense of helplessness. "There is," as Margaret Thatcher insisted in her hey-day on the other side of the Atlantic, "no alternative" (even Gorbachev unfortunately agreed). Those who have the money power are free to choose among name-brand commodities (including prestigious locations), but the citizenry as a whole are denied any collective choice of political system, of ways of social relating, of modes of production, consumption and exchange. If the mess seems impossible to change then it is simply because "there is no alternative." It is the supreme rationality of the market versus

the silly irrationality of anything else. And all those institutions that might have helped define some alternative have either been suppressed or - with some notable exceptions, such as the church - been brow-beaten into submission. We the people have no right to choose what kind of city we shall inhabit.

But how is that we are so persuaded "there is no alternative?" Why is it, in Roberto Unger's (1987a, 37) words, that "we often seem to be (such) helpless puppets of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit." Is it simply that we lack the will, the courage and the perspicacity to open up alternatives and actively pursue them? Or is there something else at work? Surely it cannot be lack of imagination. The academy, for example, is full of explorations of the imaginary. In physics the exploration of possible worlds is the norm rather than the exception. In the humanities a fascination with what is called "the imaginary" is everywhere apparent. And the media world that is now available to us has never before been so replete with fantasies and possibilities for collective communication about alternative worlds. Yet none of this seems to impinge upon the terrible trajectory that daily life assumes in the material world around us. We seem, as Unger (1987a, 331) puts it, to be "torn between dreams that seem unrealizable and prospects that hardly seem to matter."

To be sure, the ideology and practices of competitive neo-liberalism do their quietly effective and insidious work within the major institutions - the media and the universities - that shape the imaginative context in which we live. And they do so with hardly anyone noticing. The political correctness imposed by raw money power has done far more to censor opinion within these institutions than the overt repressions of McCarthyism ever did. "Possibility has had a bad press" Ernst Bloch (1988, 7) remarks, adding "there is a very clear interest that has prevented the world from being changed into the possible." Bloch, interestingly, associated this condition with the demise, denigration and disparagement of all forms of utopian thought. That, he argued, meant a loss of hope and without hope alternative politics becomes impossible. Could it be, then, that a revitalization of the utopian tradition will give us ways to think the possibility of

real alternatives? In this essay I set out to explore that possibility.

### **THE FIGURE OF THE CITY**

The figures of “the city” and of “Utopia” have long been intertwined. In their early incarnations, Utopias were usually given a distinctively urban form and most of what passes for urban and city planning in the broadest sense has been infected (some would prefer “inspired”) by utopian modes of thought. The connection long predates Sir Thomas More’s first adventure with the utopian genre in 1516. Plato, after all, connected ideal forms of government with his closed republic in such a way as to fold the concepts of city and citizen into each other. The judeo-Christian tradition defined paradise as a distinctive place where all good souls would go after their trials and tribulations in the temporal world. From this all manner of metaphors flowed of the heavenly city, the city of God, the eternal city, the shining city on a hill (a metaphor dearly beloved by President Reagan). But if heaven is a “happy place” then that “other” place, hell, the place of “the evil other,” cannot be far away. The figure of the city as a fulcrum of social disorder, moral breakdown and unmitigated evil - from Babylon, Sodom and Gommorah to Gotham - also has its place in the freight of metaphorical meanings that the word “city” carries across our cultural universe. Dystopias take on urban forms such as those found in Huxley’s *Brave New World* or Orwell’s *1984*. The word “police” derives from the Greek “polis” which means “city.” And if Karl Popper was to depict Plato as one of the first great enemies of “the open society” then the Utopias that followed could just as easily be cast as oppressive and totalitarian hells as emancipatory and happy heavens.

It is hard to untangle the grubby day-to-day practices and discourses that affect urban living from the grandiose metaphorical meanings that so freely intermingle with emotions and beliefs about the good life and urban form. I cannot possibly hope to untangle such meanings here. But it is important to recognise their emotive power. So I provide a few illustrative connections to help consolidate the point that urban politics is fraught with deeply held though often

subterranean emotions and political passions in which utopian dreams have a particular place.

“City air makes one free” it was once said. That idea took shape as serfs escaped their bonds to claim political and personal freedoms within the self-governing legal entities of medieval cities. The association between city life and personal freedoms including the freedom to explore, invent, create, define new ways of life, consequently has a long and intricate history. Generations of migrants have sought the heavenly city as haven from rural repressions. The “city” and “citizenship” tie neatly together within this formulation. But the city is equally the site of anxiety and anomie. It is the place of the anonymous alien, the underclass (or, as our predecessors preferred it, “the dangerous classes”), the site of an incomprehensible “otherness,” (immigrants, gays, the mentally disturbed, the culturally different, the racially marked), the terrain of pollution (moral as well as physical), of terrible corruptions, the place of the damned that needs to be enclosed and controlled, making “city” and “citizen” as politically opposed in the public imagination as they are etymologically linked.

This polarization of positive and negative images has its geography. Traditionally this registers as a division between secular and sacred space within the city. Later, the supposed virtues of the countryside and the small town were often contrasted with the evils of the city. When, for example, the rural army of reaction was assembled on the outskirts of Paris in 1871 poised to engage in the savage slaughter of some 30,000 communards, they were first persuaded that their mission was to reclaim the city from the forces of satan. When President Ford denied aid to New York City in 1975 in the midst of its fiscal crisis (“Ford to City: ‘Drop Dead!’” read the famous newspaper headline), the plaudits of virtuous and God-fearing small-town America were everywhere to be heard. In contemporary America, the image of the respectable God-fearing suburbs (predominantly white and middle class) plays against the inner-city as a hell-hole where all the damned (with plenty of underclass racial coding thrown in) are properly confined. Imaginings of this sort take a terrible toll. When,

for example, it was proposed to disperse some 200 families from the inner city of Baltimore to the suburbs as part of a "Movement to Opportunity," the suburbanites rose up in wrath to stop the program, using a language that sounded as if representatives of the devil were about to be released from their inner city prison and let loose as a corrupting power in their midst. Religion doesn't always have to play this way of course. It also powers many an organization that seeks to defend the poor, improve communities and stabilize family life in the crumbling inner cities.

None of these imaginaries are innocent. Nor should we expect them to be. What distinguishes the worst of architects from the best of bees, Marx (1977, 283-4) long ago observed, is that architects erect a structure in the imagination before realizing it in material form. When, therefore, architects, planners, urban designers, engineers and urbanists of all sorts find themselves asked to help solve a wide range of social, political and economic problems, they have to do battle with a wide range of emotive meanings held by themselves as well as by others. But Marx's metaphor prods us further. While the figure of the architect is useful to understand the role of the imagination in the labor process, it can just as easily be reversed. Everyone who engages in any kind of labor process is an architect of sorts. So if the future of humanity lies in cities and if the qualities of urban living in the twenty-first century will define the qualities of civilization, so all of us who labor will be architects of that future. That labor process has very special dialectical qualities. In changing the world we change ourselves. That dialectic is fundamental to understanding both the history of and the prospects for urban futures. As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning who we want, or perhaps even more pertinently, who we do not want to become. Every single one of us has something to think, say, and do about that.

How our individual and collective imagination works is, therefore, crucial to defining the labor of urbanization. Critical reflection on our imaginaries entails, however, both confronting

the hidden utopianism and resurrecting it in order to act as conscious architects of our fates rather than as “helpless puppets” of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit. If, as Unger (1987b, 8) puts it, we accept that “society is made and imagined,” then we must also accept that it can be “remade and reimagined.”

### **UTOPIANISM AS SPATIAL PLAY**

Any project to revitalize utopianism must first consider how and with what consequences it has worked as both a constructive and destructive force for change in our historical geography.

Consider Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. More's aim, and this is characteristic, was social harmony and stability (in contrast to the chaotic state of affairs in England at that time). To this end, he excluded the potentially disruptive social forces of money, private property, wage labor, exploitation (the workday is six hours), internal (though not external) commodity exchange, capital accumulation, the market process (though not a market place). The happy perfection of the social and moral order depends upon these exclusions. All of this is secured by way of a tightly organised spatial form. Utopia is an artificially created island which functions as an isolated, coherently organised and largely closed space economy (though closely monitored relations with the outside world are posited). The internal spatial ordering of the island strictly regulates a stabilized and unchanging social process. Put crudely, spatial form controls temporality, an imagined geography controls the possibility of social change and history. Not all forms of temporality are erased. The time of “eternal return”, of recurrent ritual, is preserved. This cyclical time, as Gould (1987) remarks, expresses “immanence, a set of principles so general that they exist outside of time and record a universal character, a common bond, among all of nature's rich particulars,” including, in this instance, all the inhabitants of Utopia. It is the dialectic of social process that is repressed. Time's arrow, “the great principle of history,” is excluded in favor of perpetuating a happy stationary state. No future needs to be envisaged because the desired state is already

achieved. In Bacon's *New Atlantis*, a utopian text written shortly after that of More, the King decided that society had achieved such a state of perfection that no further social change was needed. In Bacon's case, technological change is not only possible but actively sought. But its implantation is tightly regulated by the wise men of Salomon's House (an institution interpreted as a forerunner of the Royal Society). The effect is to progress towards the technological perfection of an already perfected social order. More, on the other hand, evokes nostalgia for a mythological past, a perfected golden age of small town living, a moral order and a hierarchical mode of social relating that is non-conflictual and harmonious. This nostalgic strain is characteristic of much utopian thinking (even that projected into the future and incorporating futuristic technologies). And this, as we shall see, has very important consequences for how, if at all, such schemes get translated into material fact.

There are many ways to understand More's text and the many utopian schemas that were subsequently produced (such as those of Bacon and Campanella). I isolate here just one aspect: the relationship proposed between space and time, between geography and history. In effect, as Lukerman and Porter (1976) point out, these forms of Utopia can be characterized as "Utopias of spatial form" since the temporality of the social process, the dialectics of social change - real history - are excluded, while social stability is assured by a fixed spatial form. Louis Marin (1984) considers More's Utopia as a species of "spatial play." More in effect selects one out of many possible spatial orderings as a way to represent and fix a particular moral order. Marin thus interprets all utopics as spatial play. This is not a unique thought. Robert Park (1967), a leading figure in the influential Chicago School of sociology, wrote a compelling essay in 1925 on the city as "a spatial pattern and a moral order" and insisted upon an inner connection between the two. But what Marin opens up for us is the idea that the free play of the imagination, "utopics as spatial play," became, with More's initiative, a fertile means to explore and express a vast range of competing ideas about social relationships, moral orderings, political-economic systems, and the like.

The infinite array of possible spatial orderings holds out the prospect of an infinite array of possible social worlds. And what is so impressive about subsequent utopian plans when taken together is their incredible variety. Feminist Utopias of the nineteenth century (Hayden, 1981) look very different from those supposed to facilitate easier and healthier living for the working class and all sorts of anarchist, ecologically-sensitive, religious, and other alternatives define and secure their moral objectives by appeal to some very specific spatial order. The staggering range of proposals - and of spatialities - testifies to the extraordinary capacity of the human imagination to explore socio-spatial alternatives (Kumar, 1987;1991). Marin's notion of "spatial play" neatly captures the free play of the imagination in utopian schemes. Reversion to this utopian mode appears to offer a way out of Unger's dilemma.

Unfortunately, matters are not so simple. Imaginative free play is inextricably bound to the existence of authority and restrictive forms of governance. What Foucault regards as "a panoptican effect" through the creation of spatial systems of surveillance and control (polis = police) are also incorporated into utopian schemes. This dialectic between imaginative free play and authority and control throws up serious problems. The rejection, in recent times, of utopianism rests on an acute awareness of its inner connection to authoritarianism and totalitarianism (More's Utopia can easily be read this way). But rejection of utopianism on such grounds has also had the unfortunate effect of curbing the free play of the imagination in the search for alternatives. Confronting this relationship between spatial play and authoritarianism must, therefore, lie at the heart of any regenerative politics that attempts to resurrect utopian ideals. In pursuing this objective, it is useful to look at the history of how Utopias have been materialized through political-economic practices: it is here that the dialectic of free play of the imagination and authoritarianism comes to life as a fundamental dilemma in human affairs.

## MATERIALIZATIONS OF UTOPIAS OF SPATIAL FORM

When Ebenezer Howard read Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward* in 1888, he did so at one sitting and was "fairly carried away" by it. The next morning he:

"went into some of the crowded parts of London, and as I passed through the narrow dark streets, saw the wretched dwellings in which the majority of the people lived, observed on every hand the manifestations of a self-seeking order of society and reflected on the absolute unsoundness of our economic system, there came to me an overpowering sense of the temporary nature of all I saw, and of its entire unsuitability for the working life of the new order - the order of justice, unity and friendliness." (cited in Fishman, 1982, 32)

It is easy to recognize such sentiments walking the streets of Baltimore today. But Howard reacted to his reading of Bellamy in a particular way. He proposed to build new towns as a means to materialize much of what Bellamy had envisioned. Thus was the "new towns" movement born, a movement that has been one of the most practical and important interventions in urban re-engineering in the twentieth century. Sufficient accounts of this movement and its consequences - both good and bad - exist elsewhere and it is not my purpose to go over that history (see e.g. Fishman, 1982; Hall, 1988). I merely wish to emphasize how the spatial order of the new towns was clearly articulated and meant to achieve social harmony and justice. It was a practical and concrete version of utopias as spatial play.

Howard was not the only one to think in such a fashion. All the great urban planners, engineers and architects of the twentieth century set about their tasks in a similar way. While some, such as Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright mainly set up the imaginative context, a host of practitioners set about realizing those dreams in bricks and concrete, highways and tower blocks, cities and suburbs, building versions of the *Villes Radieuses* or *Broadacre City*, whole new towns, intimate scale communities, urban villages, or whatever. And even when critics of the authoritarianism and blandness of these realised

utopian dreams attacked them, they usually did so by contrasting their preferred version of spatial play with the spatial orderings that others had achieved.

When, for example, Jane Jacobs (1961) launched her famous critique of modernist processes of city planning and urban renewal (damning as she did so Le Corbusier, the Charter of Athens, Robert Moses and the great blight of dullness they and their acolytes had unleashed upon post-war cities), she in effect set up her own preferred version of spatial play by appeal to a nostalgic conception of an intimate and diverse ethnic neighborhood in which artisan forms of entrepreneurial activity and employment, and interactive face-to-face forms of social relating predominated. Jacobs was in her own way every bit as utopian as the utopianism she attacked. She proposed to play with the space in a different way in order to achieve a different kind of moral purpose. Her version of spatial play contained its own authoritarianism hidden within the organic notion of neighborhood and community as a basis for social life. The apparatus of surveillance and control that she regarded as so benevolent because it provided much-needed security, struck others, such as Sennett (1970), as oppressive and demeaning. And while she placed great emphasis upon social diversity, it was only a certain kind of controlled diversity that could really work in the happy way she envisaged.

This brings us to perhaps the most intriguing of Marin's categories: that of "degenerate utopias". The example that Marin used was Disneyland, a supposedly happy, harmonious and non-conflictual space set aside from the "real" world "outside" in such a way as to sooth and mollify, to entertain, to invent history and to cultivate a nostalgia for some mythical past, to perpetuate the fetish of commodity culture rather than to critique it. Disneyland eliminates the troubles of actual travel by assembling the rest of the world, properly sanitized and mythologized, into one place of pure fantasy containing multiple spatial orders. The dialectic is repressed and stability and harmony are secured through intense surveillance and control. Internal spatial ordering coupled with hierarchical forms of authority preclude conflict or deviation from a social

norm. Disneyland offers a fantasy journey into a world of spatial play. And in its later incarnations, as at Epcott, it offers a futuristic utopia of technological purity and unsurpassed human power to control the world (Disney moved, as it were, from More to Bacon for his inspiration). All of this is degenerate, in Marin's view, because it offers no critique of the existing state of affairs on the outside. It merely perpetuates the fetish of commodity culture and technological wizardry in a pure, sanitized and a-historical form. But, and this is where Marin's idea becomes problematic, Disneyland is an actual built environment and not an imagined place of the sort that More and Bacon produced. This immediately raises the question: can any utopianism of spatial form that gets materialized be anything other than "degenerate" in the sense that Marin has in mind? Perhaps Utopia can never be realized without destroying itself. If so, then this profoundly affects how any utopianism of spatial form can function as a practical social force upon political-economic life.

Generalizing from Marin, it can be argued that we are surrounded by a whole host of degenerate utopias of which Disneyland is but the most spectacular exemplar. When "the mall of America" became the vogue, pioneers like Rouse explicitly recognized that Disney had invented a formula for successful retailing. The construction of safe, secure, well-ordered, easily accessible and above all pleasant, soothing and non-conflictual environments for shopping was the key to commercial success. The shopping mall was conceived of as a fantasy world in which the commodity reigned supreme. And if homeless old folks started to regard it as a warm place to rest, youths found it a great place to socialize, and political agitators took to passing out their pamphlets, then the apparatus of surveillance and control (with hidden cameras and security agents) made sure nothing untoward happened. As Benjamin (1969) remarked on the Parisian arcades of the nineteenth century, the whole environment seemed designed to induce nirvana rather than critical awareness. And many other cultural institutions - museums and heritage centers, arenas for spectacle, exhibitions and festivals - seem to have as their aim the cultivation of nostalgia, the production of sanitized collective memories, the nurturing of uncritical

aesthetic sensibilities, and the absorption of future possibilities into a non-conflictual arena that is eternally present. The continuous spectacles of commodity culture, including the commodification of the spectacle itself, play their part in fomenting political indifference. It is either a stupefied nirvana or a totally blasé attitude (the fount of all indifference) that is aimed at (Simmel (1971) long ago pointed to the blasé attitude as one of the responses to excessive stimuli in urban settings). The multiple degenerate utopias that now surround us - the shopping mall being paradigmatic - do as much to signal the end of history as the collapse of the Berlin Wall ever did. They instantiate rather than critique the idea that "there is no alternative," save those given by the conjoining of technological fantasies, commodity culture and endless capital accumulation. But how could it happen that the critical and oppositional force given in utopian schemes so easily degenerates in the course of materialization into compliance with the prevailing order? There are, I think, two basic answers to this question. Let me unpack them by a closer look at what is now held out as one of the leading candidates to transform our urban futures, the movement called "the new urbanism."

Duany (1997), one of its leading lights, "feels strongly that urbanism, if not architecture, can affect society." Getting the spatial play right, in the manner proposed by the new urbanism will, he argues, help rectify matters. His proposals evidence a nostalgia for small-town America, its solid sense of community, its institutions, its mixed land uses and high densities, and its ideologists (such as Raymond Unwin). Bring all this back in urban design and the quality of urban living and of social life will be immeasurably improved. This argument is buttressed by appeal to a long line of critical commentary (Kunstler, 1993) on the "placelessness" and the lack of "authenticity" in American cities (soulless sprawling suburbs, mindless edge cities, collapsing and fragmenting city cores fill in the pieces of this dispeptic view). The new urbanism does battle with such monstrous deformities (Katz, 1994). How to recuperate history, tradition, collective memory and the sense of belonging and identity that goes with them

becomes part of its holy grail. This movement does not, therefore, lack a critical utopian edge.

The new urbanism offers something positive as well as nostalgic. It does battle with conventional wisdoms entrenched in a wide range of institutions (developers, bankers, governments, transport interests, etc.). It is willing to think about the region as a whole and to pursue a much more organic, holistic ideal of what cities and regions might be about. The postmodern penchant for fragmentation is rejected. It attempts intimate and integrated forms of development that by-pass the rather stultifying conception of the horizontally zoned and large-platted city. This liberates an interest in the street and civic architecture as arenas of sociality. It also permits new ways of thinking about the relation between work and living and facilitates an ecological dimension to design that goes beyond superior environmental quality as a consumer good. It pays attention to the thorny problem of what to do with the profligate energy requirements of the automobile-based form of urbanization and suburbanization that has predominated in the United States since World War II. Some see it as a truly revolutionary force for urban change in the United States today.

But there are problems with materializing this utopian vision. The movement presumes that America is “full of people who long to live in real communities, but who have only the dimmest idea of what that means in terms of physical design.” (Kunstler, 1996). Community will rescue us from the deadening world of social dissolution, grab-it-yourself materialism and individualised selfish market-oriented greed. But what kind of “community” is understood here? Harking back to a mythological past of small town America carries its own dangerous freight. The new urbanism connects to a facile contemporary attempt to transform large and teeming cities, so seemingly out of control, into an interlinked series of “urban villages” where, it is believed, everyone can relate in a civil and urbane fashion to everyone else. And the idea attracts, drawing support from marginalised ethnic populations, impoverished and embattled working class populations left high and dry through deindustrialization, as well as from middle

and upper class nostalgics who think of it as a civilised form of real estate development encompassing sidewalk cafes, pedestrian precincts and Laura Ashley shops.

The darker side of this communitarianism remains unstated. The spirit of community has long been held as an antidote to threats of social disorder, class war and revolutionary violence (More pioneered such thinking). Well-founded communities often exclude, define themselves against others, erect all sorts of keep-out signs (if not tangible walls), internalize surveillance, social controls and repression. Community has often been a barrier to, rather than facilitator of social change. The founding ideology of the new urbanism is both utopian and deeply fraught. In its practical materialization, the new urbanism builds an image of community and a rhetoric of place-based civic pride and consciousness for those who do not need it, while abandoning those that do to their "underclass" fate. Most of the projects that have materialized, are "greenfield" developments for the affluent. They help make the suburb "a better place to live" (Langdon, 1994) and do nothing to help revitalize decaying urban cores. Scully (1994), a sceptical ally of the movement, doubts if the new urbanism can ever get to the crux of urban impoverishment and decay. This happens because the "new urbanism" must, if it is to be realized, embed its projects in a very restrictive set of social processes. Duany (1997) has no interest in designing projects that will not get built. His concern for low income populations is limited by a minimum price for new housing units in a place like Kentlands, not too far from Baltimore, of \$150,000 (close to ten times the median income in Baltimore). His interest in the suburbs arose quite simply because this is where most new projects can be built. Suburban growth, he argues, is "the American way," buried deep "in our culture and our tradition" and while he objects strongly to the accusation that he is "complicit" with power structures and that he panders to popular taste, he also insists that everything he does is designed to create spectacular projects that outperform all others on a commercial basis. This means "faster permits, less cost, and faster sales." His version of the new urbanism operates strictly within such parameters.

But who is at fault here? The designer, Duany, or the conditions of the social process that define the parameters of his projects? In practice, most realized Utopias of spatial form have been achieved through the agency of either the state or capital accumulation, with both acting in concert being the norm in the West. It is either that, or moving "outside" of mainstream social processes (as seemed possible at least in the nineteenth century, with the United States being a favored target for utopian idealists such as Cabet, Robert Owen, and multiple religious movements). Those who took such an outsider path typically suffered a kind of meltdown of their principles, however, as they were absorbed within the mainstream of capital accumulation and the developmental state (something similar happened to the Israeli kibbutz).

The failure of realized Utopias of spatial form, can just as reasonably be attributed to the processes mobilized to materialize them as to failures of spatial form per se. There is a fundamental contradiction at work here. Utopias of spatial form are typically meant to stabilize and control the very processes that must be mobilized to build them. In the very act of realization, therefore, the historical process takes control of the spatial form that is supposed to control it. This contradiction requires further scrutiny.

### **ON THE UTOPIANISM OF SOCIAL PROCESS**

If materialized utopias went wrong because of the social processes mobilized in their construction, then the focus switches to questions of process. Can we think of a utopianism of process rather than of spatial form?

The question appears strange because the word "Utopia" is usually attached to some place that is no place as well as a happy place. The qualities of place are important and this means evocation of spatial form as a container of social processes and as an expression of moral order. Idealised versions of social processes, on the other hand, typically get expressed in purely temporal terms. They are typically bound to no particular place whatsoever. They typically make no reference to place at all and get specified outside of the constraints of spatiality altogether. Idealised schemas of

process abound. But we do not usually refer to them as utopian. I want to break with that convention and consider the utopianism of temporal process alongside the utopianism of spatial form.

We can identify a rich and complicated history of utopias as divergent temporal unfoldings. One obvious candidate is Hegel, whose guiding spirit is rendered material and concrete by a dialectics of transcendence (a dialectics that unfolds on the logic of “both-and”). Things in themselves move history as they become things for themselves. The end state of history is, interestingly, expressed as a spatialized metaphor. The ethical or aesthetic state is the teleological end point of the unfolding of the World Spirit. Marx sometimes followed this line of thinking though it was not the World Spirit but active class struggle that assumed the guiding role. As classes in themselves become classes for themselves, so history was moved onwards towards the perfected state of a post-revolutionary classless communistic society where even the state ultimately withered away. In both cases (and I obviously simplify) the stationary state as spatial form (which is unspecifiable in advance) is arrived at through a particular conception of historical process. Whereas More gives us the spatial form but not the process, Hegel and Marx give us their distinctive versions of the temporal process but not the ultimate spatial form.

There is, of course, plenty to protest in this such teleologies. Both William Blake and Kierkegaard, for example, insisted that the dialectic should be understood as “either-or” rather than “both-and” and the effect of that is to make history a succession of existential or political choices which have no necessary guiding logic or any clearly identifiable end-state (Clark 1991). In detail, we find Marx in his political histories and later writings often drawn to a dialectics of “either-or” rather than the “both-and” of Hegelian transcendence. His hesitation in supporting the Paris Commune in the grounds that the time was not yet ripe and his sudden switch to support it up to the hilt had everything to do with this double sense of the dialectics of revolutionary change. Marx clearly recognises the potential consequences of either making a

revolution or not in a given place and time and with this the teleology gives way to a much more contingent sense of historical unfolding, even if the motor of history still remains class struggle.

In order to sustain his views Marx had to deconstruct a quite different and even then dominant utopianism of process that relied upon the rational activities of 'economic man' in a context of perfected markets. Since this has been by-far the most powerful utopianism of process throughout the history of capitalism we need to pay close attention to it. Adam Smith articulated the argument most precisely. His reflections on the theory of moral sentiments - he was in the first instance a moral philosopher rather than an economist - led him to propose a utopianism of process in which individual desires, avarice, greed, drives, creativity, and the like could be mobilised through the hidden hand of the perfected market to the social benefit of all. From this Smith and the political economists derived a political program to eliminate state interventions and regulations (apart from those that secured free market institutions) and curb monopoly power. Laissez faire, free trade, properly constituted markets, became the mantras of the nineteenth century political economists. Give free markets room to flourish, then all will be well with the world. And this, of course, is the ideology that has become so dominant in the advanced capitalist countries these last twenty years. This is the system to which, we are again and again told, "there is no alternative."

Marx mounted a devastating attack upon this utopianism of process in *Capital*. In the second chapter he concedes the Smithian fiction of a perfected market. Then with a relentless and irrefutable logic he shows the inevitable consequences to be:

"in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his situation high or low, must grow worse.... Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole...."

Marx's brilliant deconstruction of free-market utopianism has largely been suppressed in recent times. The free-market juggernaut with its mantras of private and personal responsibility and initiative, deregulation, privatization, liberalization of markets, free trade, downsizing of government (except in subsidies to capital), draconian cut-backs in the welfare state and its protections, has rolled on and on. For more than twenty years now we have been battered and cajoled at almost every turn into accepting the utopianism of process of which Smith dreamed as the solution to all our ills. We have also witnessed an all-out assault on those institutions - trade unions and government in particular - that might stand in the way of such a project. Margaret Thatcher proclaimed that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families and set about dismantling all those institutions - from trade unions to local governments - that might stand in the way of her utopian vision. With the fall of the wall, Fukuyama put a Hegelian gloss on all of this. We are now at the end of history. Capitalism and the free market are triumphant world wide. The end of history is here (a sad thought if Baltimore is anything to go by).

It may seem strange to view the likes of Thatcher and Gingrich as Hegelians, but the free market triumphalism they espoused in their heyday was nothing other than Smithian utopianism of process attached to a very Hegelian kind of teleology ("progress is inevitable and there is no alternative"). In many respects, as Frankel (1987) points out, the most effective utopians in recent times have been those of a right wing persuasion and they have primarily espoused a utopianism of process rather than a utopianism of spatial form. The odd thing, however, is the failure to attach the negative epithets of "utopian" and "teleological" to this right wing assault upon the social order.

The effective consequences are close to those that Marx's deconstruction depicts. Income inequalities have risen rapidly in all those countries that have given themselves over most energetically to the utopianism of the market. Globally, the World Bank (1995) reports that a billion of the 2,3 billion wage workers in the world are struggling to survive on less

than a dollar a day. Such a condition would not be so bad if other systems of support (such as self-sufficient peasant agriculture) were available but in many instances these have also been destroyed through market penetration, environmental degradation and the like. Global income differentials have also widened (United Nations Development Program, 1996): "between 1960 and 1991 the share of the richest 20% rose from 70% of global income to 85% - while that of the poorest declined from 2,3% to 1,4%." By 1991, "more than 85% of the world's population received only 15% of its income" and "the net worth of the 358 richest people, the dollar billionaires, is equal to the combined income of the poorest 45% of the world population - 2,3 billion people." Such income polarization is as astounding as it is obscene. If this is the end of history, then it is a rather desperate and dystopian ending for most of the world's population.

The consequent polarization in income and wealth also has its geographical forms of expression: spiralling inequalities between regions (that left for example, sub-Saharan Africa far behind as East and Southeast Asia surged ahead) as well as escalating contrasts between affluent neighborhoods and impoverished shanty towns or, in the case of the United States, between impoverished inner cities and affluent and exclusionary suburbs. All of this renders hollow the World Bank's extraordinary utopian claim that international integration coupled with free market liberalism and low levels of government interference is the best way to deliver growth and rising living standards for workers. This claim reads all the more oddly since the repressive and strongly interventionist political regimes in Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore were then cited as models of free-market liberalism (more than 65% of the housing stock in Singapore is state produced and owned and the whole economy is orchestrated from top to bottom by state power). Now such economies are in financial difficulty, of course, it is because of too much government intervention.

This brings us to a key issue. The materialization of a utopianism of process requires that the process come to ground someplace, that it construct some sort of space within

which it can function. How it gets framed spatially and how it produces space become critical facets of its tangible realization. Much of my own work these last twenty years (Harvey, 1982; 1989) has been about trying to track exactly such a process, to understand how capital builds a geographical landscape in its own image at a certain point in time only to have to destroy it later in order to accommodate its own dynamic of endless capital accumulation, strong technological change and fierce forms of class struggle. The history of creative destruction and of uneven geographical development in the bourgeois era is simply stunning. Much of the extraordinary transformation of the earth's surface these last two hundred years reflects precisely the putting into practice of the free market utopianism of process and its restless and perpetual reorganizations of spatial forms.

But the manner of this spatial materialization has all manner of consequences. As free market capital accumulation plays across a variegated geographical terrain of resource endowments, cultural histories, communications possibilities, labor quantities and qualities (a geographical terrain that is increasingly a differentiated product of capital investments in infrastructures and built environments), so it produces an intensification of uneven geographical development in standards of living and life prospects. Rich regions grow richer leaving poor regions ever poorer (Baltimore provides a simple example). Circular and cumulative causation embedded within the utopianism of the market process produces increasing differentiations in wealth and power, rather than a gradual progress towards homogeneity and equality. There is, the old adage goes, "nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals," and that is exactly how the free market operates.

Community and/or state power has led the way in trying to counteract some of the more egregious consequences of free market utopianism (spiralling income inequalities, uneven geographical developments, externality effects on the environment, and the like). But the free play of this utopianism of process can be assured if, as Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto*, the state becomes "the executive

committee of the bourgeoisie." Decolonization after 1945 and the subsequent internationalization and liberalization of global markets, has brought the whole world much closer to that norm, though the uneven pace at which this has occurred (a product of political and social struggles) has affected how the utopianism of process has been materialized in different places and times. Geopolitical struggles between places are integral to the problem.

The upshot of this argument is that the purity of any utopianism of process inevitably gets upset by its manner of spatialization. In exactly the same way that materializations of spatial utopias run afoul of the particularities of the temporal process mobilized to produce them, so the utopianism of process runs afoul of the spatial framings and the particularities of place construction necessary to its materialization. The destruction of Baltimore as a living city these last twenty years, under conditions of greater freedoms of the market, exactly illustrates the nature of the problem.

### **TOWARDS A SPATIO-TEMPORAL UTOPIANISM**

The obvious resolution to this problem is to construct a utopianism that is spatio-temporal rather than either spatial or temporal. It is, after all, many years now since Einstein taught us that space and time cannot meaningfully be separated. There are more than a few hints within the social sciences that the separation of space from time, though sometimes useful, can often be misleading (see Harvey, 1996, Part III). And if space and time are viewed as social constructs (implying the rejection of the absolute theories of space and time attributable to Newton and Descartes), then the production of space and time must be incorporated into any revitalised utopianism.

The history of utopianisms of spatial form and temporal process taken separately is, however, instructive. From the former, the idea of imaginative spatial play to achieve specific social and moral goals can be converted into the idea of potentially endless spatial plays. Experimentation with different spatial forms is a way to explore the wide range of human potentialities (different modes of collective living, of

gender relations, of production-consumption styles, in the relation to nature, etc.). This is how Lefebvre (1991) sets up his conception of the production of space. He sees it as a privileged means to explore alternative and emancipatory strategies. But Lefebvre is resolutely antagonistic to the traditional utopianisms of spatial form precisely because of their closed authoritarianism. He fashions a devastating critique of Cartesian conceptions, of the political absolutism that flows from absolute conceptions of space, of the oppressions visited upon the world by a rationalised, bureaucratised, technocratically and capitalistically-defined spatiality. For him, the production of space must always remain as an endlessly open possibility. But the effect is to leave the spaces of any alternative frustratingly undefined. Lefebvre refuses specific recommendations (though there are some nostalgic hints that they got it right in Renaissance Tuscany). He refuses to confront the underlying problem: that to materialize a space is to engage with closure (however temporary) which is an authoritarian act. The history of all realized utopias points to this issue of closure as both fundamental and unavoidable, even if disillusionment is the inevitable consequence. If, therefore, alternatives are to be realized, the problem of closure (and the authority it presupposes) cannot endlessly be evaded. To do so is to embrace an agonistic romanticism of perpetually unfulfilled longing and desire. And this is, in the end, where Lefebvre leaves us.

Consider the matter now from the standpoint of process-oriented utopias. The supposedly endlessly open and benevolent qualities of some utopian social process, like market exchange, have to crystallize into a material world somewhere and somehow. Social and material structures (walls, highways, territorial subdivisions, institutions of governance) are either made or not made. The dialectic of either-or is omnipresent. Once such structures are built they are often hard to change (nuclear power stations commit us for thousands of years). Struggle as we might to create "flexible landscapes," the fixity of structures tends to increase with time making the conditions of change more rather than less sclerotic. A total reorganization of materialized

organizational forms like New York City or Los Angeles is much harder to envisage let alone accomplish now than a century ago. Free-flowing processes become instanced in structures, in institutional, social, cultural and physical realities that acquire a relative permanence, fixity and immovability. Materialized Utopias of process cannot escape the question of closure either. The utopianism of the free market necessarily produces a social order akin to free-market stalinism coupled with a world of accelerating income inequalities instanced in the physical landscape as massively uneven geographical development of both life chances and human potentialities.

Closure of any sort contains its own authority because to materialize any one design, no matter how playfully construed, is to foreclose, in some cases temporarily but in other instances relatively permanently, on the possibility of materializing others. We cannot evade such choices. The dialectic is "either/or" not "both/and". What the materialised utopianism of spatial form so clearly confronts is the problematics of closure and it is this which the utopianism of the social process so dangerously evades.

What the abandonment of all talk of utopia on the left has done, is to leave the question of valid and legitimate authority in abeyance (or, more exactly, to leave it to the moralisms of the conservatives - both of the neo-liberal and religious variety). It has left the concept of Utopia, as Marin observes, as a pure signifier without any meaningful referent in the material world. And for many contemporary theorists that is where the concept can and should remain: as a pure signifier of hope destined never to acquire a material referent. How, then, can a stronger utopianism be constructed that integrates social process and spatial form? I have argued that this cannot be done without facing up to the problems of authority and closure, that fragmentation and dispersal cannot work, and that the bitter struggle of the "either-or" perpetually interferes with the gentler and more harmonious dialectic of "both-and." These insights are fundamental. But they need a stronger and more positive elaboration.

## **DIALECTICAL UTOPIANISM**

Marx was a violent opponent of utopianism as he knew it. He savaged the utopias of spatial form and thoroughly deconstructed Adam Smith's utopianism of social process. Yet Marx passionately believed in the emancipatory potential of class struggle as *the* privileged process that would lead to a happier life. And both he and Engels argued in the *Communist Manifesto* that there are historical moments when oppositional forces are in such an undeveloped state that "fantastic pictures of future society" come to represent "the first instinctive yearnings" for "a general reconstruction of society." The literature produced by the socialist utopians of the early nineteenth century contains a powerful and important critical element. In attacking "every principle of existing society," they provided "the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class." Furthermore, "the practical measures proposed" were helpful as landmarks in the struggle to abolish class distinctions. The danger, Marx and Engels argued, is that we will come to believe "in the miraculous effects" of some Utopian science. Their own science of historical and dialectical materialism should be sufficient, they held, to set free the elements of the new society from within the womb of a collapsing bourgeois order. The seeds of revolutionary transformation must be found in the present; no society can launch upon a task of radical reorganization for which it is not at least partially prepared. On this basis we can hope to "grow" an alternative spatio-temporal utopianism out of existing spatio-temporal processes and their internal contradictions.

But by what process can a city like Baltimore be revitalised and by what mode of analysis can the elements of some new society be detected in the midst of the mess that now prevails? It is difficult to construct any solid sense of how change can occur in such conditions. The steps through which we must pass can be identified - the crucial moments of passage from the personal to the political and back again, from the particular to the universal and back again, from process to form and back again. Within such a dialectics lie clues to transformative possibilities and actions. Furthermore, the urbanization processes at work in Baltimore are deeply

resonant of that interlinkage between spatial pattern and moral order that Robert Park long ago identified as central to understanding any urban condition. To break open that tight connection between spatial form and social process must clearly be a powerfully constitutive political aim. To liberate the spatial form-moral order connection from its existing constraints requires, however, a different kind of utopianism, a genuinely spatiotemporal and dialectical utopianism that can simultaneously embrace Lefebvre's emancipatory concerns for the production of space and Unger's drive to overthrow and re-fashion institutional arrangements. But Park (1967, 3) also wrote (in a passage that echoes Marx's observations on the labor process):

"the city and the urban environment represent man's most consistent and, on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself."

While we can reasonably aspire to intervene in that process of "remaking ourselves" and perhaps even to acquire some "clear sense of the nature of (our) task," we cannot leap outside of the dialectic and imagine we are not embedded and limited by the institutional worlds, the built environments and the material conditions we have already created. But, as Marx infers by appeal to the metaphor of architect and bee, we cannot evade the question of the imagination either. To repeat Unger's formulation, "if society is imagined and made then it can be re-imagined and re-made." And it is here that the case for a non-miraculous dialectical utopianism becomes compelling, not as a total solution but as a moment in which we gather our intellectual, critical and imaginative powers together to give possibility a much grander press than currently exists.



## PART III ON ARCHITECTS, BEES AND “SPECIES BEING”

### ON ARCHITECTS AND BEES

The figure (and it is the *figure* rather than the professional person of whom I speak) of the architect occupies a central position in all discussions of the processes of constructing and organizing spaces. Architects have been deeply enmeshed throughout history in the pursuit of utopian ideals (particularly though not solely those of spatial form). The architect shapes spaces so as to give them social utility as well as human and aesthetic/symbolic meanings. The architect shapes and preserves long-term social memories and strives to give material form to the longings and desires of individuals and collectivities. The architect struggles to open spaces for new possibilities, for future forms of social life. For all of these reasons, as Karatani (1995, xxxv) points out, the “will to architecture” understood as “the will to create” is “the foundation of Western thought.” Plato held to that view and Leibniz even went so far as to say: “God as architect fully satisfies God as lawgiver.”

But there is a sense in which we can all equally well see ourselves as architects of a sort. To construe ourselves as “architects of our own fates and fortunes,” is to adopt the figure of the architect as a metaphor for our own agency as we go about our daily practices and through them effectively preserve, construct and re-construct our life-world. This reconnects directly to Marx. For it is hard to find a better statement of the foundational principles of the dynamics and dialectics of socio-ecological change than those laid out in the first volume of *Capital*:

“Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature....By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway...We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively

human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose....." (Marx, 1973, pp.283-4)

Marx's analogy can easily be reversed: while the activities of the architect help us understand the labor process in general, everyone who engages in any kind of creative labor process is like the architect rather than like the bee.

Marx's evocation of bees has, however, a double reckoning. Not only does it relate directly to the sophistication of their architectural practices (so fascinating to naturalists), but Marx is undoubtedly also referring to Mandeville's famous tract of 1714 on *The Fable of the Bees* (with its subtitle of "private vices and public virtues"). Mandeville not only commented therein on how public prosperity and virtue necessarily rested on private vanity, envy, vice and waste (a problem that Adam Smith's utopianism of the market was later designed to redress) but took the even more invidious though "honest" position that society in general could prosper only if the workers remained poor, ignorant and deprived of any and all knowledge that might multiply their desires. Marx's concept of the dignity and creativity of human labor contrasts with the ignoble and degraded status of a "worker bee" under capitalism. The latter obviously has little or no chance to awaken those "slumbering powers" latent within us to change the world and change ourselves.

We now know a lot more about bees. They are, for example, very communicative creatures. The dance choreography they perform in the hive provides very precise information as to where food sources can be found. The intricacy and complexity of the communication system (and the accuracy and precision incorporated in it) demonstrates a truly amazing capacity

for bees to encode and communicate information in an abstract, symbolic way that would put to shame many a communications or GIS specialist let alone any architect (Von Frisch, 1965, took forty years to map the dances). The code to the dance patterns was broken, almost by accident, by a mathematician who happened to be the daughter of a bee researcher. She recognised the patterns when projecting the properties of a six-dimensional flag manifold - a rare and obscure kind of mathematics - onto a two dimensional space (Frank, 1997). The entire repertory of bee dances with all of its innumerable parts and variations falls within a mathematical schema unknown to any architect. The only other known physical process to which such a mathematics applies concerns the quarks of quantum theory. This raises the speculative possibility that "the bees are somehow sensitive to what's going on in the quantum world of quarks, that quantum mechanics is as important to their perception of the world as sight, sound, and smell." If this turns out to be true, then not only do bees "know" (with a very tiny brain) a kind of mathematics known to only a handful of people, but they also may be able to do what no human appears ever able to do - operate in quantum fields without disturbing them. So even as we enter the age of quantum computing with all of its untold power, we still cannot do what bees seem able to do.

The more we know about bees, the more the comparison with even the best of human labor (let alone the worst of architects) appears less and less complimentary to our supposedly superior powers. This seriously dents any idea that humans are somehow at the "summit" of living things in all or even most respects. But it also sharpens interest in the question of what our "exclusive" species capacities and "slumbering powers" might be.

### **HUMAN CAPACITIES AND POWERS**

Many species, like bees, possess "basic senses entirely outside the human repertory." From this, Wilson (1998) formulates "an informal rule of biological evolution important to the understanding of the human condition: If an organic sensor can be imagined that picks up any signal from the

environment, there exists a species somewhere that possesses it." It is not surprising, therefore, that the unaided human senses we possess "seem remarkably deficient relative to the bountiful powers of life expressed in such diversity." Wilson's characteristically reductive answer to why this is so runs as follows:

"Biological capacity evolves until it maximizes the fitness of organisms for the niches they fill, and not a squiggle more. Every species, every kind of butterfly, bat, fish and primate, including *Homo sapiens*, occupies a distinctive niche. It follows that each species lives in its own sensory world."

When, therefore, we appeal to the idea of "the body as the measure of all things" we immediately encounter the limitations of our own sensory world. But herein lies a paradox. For not only can the body be considered a social construct (in a sense that Wilson would never admit given his biological reductionism) but there is also the simple fact that human beings have (in ways that Wilson strongly emphasizes) found means through science and measurement to "listen, see and hear" far beyond the sensory capacities immediately available to us. The capacities we have acquired as "cyborgs and scientists" cannot be ignored. But we then encounter yet another problem which is, interestingly, a fundamental question confronted by both Marx and Wilson (unlikely allies both) in their search for some sort of unity of knowledge. Wilson's version of it is this:

"Natural selection (cannot) anticipate future needs....If the principle is universally true, how did natural selection prepare the mind for civilization before civilization existed? That is the great mystery of human evolution: how to account for calculus and Mozart."

This is a familiar problem in Marx. In innumerable passages, from the *Communist Manifesto* on, he appears to contradict the conception of the labor process laid out in *Capital* and insist that our ideas, conceptions, views (in one word, our "consciousness") change with every change in material

conditions of existence and that the material form of a mode of production gives rise to institutional, legal and political structures which imprison our thoughts and possibilities in particular ways. In perhaps the most famous rendition of this, Marx argues “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.” How, then, can the human imagination, made so much of in *Capital*, range freely enough outside of the existing material and institutional conditions (e.g. those set by of capitalism) to even conceptualize what the socialist alternative might look like? In exactly the same way that Wilson has a problem accounting for the explosion of cultural and scientific forms in recent history, so Marx’s historical materialism has a problem in preparing our imaginations (let alone our political practices) for the creation of a socialist (or for that matter any other) alternative.

While this may explain how we can be “such puppets of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit” (to repeat Unger’s trenchant phrase) it also presents a difficult paradox. The historical-geographical experience of revolutionary movements in power (and of materialised utopianism of any sort) indicates the deep seriousness of the problem of unpreparedness for radical change. Many revolutionary movements did not or could not free themselves from ways of thinking embedded in the material circumstances of their past. The dilemma is as pertinent and real in political practices as it is salient theoretically. Unger’s thought perpetually gravitates back to this central problem. It is a fundamental dilemma that any grounded form of spatiotemporal utopianism must confront.

Marx does, however, soften the theoretical paradox somewhat:

“At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production come in conflict with the existing relations of production....From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With

the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic - in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."

The latter (the ideological forms) do not here appear to be quite as strictly determined by material conditions (in part because of their inherent fuzziness) while the very existence of contradictions (particularly between the forces and relations of production) holds out the possibility for creative manoeuvre and open decision-making.

Nevertheless we often seem to oscillate in our understandings of ourselves and in our ways of thinking between an unreal fantasy of infinite choice (Unger's "alternatives that scarcely seem to matter") and a cold reality of no alternative to the business as usual dictated by our material and intellectual circumstances. This is why the figure of the architect/planner is so instructive. Consider it further. It takes a huge exercise of the imagination to design an office tower, a residence, a factory, a leisure park, a city, a regional land use system, or whatever. The architect/planner has to imagine spaces, orderings, materials, aesthetic effects, relations to environments, and deal at the same time with the more mundane issues of plumbing, heating, electric cables, lighting, transportation technologies, engineering volumes and weights, and the like. The architect/planner is not a totally free agent in this. Not only do the quantities and qualities of available materials and the nature of sites constrain choices but educational traditions and learned practices channel thought. Regulations, costs, rates of return, clients' preferences, have to be considered to the point where it often seems that the developers, the financiers, the accountants, the builders and the state apparatus have more to say about the final shape of things than the architect/planner. Architecture and planning are embedded spatio-temporal practices. But there is,

nevertheless, always a moment when the free play of the imagination - the will to create - must enter.

The inner connection at work within Marx's oppositional statements then becomes more understandable. All capitalist ventures, including those of the architect/planner, are speculative. This is what it means to throw money into circulation as capital and hope to realize a profit. All capitalist ventures must exist in the imagination before they are realized in the market (hence the acknowledged power of human expectations in economic action). The incredible power of capitalism as a social system lies in its capacity to mobilize the multiple imaginaries of entrepreneurs, financiers, developers, artists, architects, planners and bureaucrats (and a whole host of others including, of course, the ordinary laborer) to engage in material activities that keep the system reproducing itself, albeit on an expanding scale. The discipline - such as it is - imposed by the system comes through the acid test of profitability. It is only then that the imaginary realizes itself in ways that gain positive reinforcement. But there are as many ways to make a profit as to skin a proverbial cat. So while the singular goal of profit may guide capitalist activity, there is no single path to reach that goal. Indeed, the whole history of the capitalist imaginary has been to find all sorts of innovative and often quirky ways to realise that singular objective. Giving free rein to the imagination is fundamental to the perpetuation of capitalism and it is within this space that an alternative socialist imaginary can grow (though never, of course, in a manner that is disembedded from capitalism and its dominant ways of thinking and doing). What we then recognise is a very simple material fact about the way our world, the world of capitalist culture, economy, politics and consciousness, works. It is full of an incredible variety of imagined schemes (political, economic, institutional as well as for the production of spatial configurations) many of which get constructed. Some schemes fail. Others are wildly successful. Some work for a time and then fall apart. It is the cold logic of the market place (often lubricated by a hefty dose of political favoritism and conniving collusions) that fixes the outcome. But it is the passionate engagement with future possibilities that starts the whole affair. Zola captured

this idea beautifully in his expose of the power of money to transform the world through speculation. Says Saccard, Zola's anti-hero in his novel *Money*:

"you will behold a complete resurrection over all those depopulated plains, those deserted passes, which our railways will traverse - yes! fields will be cleared, roads and canals built, new cities will spring from the soil, life will return as it returns to a sick body, when we stimulate the system by injecting new blood into exhausted veins. Yes! money will work these miracles.... You must understand that speculation, gambling, is the central mechanism, the heart itself, of a vast affair like ours. Yes, it attracts blood, takes it from every source in little streamlets, collects it, sends it back in rivers in all direction, and establishes an enormous circulation of money, which is the very life of great enterprises..... Speculation - why, it is the one inducement that we have to live; it is the eternal desire that compels us to live and struggle. Without speculation, my dear friend, there would be no business of any kind.... It is the same as in love. In love as in speculation there is much filth; in love also, people think only of their own gratification; yet without love there would be no life, and the world would come to an end."

Saccard's vision, his love of life, seduces all around him. Even his cautious and demure companion - Mme Caroline - is struck by how the present state of the land in the Levant fails to match up with human desires and potentialities:

"And her love of life, her ever-buoyant hopefulness, filled her with enthusiasm at the idea of the all-powerful magic wand with which science and speculation could strike this old sleeping soil and suddenly reawaken it..... And it was just this that she saw rising again - the forward, irresistible march, the social impulse towards the greatest possible sum of happiness, the need of action, of going ahead, without knowing exactly whither.... And amid it all there was the globe turned upside down by the ant-swarm rebuilding its abode, its work never ending, fresh

sources of enjoyment ever being discovered, man's power increasing ten-fold, the earth belonging to him more and more every day. Money, aiding science, yielded progress."

While the outcome suggests there is no alternative, the starting point holds that there are at least a million and one alternatives as we seek to probe future possibilities with all the passion and imagination at our command. The dialectic of the imaginary and its material realization (mediated in most instances through production) locates the two sides of how capitalism replicates and changes itself, how it can be such a revolutionary mode of production in and for itself. If, then, capitalism is such a gigantic speculative system in which the fictitious and imaginary elements surround us at every turn, it necessarily thereby contains, often unknowingly in its midst, the possibility of "growing" alternatives within the interstices of itself. It is the task of dialectical and intellectual enquiry to extract the elements that make for the possibility of real alternatives. This is where a spatiotemporal utopianism must begin.

### **THE CONCEPTION OF "OUR SPECIES BEING"**

To speak of our capacities to transform the world through labor and thereby to transform ourselves, and to speak also of how we might deploy our albeit constrained imaginations in such a project, is to presuppose some way of understanding ourselves as a species, our specific capacities and powers (including the "slumbering powers" of which Marx speaks), in relation to the world we inhabit. The dialectical and metabolic relation we have to nature and through that back to a distinctively human nature (with its special qualities and meanings) must therefore lie at the very basis of what we, as architects of our futures and our fates, can and want to accomplish.

Serious problems have arisen in social theory as well as in the quest for alternatives whenever a biological basis - such as that invoked in a concept like "species being" - has been invoked (familiar examples include the way social Darwinism founded Nazism, organicist theories of the state, the dismal history of the eugenics movement particularly as applied to

racial categories and the profound social antagonisms generated in the debate over sociobiology during the 1970s). Much of the writing in this genre has indeed been reactionary, conservative and fatalistic with a strong dash of biological determinism (these days usually genetic) thrown in. The general response on the social science side and throughout much of the left in recent times has been to retreat from any examination of the biological/physical basis of human behavior. Within Marxism, for example, the trend has been to treat human nature as relative to the mode of production (or to material life in general) and to deny any universal qualities to our species being.

This is not, as Geras (1983) expertly argues, an adequate response (nor is it at all consistent with Marx's formulations). However dangerous the territory, ways have to be found to confront the idea of "human nature" and of our "species being". Without such formulations, we cannot define what we might be alienated from or what emancipation might mean. Nor can we determine which of our "slumbering powers" must be awakened to achieve emancipatory goals. A working definition of human nature, however tentative and insecure, is a necessary step in the search for real as opposed to fantastic alternatives. A conversation about our "species being" is desperately called for.

I propose a basic conception that goes roughly like this. We are a species on earth like any other, endowed, like any other, with specific capacities and powers that are put to use to modify environments in ways that are conducive to our own sustenance and reproduction. In this we are no different from all other species (like termites, bees and beavers) that modify their environments while adapting further to the environments they themselves help construct.

This conception defines "the nature imposed condition of our existence." We are sensory beings in a metabolic relation to the world around us. We modify that world and in so doing change ourselves through our activities and labors. Like all other species, we have some very species-specific capacities and powers, arguably the most important of which are our

ability to alter and adapt our forms of social organization (to create, for example, divisions of labor, class structures and institutions), to build a long historical memory through language, to accumulate knowledge and understandings that are collectively available to us as guides to future action, to reflect on what we have done and do in ways that permit learning from experience (not only our own but also that of others), and, by virtue of our particular dexterities, to build all kinds of adjuncts (e.g. tools, technologies, organizational forms and communications systems) to enhance our capacities to see, hear and feel way beyond the physiological limitations given by our own bodily constitution. The effect is to make the speed and scale of adaptation to and transformation of our species being and of our species environment highly sensitive to the pace and direction of cultural, technological, economic, social and political changes. It is this, of course, that makes so much (though not all) of what we think and do subservient to the inherent dynamics of the dominant mode of production we adopt. The argument for seeing human nature in relative terms, as something in the course of construction, is not without weight and foundation. But it also points to a connection between the concept of "species being" and "species potential."

We can never abstract from the universal character of our existence as sensory and natural beings, the product of a biological and historical-geographical evolutionary process that has left its mark upon our species both in terms of genetic endowments and rapidly accumulating cultural acquisitions. The sociobiologists are right to insist upon the significance of our genetic heritage. No conception of human nature can ignore what modern genetics and microbiology are revealing about human constraints, capacities and powers. The collapse of the Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter through contemporary studies of the mind/brain problem is likewise leading the way to a radical reformulation of the relation between thought and action in human behaviors.

But the difficulty in the face of which all sociobiology founders is the inability to predict in any kind of way the paths of cultural/social evolution as these have occurred most particularly in

recent times. While it is plausible to argue for some kind of co-evolution between biological characteristics and cultural forms over the very long term, the explosion of cultural/technical/linguistic understandings and practices particularly over the last three hundred years has provided no time for biological adaptation. It has, furthermore, no possible causative or reductive explanation in terms of physical or biological processes alone. The latter may form the necessary foundations for socio-ecological change but they cannot provide sufficient explanations for the rise of civilizations (let alone for calculus and Mozart). In effect, the situation we have to confront is one in which genetic endowments have been put to use in entirely new cultural ways. But what are these endowments that provide the raw materials out of which we are fashioning our historical geography?

We are, at root, curious and transformative beings endowed with vivid imaginations and a certain repertoire of possibilities that we have learned to put together in quite different ways at different places and times. We are political animals with respect to each other and politics is grounded in communicative abilities that are themselves evolving rapidly. Among our more endearing habits, furthermore, is the ability to be sophisticated rule makers and compulsive rule breakers. Indeed, a case can be made (and here I parallel the general thrust of Unger's work) that emancipation is best defined by a condition in which we have a certain liberty to be both rule makers and rule breakers with reasonable impunity (for this reason Unger considers what he calls "immunity rights" to be a fundamental feature of any society that aspires to emancipatory forms of development). But the rule making has to acknowledge a bundle of constraints and possibilities derived from our distinctive and achieved metabolic condition. The basic repertoire derived from evolutionary experience provides strategic options for human action. The repertoire includes:

1. Competition and the Struggle for Existence (the production of *hierarchy and homogeneity* through natural or, in human history, economic, political and cultural selection)

2. Adaptation and Diversification into Environmental Niches (the production of *diversity* through proliferation and innovation in economic, political or cultural terms)
3. Collaboration, Cooperation and Mutual Aid (the production of *social organization*, institutional arrangements and consensual political-discursive forms all of which rest upon capacities to communicate and translate)
4. Environmental Transformations (the transformation and modification of "nature" into, in our case, a "*humanised nature*" broadly in accord - though with frequent unintended consequences - with human requirements )
5. Spatial Orderings (mobilities and migrations coupled with the *production of spaces* for distinctive purposes such as escape, defense, organizational consolidation, transport and communication, and the organization of the spatially articulated material support system for the life of individuals, collectivities and the species)
6. Temporal Orderings (the setting up of biological, social and cultural "clocks" that contribute to survival coupled with the use of various time orderings for biological and social purposes - in human societies time orderings vary from the almost instantaneous transmission of computerised orders to the long-term contracts that evolve by culture into moral precepts, tradition, and law)

These six elements form a basic repertoire of capacities and powers handed down to us out of our evolutionary experience. While all organisms may possess some or even all of the repertoire in some degree, there is no question that human beings have highlighted each element in particular ways (e.g. the long-term temporal relations of culturally transmitted traditions) and achieved rich and flexible ways of combining the different elements into complex social systems. Each mode of production can be construed as a special combinatorial mix of elements drawn from this basic repertoire.

But it is vital to interpret the categories relationally rather than as mutually exclusive (see Harvey, 1996 for a fuller statement). I think sociobiologists are correct, for example, to argue that cooperation (“reciprocal altruism” is their preferred term) is in some sense an adaptive form of competition (organisms that help each other survive better). The difficulty arises when they make the competitive moment the foundation of everything else (a convenient way to make capitalist competition appear as *the* fundamental law of nature). From a relational standpoint, competition can just as easily be seen as a form of cooperation. The production of territoriality is an interesting case in point. By defining territories competitively, organisms cooperatively organize the partition of resources to save on ruinous and destructive competition. Properly organized, territoriality is as much about collaboration in human affairs as it is about competition and exclusion.

The character of a social formation is defined by exactly how the elements in the overall repertoire get elaborated upon and combined through the exigencies of class power. Capitalism, for example, is often construed as being basically about competition. Survival of the fittest (measured in terms of profitability) is the Darwinian mechanism that creates order out of the chaos of speculative and competitive economic activity. But capitalism is also highly adaptive, constantly searching out innovative strategies, new market niches and new product lines precisely to avoid competition in already established fields. Furthermore, capitalism could not survive without a lot of cooperation, collaboration and mutual aid. I speak here not only of the ways in which supposed competitors so frequently collude (clandestinely or overtly) but also of the extensive regulatory mechanisms embedded primarily in state power and the law to ensure that markets function as a consensual and collaborative framework for competition. The transformation or “production” of nature through collaborative efforts (in, say, the fields of plant and animal breeding and now genetic engineering, the construction of physical infrastructures, the building of cities, and the like) generates rapidly evolving environments (both social and physical) within which different forms of competitive, adaptive or collaborative

behavior can arise. Uneven geographical developments shape entirely new market niches, for example. And, as I have often emphasised, capitalism has found remarkable ways to produce new spatial configurations, to measure and coordinate turnover times, and thereby construct an entirely different spatio-temporality to frame its own activities.

It is not, therefore, competition alone that defines capitalism, but the particular *mode* of competition as embedded in all the other evolutionary processes. Institutions, rules and regulations struggle to ensure that only one sort of competition - that within relatively freely functioning markets respecting property rights and freedom of contract - will prevail. The normal causal ordering given in sociobiology can easily be reversed; it is only through the collaborative and cooperative structures of society (however coerced) that competition and the struggle for existence can be orchestrated to do its work. The point here, however, is not to change the causal ordering and make it seem as if society (the mode of cooperation) has in some way contained nature. It is much more appropriate to argue that competition is always regulated by the effects internalized within it of cooperation, adaptation, environmental transformations, and the production of space and time.

This sheds light on how an alternative to capitalism might be construed. The traditional way of thinking about socialism/communism, for example, is in terms of a total shift from, say, competition to cooperation, collaboration and mutual aid. This is far too simplistic and restrictive a way to think. If capitalism cannot survive without deploying all of the repertoire in some way, then the task for socialism must be to find a different combination of *all* the elements from within the basic repertoire. This cannot be done by presuming that only one of the elements matters and that the others can be suppressed. Competition, for example, can never be eliminated. But it can be organized differently and with quite different ends and goals in view. The balance between competition and cooperation can be altered. This has frequently occurred in capitalist history as phases of "excessive competition" have been replaced by phases of

strong state regulation or vice versa. The recent move towards globalization is an example of how a shift in one key element in the repertoire - the production of space - can occur in the struggle to sustain the system.

Any mode of production is a contradictory and dynamic unity of different elements drawn from this basic repertoire. There is plenty of contradiction, tension and conflict within it and these provide a set of embedded possibilities to construct alternatives. The transition from one mode of production to another entails transformations in all elements in the repertoire in relation to each other. "No natural laws can be done away with," Marx wrote in a letter to Kugelmann in 1868, adding, "what can change, in historically different circumstances, is only the form in which these laws operate." Or, just as persuasively, "no social order can accomplish transformations for which it is not already internally prepared."

All species (including human beings) can affect subsequent evolution through their behavior. All species (including humans) make active choices and by their behavior change the physical and social conditions with which their descendants have to cope. They also modify their behavior in response to changed conditions and by moving expose themselves to new conditions that open up different possibilities for evolutionary change. Organisms "are not simply *objects* of the laws of nature, altering themselves to bend to the inevitable, but active *subjects* transforming nature according to its laws" (Lewontin, 1982). Here the concept of "species potential" returns to the fore because we are now more than ever architects of evolution by virtue of the scientific, technical and cultural powers that we have acquired. We are not, nor can we ever be, master architects so close to God as to be the ultimate lawgiver (as Leibniz evidently thought). But we have worked ourselves into a position in which the future of all evolution, including our own, is as much a function of conscious political and social choices as it is of random events to which we respond. So what kind of evolution do we, as savvy architects, imagine and plan? The answer to that question in part depends on how we envision the redefinition and recombination of the basic elements in the repertoire.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS NATURE AND HUMAN NATURE**

Consider, for example, just one element in the repertoire: the kind of “nature” we are now in a position to produce. As active subjects in the evolutionary game we have accumulated massive powers to transform the world. The way we exercise those powers is fundamental to the definition of what we as a species will become. This is now an open and critical focus of discussion and debate, as much among the capitalists and their allies (many of whom are obsessed with the issue of long-term sustainability) as among those who seek alternatives. Do we have a distinctive “species being” and what does that entail about our future relation to external nature?

The concept of “species being” is, of course, species centered. It entails a resolutely anthropocentric stance. We cannot ever avoid (any more than can bees and beavers) asserting our own species identity, being expressive of who we are and what we can become, and putting our species capacities and powers to work in the world we inhabit. To construe the matter any other way is to fool ourselves (alienate ourselves) as to who and what we are.

What partially separates us human architects from bees, however, is that we are now obliged (by our own achievements) to work out in the imagination as well as through discursive debates our individual and collective responsibilities not only to ourselves and to each other but also to all those other “others” that comprise what we usually refer to as “external” nature (“external,” that is, to us). We have reached an evolutionary condition in which conscious choices can and need to be made not only about our own evolutionary paths but also about those of other species. Even genetic evolution, says Wilson (1998, 270) “is about to become conscious and volitional, and usher in a new epoch in the history of life” for which, unfortunately (according to his schema) we are not genetically prepared. We have long been powerful evolutionary agents through everything from plant and animal breeding, massive habitat modification, rapid population growth, to the diffusion and mixing of species on a global scale. But we have

been rapidly accumulating far vaster powers over the last two centuries.

This in no way means we are somehow "outside of" metabolic or evolutionary constraints or invulnerable to natural forces. But we are in a position to consciously deploy the repertoire of evolved possibilities in radically different combinatorial ways. If the full volitional period of evolution is about to begin, then, says Wilson (1998, 277) - in a statement that smacks far more of traditional humanism than biological reductionism - "soon we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become." That question is as deeply speculative about our species being and our species destiny as anything that any architect has ever faced before.

Grappling with responsibilities and ethical engagements towards all others entails the construction of discursive regimes, systems of knowledge and ways of thinking that come together to define a different kind of imaginary and quite different modes of action from those which Zola, for example, depicted as so typical of the passionately engaged capitalist entrepreneur determined to master nature and construct a world in his own image. But on what basis do we seek to construct the alternative? There is no lack of passionate advocacy of this or that solution - the environmental and ecological movements are full of competing and cacophonous claims as to the possible future of the human species on planet earth.

Consider some of the major axes of difference. Ecocentric or biocentric views vie with naked anthropocentrism. Individualism clashes with collectivism (communitarianism). Culturally and historically-geographically embedded views (particularly those of indigenous peoples) sit uneasily alongside universal claims and principles (often advanced by scientists). Broadly materialist and economic concerns over access to life chances (whether it be of species, individuals, social groups, or habitats) are frequently opposed to aesthetic, spiritual and religious readings. Hubristic attitudes of promethean domination contrast with humility before the mighty and wondrous powers of nature. Innumerable villains

(enlightenment reason, speciesism, modernity and modernization, scientific/technical rationality, materialism (in both the narrow and broader sense), technological change (progress), multinationals (particularly oil), the world bank, patriarchy, capitalism, the free market, private property, consumerism (usually of the supposedly mindless sort), state power, imperialism, state socialism, meddling and bumbling bureaucrats, military industrial complexes, human ignorance, indifference, arrogance, myopia and stupidity, and the like) all jostle (singly or in some particular combination) for the position of arch-enemy of ecological sanity. And the long-standing debate over ends versus means (authoritarian, democratic, managerial, personal) has plenty of echoes in environmental politics.

I know these are caricatures of some of the binary positions to be found within the environmental/ecological movement. They are, however, the sorts of oppositions that make for innumerable confusions, particularly when taken in combination. But there are added complications. Nobody knows, for example, exactly where an "ecosystem" or a "community" (the usual unit of analysis) begins and ends. Claims worked out and agreed upon at one geographical scale (the local, the bioregion, the nation) do not necessarily make sense when aggregated up to some other scale (e.g. the globe). What makes sense, furthermore, for one generation will not necessarily be helpful to another. And every political movement under the sun - from nazis to free-market liberals, from feminists to social ecologists, from capitalists to socialists, from religious fundamentalists to atheistic scientists - necessarily considers it has the exclusive and correct line on environmental issues because to be seen as "natural" is to assume the mantle of inevitability and probity. Put all this together and we have a witches brew of political arguments, concepts and difficulties that can conveniently be the basis of endless academic, intellectual, theoretical and philosophical debate. There is enough grist here to engage participants at learned conferences until kingdom come. Which, in a way, is what makes the whole topic so intellectually interesting. To speak of consensus (or even sketch it as a goal) is plainly impossible in such a situation. Yet some common

language, or at least an adequate way of translating between different languages (scientific, managerial and legal, popular, critical, etc.) is required if any kind of conversation about alternatives is to take place. Even in the midst of all this conflict and diversity, therefore, some sort of common grounding must be constructed. Without it, authoritarianism, discursive violence and hegemonic practices become the basis for decisions and this, of course, is unlikely to create space for alternative possibilities.

There are, however, some dominant simplifying metaphors to help guide deliberations. Such metaphors, while indispensable, have their pitfalls. Consider, for example, the overwhelmingly powerful role now played by ideas of environmental crisis, imminent ecological collapse or even “the end of nature” in oppositional environmental thinking. For some on the left, this rhetoric attracts because it has the convenient effect of displacing a long-standing belief in the ultimate crisis and collapse of capitalism from the field of class struggle to that of the environment. An alternative *must* be found immediately, the argument goes, if the world as we know it is not to end in environmental catastrophe.

Apocalyptic argument of this sort is not confined to extreme environmentalists. Many scientists sound similarly alarmist calls. In a declaration signed by more than two thousand of the world’s most prestigious scientists we read:

“Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about” (Union of Concerned Scientists, 1996).

This language of “humanity on a collision course with the natural world” is odd in many respects. Making it seem as if

human beings are somehow outside of nature, it turns humanity into the metaphorical equivalent of some asteroid set to collide with the rest of nature, thereby avoiding the long history of evolutionary changes through which human beings have symbiotically transformed the world and themselves. The statement reeks of those “abstract and ideological conceptions” of which Marx complained “whenever (natural scientists) venture beyond the bounds of their own speciality” (Marx, 1977, 494).

Such an alarmist rhetoric of crisis and imminent catastrophe is dangerous. To begin with, it presumes we know with utmost certitude and precision the flash point of some collision between “human beings and the natural world.” But most scientists, even those who issue clarion calls for action, continuously hedge their bets as to where the really serious problems lie and how imminent they truly are. Wilson (1998, 285-7) thinks “the wall toward which humanity is evidently rushing is a shortage not of minerals and energy, but of food and water.” The capacity of the earth to support its “voracious human biomass” is, he suggests, becoming dicier and dicier. But others point to global warming and climate change, loss of habitats and biodiversities (a theme also dear to Wilson’s heart), degradation of a wide array of biosystems (from tropical rain forests to oceans), and the problems of absorbing the extraordinary array of new chemical compounds (many with highly toxic qualities) in biosystems ill-prepared for them. Even though a broad scientific consensus exists concerning the potentially serious nature of such problems, the ability of scientists to predict impacts and outcomes of environmental transformations with accuracy is severely limited. Most willingly admit so. Their worries and concerns are guided as much by beliefs as by evidence. In the face of this unpredictability, the uncertainties, risks and unintended consequences that attach to taking the wrong kind of pre-emptive action in the face of some imagined “collision” may be just as bad as not taking action in the face of impending disaster. The problem, however, is that neither the environmental movement nor their allies within the scientific community are very well prepared to acknowledge let alone take seriously the potentially negative consequences, for

human beings as well as for other species, of the unintended consequences of their own proposals.

An unthinking crisis rhetoric also helps legitimize all manner of actions irrespective of social or political consequences. When the British Government came to the climate change conference in Kyoto in 1997 as one of the few countries that had met its target for the carbon dioxide reductions earlier proposed at the Rio Conference of 1994, it did so because of the Conservative Party's determination to crush the power of labor anchored in the Miner's Union by freeing the British energy industry from its dependency on coal. Closing the mines for class struggle reasons could be legitimised by appeal to environmental well-being. There are, unfortunately, far too many examples (historical as well as contemporary - see Harvey, 1996, chapter 8) where social and political aims have been clothed or excused in the rhetoric of environmentalism, dictated by natural limits or nature-imposed scarcities. A rhetoric of impending environmental catastrophe will not, furthermore, necessarily sharpen our minds in the direction of cooperative, collective and democratic responses. It often sparks elitist and authoritarian impulses (particularly among many scientists) or even a "lifeboat ethic" in which the powerful pitch the rest overboard.

The invocation of "limits" and "ecoscarcity" should, therefore, make us as politically nervous as it makes us theoretically suspicious (see Harvey, 1996, 139-49). While there are versions of this argument that accept that "limits" and "ecoscarcities" are socially evaluated and produced (in which case the question of limits in nature gets so softened as to become almost irrelevant), it is hard to stop this line of thinking slipping into some version of naturalism (the absolutism of fixed limits in nature) or, worse still, a fatalistic Malthusianism in which disease, famine, war and multiple social disruptions are seen as the "natural" correctives to human hubris. Not a few radical environmentalists now claim that Malthus was right rather than wrong.

Against the idea that we are headed over the cliff into some abyss (collapse) or that we are about to run into a solid and immovable brick wall (limits), I think it consistent with both

the better sorts of environmental thinking and Marx's dialectical materialism to construe ourselves as embedded within an on-going flow of living processes that we can individually and collectively affect through our actions. We are profoundly affected by all manner of events (particularly physical changes in energy flows on earth, land and sea, adaptations by other species as well as well as changes we ourselves induce).. We are active agents caught within "the web of life" (see, e.g Capra 1996 or Birch and Cobb, 1981, for elaborations of this concept). The dialectical conceptions laid out by Levins and Lewontin (1985) or the process-based arguments of someone like Whitehead (1969) can be brought together with those of Marx (see Harvey, 1996, chapter 2) to consolidate the "web of life" metaphor into a theoretical and logical structure of argument. I consider this by far the most useful metaphor to understand our situation. It is certainly more accurate and more useful than the linear thinking that has us heading off a cliff or crashing into a brick wall. It is therefore significant that the world scientists' warning to humanity shifts its metaphorical ground in mid-flight from that of a collision between two entities to the idea of "the world's interdependent web of life" (Union of Concerned Scientists, 1996).

### **THE WEB OF LIFE**

How, then, can perspectives on future alternatives be constructed from within this "web of life" metaphor? We must needs first consider the directly "negative" and "positive" consequences of diverse human activities, both for ourselves (with appropriate concern for class, social, national and geographical distinctions) as well as for others (including non-human species and whole habitats). But even more importantly we need to recognise how our actions filter through the web of interconnections that make up the living world with all manner of unintended consequences. Like many other species, we are perfectly capable (without necessarily being conscious of it) of fouling our own nest or depleting our own resources base to such a degree that we seriously threaten the conditions of our own survival (in our case at least in achieved cultural and economic if not in more basically physical terms). There are innumerable historical and geographical examples

where human populations have, in effect, died in their own wastes and excrements (the original colonial settlements in Jamestown may have died out for this reason).

We can likewise overextend ourselves and create walls and limits around ourselves where there were none before. But these are self-and socially-created rather than nature imposed limits and walls. This was, of course, the central point that George Perkins Marsh drove home with historical-geographical example after example in that remarkable book published back in 1864 (a book which has inspired thinking on this topic ever since). He wrote:

“it is certain that man has done much to mould the form of the earth’s surface, though we cannot always distinguish between the results of his action and the effects of purely geological causes...The physical revolutions thus wrought by man have not all been destructive to human interests....(But) man has too long forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste. Nature has provided against the absolute destruction of any of her elementary matter, the raw material of her works...But man is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords. the proportions and accomodations which insured the stability of existing arrangements are overthrown. Indigneous vegetable and animal species are extirpated, and supplanted by others of foreign origin, spntaneous production is forbidden and restricted, and the fate of the earth is either laid bare or covered with a new and reluctant growth of vegetable forms, and with alien tribes of animal life. These intentional changes and substitutions constitute, indeed, great revolutions; but vast as is their magnitude and important, they are, as we shall see, insignificant in comparison with the contingent and unsought results which have flowed from them.”

Merely monitoring such interactions, threats and environmental challenges turns out to be a huge and complicated task. It requires the deployment of massive

research and intellectual resources within a hard-to-coordinate academic division of labor across a wide range of political and ideological beliefs (the work of the International Panel on Climate Change these last few years shows it can be done, at least in a fashion).

The issue of scale, both temporal and spatial is here vital to how we identify and assess the seriousness of environmental issues and try to track unintended consequences. Global issues (warming and loss of biodiversity) contrast with micro-local issues (radon in the basement) and short-term difficulties intermingle with long-term trends. The theory of uneven geographical developments (see chapter 3) with its emphasis upon scalars and differentiations, is as applicable here as anywhere. Relations between scales must be understood because our relation and responsibility to nature and to our species being entails responsibilities and actions that vary from the micro preservation of habitat diversities in hedgerows and in nooks and crannies of gardens through regional issues like deteriorating water resources and tropospheric ozone concentrations to the hugely complicated global issues of stratospheric ozone depletion, resource degradation, maintenance of biodiversity and global warming. Any contemporary return to utopian thinking has to be ecologically informed about all such issues in ways that have never before been quite the case. This is the world we have to change as we seek to change ourselves.

How, then, should we generalize about our contemporary situation and the alternatives to which it points? A strong case can be made that the humanly-induced environmental transformations now underway are larger scale, riskier, and more far-reaching and complex in their implications (materially, spiritually, aesthetically) than ever before in human history. The quantitative shifts that have occurred in the last half of the twentieth century in, for example, scientific knowledge and engineering capacities, industrial output, waste generation, invention of new chemical compounds, urbanization, population growth, international trade, fossil fuel consumption, resource extraction, habitat modification - just to name some of the most important features - imply

a qualitative shift in environmental impacts and potential unintended consequences that requires a comparable qualitative shift in our responses and our thinking. The web of planetary life has become so heavily permeated with human influences that evolutionary paths depend heavily (though by no means exclusively) on our collective activities and actions. For this reason alone it is important to side with caution. While I do not accept the apocalyptic rhetoric of limits and catastrophe as an overarching metaphor, I do not therefore dismiss all worrying data and all serious concerns as “merely alarmist” as do many environmental sceptics.

In this regard, I think Wilson (1998, 290-2) has it roughly right. We face a series of environmental bottlenecks in the twenty-first century. It is important to take evasive action now to prevent them closing to form solid walls. We not only have a responsibility, he says, to emerge from those bottlenecks in a better condition than we entered, but we need to ensure that we take as much of the rest of life with us as possible.

The environmental movement backed by science has pioneered in alerting us to many of the risks and uncertainties to be confronted. There is far more to the environmental issue than the conventional Malthusian view that population growth might outstrip resources and generate crises of subsistence (up until as late as the 1970s this was the dominant form environmentalism took). The evidence for widespread unintended consequences of the massive environmental changes now underway (some distinctly harmful to us and others unnecessarily harmful to other species), though not uncontested, is now persuasive (cf. loss of biodiversity at accelerating rates). But this is quite different from thinking we are reaching some limit in nature, that environmental catastrophe is just around the corner, or, even more dramatically, that we are about to destroy the planet earth. Prudence in the face of such mounting risks is a perfectly reasonable posture. It also provides a more likely basis for forging some collective sense of how to exercise our responsibilities to nature as well as to human nature. But matters are far from simple. To begin with, the definition of “environmental issues” often entails a particular bias, with

those that affect the poor, the marginalised and the working classes frequently being ignored (occupational safety and health, for example) while those that affect the rich and the affluent get emphasised (for example, poverty is a far more important cause of shortened life expectations in the United States than smoking but it is smoking that gets all the attention). Secondly, environmental impacts frequently have a social bias (class, racial, gender discriminations are evident in, say, the location of toxic waste sites and the global impacts of resource depletion or environmental degradation). Thirdly, some risks and uncertainties can strike anywhere, even against the rich and the powerful. The smoke from the fires that raged in Indonesia in the fall of 1997 did not respect national or class boundaries any more than did the cholera that swept nineteenth century cities. Problems of the latter sort can sometimes provoke a universal, rather than a specifically class-based, approach to public health and environmental regulation. The threat of increased hurricane frequencies from global warming terrifies insurance companies as much as it irritates the auto and oil companies to hear that they should cut back on their global plans for expansion because of the threat of emissions to the atmosphere (though even here the drive to produce a non-polluting car is becoming more and more evident within the auto industry itself). Finally, the distinction between the production/prevention of risks and the capitalistic bias towards consumption/commodification of cures has significance.

The implication is that there are multiple contradictions to be worked out as we contemplate responsibilities to nature on the one hand and responsibilities to human nature on the other. The latter are not by definition antagonistic to the former. But traditional ways of looking upon the solution to poverty as lying entirely with redistributions out of growth (or, for that matter, that the path towards communism lies solely by way of liberation of the productive forces) cannot easily be sustained. Other ways of achieving such social and political objectives must be found. And there are now, fortunately, abundant examples of how more equitable access to life chances can produce environmentally beneficial as well as socially advantageous results (cf. the case of Kerala).

Environmental arguments are not necessarily or even broadly antagonistic to class politics. An evolving socialist or other alternative perspective needs to understand the specific class content and definition of environmental issues and seek alliances around their resolution (as, for example, in the environmental justice movement). Furthermore, many issues that start out as non-class can end up having a strong class content as remedies are sought and applied. For example, AIDS and poverty are becoming increasingly interlocked because the expensive ways of controlling its spread are leaving poor countries in Africa or impoverished inner city populations most horribly exposed (in some of the poorest countries of Africa nearly a quarter of the population is HIV positive). The politics of any class-based environmental movement entails building alliances across many social layers in the population including many of those not directly affected by the issue at hand.

But there is a more general point. The risk and uncertainty we now experience acquires its scale, complexity and far-reaching implications by virtue of processes that have produced the massive industrial, technological, urban, demographic, lifestyle and intellectual transformations and uneven developments that we have witnessed in the latter half of the twentieth century. In this, a relatively small number of key institutions, such as the modern state and its adjuncts (including international coordinating agencies), multinational firms and finance capital, and "big" science and technology, have played a dominant and guiding role. For all the inner diversity, some sort of hegemonic economic-engineering discourse has also come to dominate discussion of environmental questions and to dictate how we are to construe our responsibilities to nature and to human nature. Commodifying everything and subjecting almost all transactions (including those connected to the production of knowledge) to the singular logic of commercial profitability and the cost-benefit calculus is a dominant way of thinking. The production of our environmental difficulties, both for the working class, the marginalised and the impoverished (many of whom have had their resource base stripped from under them by a rapacious commercialism) as well as for some

segments of capital and even of some elements of the rich and the affluent, is consequential upon this hegemonic class project, its market-based philosophy and modes of thinking that attach thereto.

This invites as response the organization of an equally powerful class project of risk prevention and reduction, resource recuperation and control, in which the working class, the disempowered and the marginalised take a leading role. In performing that role the whole question of constructing an alternative mode of production, exchange and consumption that is risk reducing and environmentally as well as socially just and sensitive can be posed. Such a politics must rest on the creation of class alliances - including disaffected scientists who see the problem but have little conception of how to construct a socially just solution - in which the environmental issue and a more satisfying "relation to nature" have a prominent place alongside the reconstruction of social relations and modes of production and consumption. A political project of this sort does not, I insist, need a rhetoric of limits or collapse to work effectively and well. But it does require careful and respectful negotiation with many environmental movements and disaffected scientists who clearly see that the way contemporary society is working is incompatible with a satisfactory resolution to the environmental questions that so bother them. The basis for such a project must rest, however, upon some broad agreement on how we are both individually and collectively going to construct and exercise our responsibilities to nature in general and towards our own human nature in particular.

### **SPATIOTEMPORAL UTOPIANISM AND ECOLOGICAL QUALITIES**

Let us return to the figure of the architect/planner. What kind of unity of knowledge and action is presupposed in what they do? Karatani's (1995, xxxviii) characterization of architectural practices is here helpful:

"Design is similar to Wittgenstein's term 'game,' where, as he says, 'we play - and make up the rules as we go along.' No architect can predict the result. No

architecture is free of its context. Architecture is an event par excellence in the sense that it is a making or a becoming that exceeds the maker's control. Plato admired the architect as metaphor but despised the architect as an earthly laborer, because the actual architect, and even architecture itself, are exposed to contingency. Contingency does not imply, however, that, as opposed to the designer's ideal, the actual architecture is secondary and constantly in danger of collapse. Rather, contingency insures that no architect is able to determine a design free from the relationship with the 'other' - the client, staff, and other factors relevant to the design process. All architects face this other. Architecture is thus a form of communication conditioned to occur without common rules - it is a communication with the other, who, by definition, does not follow the same set of rules."

The architecture of any spatiotemporal utopianism must be grounded in contingent matrices of existing and already achieved social relations (understood in terms of the totality of political-economic processes, assemblages of technological capacities and powers together with all the superstructural features of law, knowledges, and the like). It must also acknowledge its embeddedness in a physical and ecological world which is already achieved but highly dynamic. To paraphrase Marx, we architects all exercise the will to create but do so under conditions not chosen or created by ourselves. Furthermore, since we can never be entirely sure of the full implications of our actions, the resultant trajectories of historical-geographical change always escape from the total control of our individual or collective wills.

This conception is antagonistic to a strongly binary tradition in Western thought that goes back to the Greeks. Karatani (1995,5) summarises it thus:

"On the one hand evolutionists consider the world a living, growing form or organism; on the other hand, creationists consider it a designed work of art. These two types represent two worldviews: one that understands the world

as becoming and another that understands the world as a product of making.”

The contemporary version of this debate pits “social constructivism” against the “objective science” of, for example, genetic determination. But Marx does not fit easily into such a binary. Nor, interestingly, does Wilson in practice in spite of all his avowals to the contrary. Such a binary cannot, I conclude, capture what evolution in general and human evolution in particular might be about. There is, as Marx insisted, nothing “unnatural” about the historical geography of human development. We act upon the world as a “force of nature” and, like all architects, seek to create works of art whose implications we can never fully understand or control.

The challenge is, therefore, to work out a language for progressive utopianism that is materially grounded in social and ecological conditions but which nevertheless emphasizes possibilities and alternatives for human action through the will to create. The ecological dimension to utopian thinking has, of course, its own tradition. But it has either been marginalised (most classical utopian schemes say little or nothing about the negotiation with nature and if they do it tends to presume a land like Cockaigne, full of milk and honey) or far too restrictive, usually predicated upon some doctrine of the harmony with nature achieved at some relatively small scale (the commune, the village, or the small town). In the strain of thought that runs from Patrick Geddes through Lewis Mumford into the current thinking about the new urbanism, this utopianism has a presence at a metropolitan and regional scale (Mumford’s ideal of the city and its region as a “work of art” fits neatly into the constructivist side of the utopian tradition). Many residues of it can be detected in the landscape of capitalism (garden cities, suburbs, and access to recreational areas as well as movements for clean air, clean water and adequate sewage disposal in metropolitan regions). While such achievements and movements should not be discounted, we have plainly gone beyond situations easily addressed by such modes of thought. Our collective responsibilities to human nature and to nature need to be connected in a far more dynamic and co-evolutionary way

across a variety of spatio-temporal scales. Issues like conservation of micro habitats, ecological restoration projects, urban design, fossil fuel utilization, resource exploitation patterns, livelihood protections, sustenance of certain geographically specific cultural forms, enhancement of life chances at everything from the global to the local level, all somehow need to be brought together and factored into a more generalized sense of how a political-economic alternative might arise out of the contradictions of a class-bound capitalist system.

We can all seek to be architects of our fates by exercising our will to create. But no architect is ever exempt from the contingencies and constraints of existing conditions and no architect can ever hope, except in that realm of pure fantasy that does not matter, to so control the web of life as to be free of “the contingent and unsought results” which flow from their actions. Architects and bees at least have that in common, even if what distinguishes them also clearly signals where and how the real political movement to abolish the present abysmal state of things can be set in motion.

### **THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE: REFORMISM OR REVOLUTION?**

There is, as Unger somewhere remarks, a “huge embarrassment” in the history of public policy in the advanced capitalist world: it simply lurches back and forth between two extremes, swinging on a pendulum of hopes and fears and fashions, as if there is no exit from the fundamental dilemmas posed by trying to reconcile capitalism and democracy, the search for profit and the humane desire to deliver decent life opportunities and living conditions for all. While we often believe we are venturing on some new and untrodden path and create convenient rhetorics (such as “the third way”) to support the illusion, all we really do is swing helplessly on that hidden pendulum of thought and policy concerns.

I can put a particular gloss on that argument given the preceding analysis. The pendulum swings between visions guided alternately by a utopianism of spatial form versus a

utopianism of the social process. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, there was a widespread belief, embedded in innumerable public policies, that planning of national territorial spaces incorporating strong elements of regional and urban planning was the way to support, constrain and control processes of capital accumulation for public benefit. The slums were torn down, urban renewal proceeded a-pace, housing estates and new schools were built, transport systems were constructed, land use controls were instituted, industrial and population distribution plans were implemented, spatial order was rationalized, gains in efficiency in the space economy became imperative. Social inequalities, it was widely argued, could be counteracted by transformations of spatial form wrought by productive public investments orchestrated through the various levels of the state apparatus.

I generalize far too crudely of course. There were wide differences between countries (the United States and Sweden were poles apart in many respects) and political shifts within countries (between, say, Labour and Conservative in Britain) also left their marks. But I think it nevertheless true to point to a prevailing "zeitgeist" of the time that looked very strongly to a utopianism of spatial form to answer political-economic and social questions. The struggles were largely over how much support should go to capital (whether private or public) and how much to state-engineered redistributions of wealth many of which were to be delivered in kind through the provision of public infrastructures (housing, transportation, education, health care, leisure facilities, etc.).

It would be wrong to characterize that whole era as a failure. Some remarkable changes were wrought and many of them were for the better, at least relative to what existed before if not in terms of popular aspirations. But the contradiction of serving two compelling needs - sustained capital accumulation and progressive social welfare - could never be contained. By the 1970s, the rampant discontents of marginalized populations and the cultural discontents of the '68 generation on the one hand confronted chronic stagflation throughout the economy on the other. The vision of spatial form utopianism was exhausted if not discredited (particularly

in its rather arrogant high-modernist mode). Step by step the zeitgeist of spatial form utopianism fell into disrepute during the long-drawn out crises of the mid-1970s.

The means by which it was replaced by a revolutionary rhetoric of social process utopianism from 1980 onwards has now been the subject of several reflective accounts (e.g. Yergin and Stanislaw, 1998). That revolutionary turn is indelibly associated with the names of Thatcher and Reagan. It placed market processes and privatization to the fore coupled with the dismantling of many of the mechanisms of redistribution embedded in spatial form utopianism such as the welfare state, planning (national, regional and urban) and organized powers of labor. Planning became a dirty word particularly in the anglo-saxon world and the myth of privatization and individualized market action as the answer to all dilemmas spread far and wide. The collapse of communism put a further nail in the coffin of the idea that a planned society had anything to offer. There were, of course, substantial divergences; many social democratic governments in Europe and some of the more "dirigiste" governments in Asia (Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan) and Europe (e.g. France) hardly fell clearly into line. Furthermore, social process utopianism can in practice never do without strong government (which was precisely what Thatcher offered) to achieve its ends. The only interesting question that remained on the table in the 1980s and 1990s was how state interventions might promote competitive capitalist strength (of nations, regions or cities) and perhaps deliver some benefits to marginalised populations on the side by the magic of "trickle-down" or "under-the table" subventions. The fact that a city like Barcelona (under socialist direction) delivered some of the latter does not detract from the point that its fundamental orientation was to the former (and became increasingly so as time went on).

But by the late-1990s there were signs of difficulty. Social process utopianism that had promised so much had, in those countries where it was most closely followed (e.g. the U.S.A. and Britain) delivered plenty to the rich, a lot of insecurity to the middle classes and degradation to the lower classes and marginalized minorities. Uneven geographical development on a global scale accelerated and the countries of the world

that had looked to industrial development to raise the wealth of their nation gained very little (the link between industrialization and economic growth was, for the first time since the industrial revolution, effectively broken from the 1980s onwards). The pronouncements from Davos became less triumphalist and the famed “Washington consensus” of the mid-1990s looked less and less tenable as financial disruptions rolled out of the Far East. The pendulum began to swing back towards the center with Clinton, Blair and Schroeder pushing towards some kind of “third way.” Regulation and governance (global, national, regional and local) came back onto the agenda. Even interest in Marxism revived. And we now seem poised to begin the long swing back into a spatial form utopianism as an answer to social and environmental problems.

But herein lies the “huge embarrassment” of which Unger complains. For as I listen to debates over, say, what to do with London’s growth and the effective planning of southeast England, I hear clear echoes of the 1950s and 1960s all over again, though proposed as if they are new and fresh insights (in much the same way that the new urbanism echoes the rhetoric of the Regional Plan Association of the 1920s and the works of Raymond Unwin). There is nothing wrong in principle of going back to the past (though Marx’s warnings of how the past can weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living should always be heeded). But there is something wrong in going back to it unthinkingly without reckoning upon and learning from mistakes.

And the utopianism of spatial form that predominated in the 1960s contained some serious errors that need to be corrected. It was far too homogeneous (it did not cater to diversification) and held down competition (thinking that collaboration was all that was needed). It entailed collaboration around a singular aim and paid little mind to the dialectics of socio-environmental transformations. It was overall very undialectical in its conception. While it embraced closure with a certain zeal it did so in such a way as to preclude variation in the mix of socio-ecological evolutionary possibilities. The reformism embedded in it meant, furthermore, that it could

not challenge the basics of capital accumulation even though it profoundly sought greater equality in social relations. While it may have sought the latter it tended more and more to produce mechanics of social control that deserved the opprobrium of many critics (including, of course, Foucault). The production of space that resulted deserved much of the scorn poured on it by Lefebvre and many others. Curiously, the Thatcher-Reagan shift was much more revolutionary in all of these respects with radical consequences for the contemporary landscape of urbanization (including the production of a good deal of chaotic movement and individualized pursuits for liberties).

The immediate task to be debated about the current round of opportunities to engage in a more planned production of space is how to contemplate it as one revolutionary moment in the path towards more systematic socio-ecological changes. The questions to be posed are of two sorts. First, to gain some sense of the link between the production of space as one of our specific species powers and the other elements of competition, collaboration, diversification, temporal reorderings and the transformations of environment. The second is to pull together some consensus around the pattern of all of these shifts in relationship to some radically different alternative in terms of social and environmental relations and the long-term prospects for life-chances for all. This is the fundamental debate that must now occur if the chance for alternatives is not to be lost in the future as it has so often been stymied in the past.

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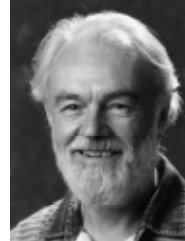
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## Curriculum Vitae David Harvey

**David Harvey is Professor of Geography at the John Hopkins University, and Senior Research Fellow at St. Peter's College Oxford.**



He started his career as Lecturer in Geography at the University of Bristol, England in 1961.

In 1969 he became Associate Professor of Geography at John Hopkins University. As from 1973 he obtained the title of full Professor there.

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His main research interests are: Geography and social theory, urbanisation, political economy, cultural geography and cultural change, environmental philosophies, environmental and social change, ecological movements, social justice, geographies of difference and utopianism.

Prof. Harvey received many rewards and honours, among which the most recent:

*1997*

Doctorat Honoris Causa of Roskilde University Denmark

*1998*

Elected Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy

*2000*

Honorary Doctorate of Uppsala University Sweden.

Many plenary addresses, invited lectures and visiting lectures were given by him in the United States, in Great Britain, and other places all over the world.

**The most recent publications by David Harvey**

*1973*

Social Justice and the City

*1982*

The Limits to Capital

*1985*

Consciousness and the Urban Experience

*1985*

The Urbanisation of Capital

*1989*

The Urban Experience

*1989*

The Condition of Post Modernity

*1993*

The Factory in the City: the Storey of the Cowley Automobile

Workers in Oxford

*1996*

Justice, Nature and the Geography Difference

*2000*

Spaces of Hope



