

1 Towards a framework for analysis

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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to examine the structure, logic and historical manifestations of urban land use and space as outcomes of private and political decision-making within capitalism. Two specific themes are vital to our analysis, and they intersect decisively at various points in the following text. A first theme concerns the organization of urban form and structure as the tangible expression of the private locational decisions of firms and households (the basic behavioural units of civil society). The logic of these decisions is derivative from the logic of the wider capitalist social formation, and it leads persistently to the emergence of social problems and predicaments which in turn call for urban planning. A second theme, therefore, concerns the genesis and character of urban planning (collective urban intervention) as the capitalist State confronts the problems and predicaments of the urban system. As these two themes intersect, there emerges a conceptualization of the urban process as the composite reflection of a system of private and public land-use decisions in the specific context of the capitalist mode of production. This book, in brief, is not just about social processes *in* cities; it is also about the basic historical tendencies and internal order *of* cities.

It is only with the recent emergence of various Marxian, neo-Marxian and critical analyses of the city that a mature, comprehensive treatment of this topic has become possible. Existing mainstream approaches to urbanization and planning have tended to be eclectic and partial, in that they are divorced from any wider theory of capitalist society. At the same

time, these approaches have tended to erect artificial barriers between the concepts of urbanization and the concepts of planning that they advocate. The manifest shortcomings of these approaches and their self-imposed limitations have been discussed in several recent critical statements (cf. Castells 1977a; Harloe 1977; Harvey 1973; Tabb and Sawers 1978). Here, we shall proceed directly to an examination of an alternative, historically-rooted view of urbanization and planning as a composite social event. This view is now evolving from the revival of historical materialism that is currently proceeding throughout the social sciences. One of the main points of departure in this revival is the proposition that modern urban phenomena are comprehensible only in the context of some prior analysis of the production and reproduction relations of capitalism. In short, urbanization is decipherable only as a mediated outcome of the social dynamics and imperatives of the capitalist mode of production in specific conjunctural circumstances. This basic viewpoint is beginning to engender a wide and energetic discussion about the urban question and the rational foundations of urban politics.

The intent in this book is to capture and to elaborate upon some of the main axes of this discussion. In what remains of this introductory chapter we provide an elementary guide to the main articulations of the urban question in the light of a historical materialist theory of knowledge and action. The chapters that follow take up the discussion and explore its various ramifications through a wide variety of urban processes and historical situations.

The bases of an analytical orientation

Let us begin with this simple proposition: *neither urbanization in general, nor urban planning in particular, constitute independent, self-determinate occurrences*. On the contrary, they are *social events*, embedded within society, and deriving their logic and historical meaning from the general pattern of society as a whole. These assertions, of course, provide no clues as to the nature of this general pattern. Nor do they (as yet) yield any insights into the ways in which this pattern is mediated and re-ordered by the specific processes of urbanization and planning. What they do affirm, however, is the self-evident (though, in practice, widely overlooked) notion that urbanization and planning can never be effectively treated as objects of theoretical study divorced from some wider theory of society.

Historical materialism and the capitalist mode of production

What, then, are the necessary features of this wider theory of society? Four features in particular would seem to be crucial. These capture essential levels and moments of social and historical reality, and together make conceptually coherent the disparate and fractured nature of social and urban life. First, this theory should establish a definition of society as a total and evolving structure. Second, it must elucidate the mechanisms

whereby society is physically reproduced, i.e. it must identify the material foundations of society in terms of a web of forces and relations of production. Third, it must be capable of demonstrating how the life-projects, intentionality and character of individual human beings in society are engendered and maintained. Fourth, it must be capable of illuminating and guiding human action; in other words, it should be policy-relevant in that it is self-conscious about matters of social and political change. These four points seem to provide the essential foundations of any reasonably powerful analytical-*cum*-political statement about the function and purpose of human society. There remain, of course, many questions about the manner in which any such statement should proceed, and we do not automatically preclude the possibility that it does not (or cannot) exist. If, however, some viable wider theory of society *cannot* be discovered, then social enquiry must surely fall into eclecticism, disjointedness and an arbitrary empiricism.

Now, of all existing systems of discourse, only one makes any definite claim to attack with coherence and historical self-awareness the four main points outlined above. This is the problematic of historical materialism, with its specific theoretical concept of human history as an interlocking system of modes of production. In particular, the Marxian and neo-Marxian theory of the *capitalist* mode of production constitutes a powerful framework for analysis of contemporary social issues. The various papers in this book attempt, with varying degrees of explicitness, to understand the phenomena of urbanization and planning by situating them in a theoretical context that is either historical materialist in some clearly identifiable way, or is at least consistent with and allied to a historical materialist (as opposed to a mainstream) position. Furthermore, the majority of these papers seek to imbue urbanization and planning with a specific social content by intentionally relating them to the capitalist mode of production.

This effort to derive a theory of urbanization and planning from a more fundamental theory of capitalist society does not presuppose that the debate on this latter issue has been foreclosed. On the contrary, there remains considerable disagreement within and around the problematic of historical materialism as to what constitutes an acceptable theory of capitalist society. (This is exemplified by the debate recently set off by Hindess and Hirst (1977) on the notion of concrete social formations versus abstract modes of production). At the same time, and as a corollary, there is a vital and widely-ranging debate at every level of analysis in the chapters that follow – from questions on the basic theory of knowledge to the political meaning of collective intervention in the urbanization process. What this debate avoids, however, is the rootlessness and capriciousness that characterize so much existing (mainstream) social and urban theory. It is, by contrast, rendered coherent – and analytical and politically productive – by a common agreement that what constitutes an acceptable universe of discourse must always coherently address the four basic points identified above.

The urban question

Despite our earlier assertion that urbanization and planning can only be understood in the context of some global concept of society, this does not mean that effective discussion of these phenomena simply dissolve away into a matrix of more fundamental propositions. To be sure, urbanization and planning are mediated out of a wider system of social processes, but they also retain an authenticity and significance as questions at their own specific level of analysis. The pessimistic view of Castells (1977b: 62), who asserts that 'urbanization is neither a specific real object nor a scientific object' is most certainly wrong in emphasis, if not in substance.

A specifically *urban question* does indeed exist. It is structured around the particular and indissoluble geographical and land-contingent phenomena that come into existence as capitalist social and property relations are mediated through the dimension of urban space. The urban question is composed of a set of integrated facets, each of which poses a further question at *its* own level of resolution. A first facet involves the ways in which the private behavioural entities of modern capitalist society (i.e. firms and households) interact with one another to produce a land use system. A second facet involves consideration of the dynamics of social and institutional breakdown in the urban land-use system, and the concomitant imperative of urban planning. A third facet involves an analysis of the genesis, trajectory and consequences of urban planning. Finally, from these particular questions, there emerges a composite question as to the evolutionary development of the modern city. This question revolves around the interdependent decisions and actions of firms, households and planners in a general urban system consisting of an integrated hierarchy of land-use complexes. It is our contention that, while these various questions are embedded within the wider structure and logic of capitalism, they nevertheless address themselves to analytical problems and human predicaments that *cannot* be automatically read off from the overarching capital-labour relation.

The city, then, is considerably more than a *locale* in which the grand, unmediated events of the class struggle are played out. The city *is* a definite object of theoretical enquiry (though we reaffirm that any thorough urban analysis must be situated within the wider problematic of the historical materialist theory of capitalism). We need, at this stage, to outline the internal order of the capitalist mode of production; and then, from this, to construct detailed statements on the specific properties of capitalist urbanization and planning.

The structure of capitalist civil society and the capitalist State

We here provide a brief, much-simplified description of the form, dynamics and imperatives of capitalist civil society and the capitalist State.

Commodity production in capitalism

The inner core of capitalist society consists of the institution of commodity production. This institution may be characterized as a general social process in which capitalist firms take materials and equipment, combine these with live labour, and then sell the resulting output at prices that secure for producers at least a normal rate of profit. Capitalist society presents itself as a bipartite system of production relations, comprising commodity producers (capitalist firms, together with an associated constellation of directorial, managerial, and stockholder interests) and workers (blue collar and white collar). These production relations coincide, imperfectly but decisively, with the basic allocation of authority and subordination in capitalist society, in that: (a) the meaning and purposes of capitalism (production for accumulation) are ultimately defined by the interests of commodity producers; and (b) the global social structures and processes of capitalism, into which the populace is socialized (e.g. the division of labour, the dynamics of applied technology, the pattern of urbanization, etc.) remain largely outside the domain of deliberate collective decidability. These social structures and processes emerge out of the dynamics of capitalist society, but they are not freely chosen, nor are they usually changeable except after arduous struggle and political conflict. Even so, contemporary capitalism is by no means simply reducible to a rigid model, consisting of a binary social structure of opposing capitalist and proletarian classes. For, around the basic capital-labour relation, there exist many different social groups which enormously complicate the patterns of social and political alliances in capitalism. As the essays in this volume show, one of the significant expressions of this complexity is the modern city, where *territorial* divisions and conflicts consistently breach class divisions and conflicts.

In spite of the constant mutations of capitalist production relations through time, and in spite of the increasing ambiguity of their contingent structural forms, the production of commodities in order to generate profit remains the central motor of capitalist society. It is the key to understanding the dynamics of capitalism. In particular, as a consequence of the competition among commodity producers for markets, the profits earned in commodity production are persistently ploughed back (i.e. accumulated) into expanding the bases of production. Two conditions are essential to the success of this fundamental process, and hence to the continued viability of capitalism. The first is that internally engendered limitations on the processes of production, exchange, and accumulation must be controlled or eliminated. The second is that there must be a constantly available labour force which is effectively socialized into the basic rationality of the production, exchange, and consumption of commodities. In particular, labour must be physically, mentally and morally equipped to perform the tasks of commodity production. *Neither of these vital conditions is spontaneously and automatically guaranteed by purely capitalistic processes*

of production and exchange. On the one hand, commodity production itself is latent with self-disorganizing tendencies, such as crises of overproduction, market failure, monopolization, and so on. On the other hand, the reproduction of the labour force depends in part on unpredictable personal and psychological dynamics which constantly threaten to undermine the perpetuation of an effective, compliant and disciplined labour force.

Emergence of the capitalist State

The inability of capitalism spontaneously to regenerate itself is clearly a major dilemma. A further threat to the stability of capitalism derives from the immanent class conflict between commodity producers and the labour force, and this conflict often erupts into overt political struggles. Out of these dissonances, and the concomitant threat of social disorder, there emerges an overarching historical imperative. This is the social necessity for the appearance of some mediating agency, invested with certain powers of social control, and capable of re-establishing vital social institutions when their existence is in some way threatened.

Thus it is that the *State makes its irreversible appearance as the collective guarantor of production and reproduction relations in capitalist society.* On the one hand, the State continually seeks to facilitate accumulation by attempting to ensure that (capitalistically) rational allocation and disposition of resources. On the other hand, it intervenes in the reproduction process in matters of housing, education, medical care, social work and so on. Further, by maintaining a continuous, ideological discourse about its own purposes and functions, and about the positive aspects of social life, the State seeks to legitimate the existing order of things, and to maintain in equilibrium (by physical force, when necessary) the tense internal balance of commodity-producing society. However, although the State is invested with powers of social control, it in no way establishes itself as the ultimate arbiter of all social activity. For the State is embedded in, and takes its meaning from, the general structure of commodity-producing society. Its actions are manifestations of the imperatives of that society, and not of purely self-engendered inclinations. Simply expressed, the State is bound by the very structure of the society that it oversees. Hence, the State in capitalism has no mandate to re-organize the foundations of society. Its mandate is, instead, to maintain those very foundations while engaging in remedial reforms that leave the main structure and purposes of society intact. As a corollary, the capitalist State (existing as it does in a society that is ordered by democratic and market institutions) cannot exist as the private preserve of some privileged or dominant élite. This does not mean, however, that the State in capitalism is somehow perfectly neutral and unbiased. Simply by maintaining the existing social order, the State simultaneously maintains existing relations of authority and subordination in capitalism.

As the capitalist State evolves historically, it interacts with civil society in a process of response and counter-response. Civil society continually

encounters internally generated predicaments that require the remedial intervention of the State. Then, as the State intervenes, so society moves forward to a new stage of development, in which new predicaments calling for further state intervention make their appearance. This spiral of events changes society's external form through time, although society's inner logic remains relatively unchanged. As we shall see, such interdependencies between the State and civil society are nowhere more evident than in the domain of the city, which is the ever-changing expression of interactions between private firms and households and urban planners as these interactions are mediated through space.

Urbanization and planning

We are now in a position to make a concise statement about the historical appearance of an urbanization process in capitalism, and about the internal order and dynamics of this process. For the sake of clarity, let us reaffirm that urbanization and planning constitute an integrated social event which is outwardly manifested in the form of a hierarchy of complex, dense and highly polarized land-use systems. Within these systems, civil society (firms and households) and the State (urban planners) interact with each other in highly specific and often analytically puzzling ways.

The urbanization process

Initially, cities in capitalism emerge out of the economic imperatives of commodity production and exchange. Given, in particular, the insistent profit-maximizing drives of commodity producers, the spontaneous development of spatially concentrated clusters of industrial firms is assured in capitalist society. These clusters appear historically at raw material sites and at transport nodes, where the costs of assembling and processing basic inputs is at a minimum. In addition, the concentration of many firms in close proximity to one another helps to reduce the transport costs of shifting secondary inputs and outputs between firms. Workers then assemble in dense residential districts scattered around the emergent industrial nucleus of the city. The market that is thus created attracts yet more firms, and so the city grows partly as a result of its own momentum, up to a point where diminishing returns on further growth begin to set it. The immediate consequence of these growth relationships is a twofold manifestation of a basic urban question.

First, as a system of cities is created, so, via the processes of exchange and migration, there emerges an integrated *hierarchy of centres* of different functions and sizes. We know remarkably little about the basic mechanisms that control the configuration and development of such hierarchies. What is more, there is little political debate about this issue (with the possible exception of occasional asides on the differential spatial distribution of urban amenities, or on the merits of centralized versus decentralized development programmes as a basis for national development). The issue of the urban hierarchy is a theme which permeates the following chapters

but, with the exception of Cohen's statement on the international urban hierarchy, it is rarely directly addressed. Cohen has, however, identified a crucial area of enquiry, since the development of a tightly knit nexus of economic relationships, under the aegis of international capital, is steadily forging the cities of the world into a composite system. The economic and political consequences of this development are far-reaching, and we anticipate further research on this matter in the near future.

Second, in each individual city, a complex spatial system materializes, comprising an interdependent assembly of (private and public) functional areas and locations. These areas and locations can be categorized as either *production space* (in which the accumulation process proceeds), or *reproduction space* (in which the regeneration of labour is accomplished). Both of these spaces are mediated by a third, subjacent space, devoted to *circulation needs*. These basic spaces that emerge out of the broad structure of capitalism constitute an intricate land-use pattern expressing the main character of capitalist society. This spatial system is rife with problems, conflicts and predicaments. It is also the source and major target of urban planning. Because of its complexity, and its immense analytical and political interest, this spatial system is the primary object of theoretical enquiry in this book. In short, the arguments in this book crystallize around an urban question that is predicated on the observation that the dense human occupation of land can never, in capitalism, proceed smoothly and unproblematically.

In capitalist society, the urban land-use system is primarily structured by a rent-maximizing land market. To be sure, the dynamics of the land-use system are such that the private appropriation, exchange and utilization of urban land are steadily eroded by the progressive socialization of urban space (via planning). However, contemporary urban land use throughout North America and Western Europe is governed basically by a process of market exchange. From this process emanates the characteristic internal geographical pattern of capitalist cities: a dense commercial core; a tendency to ever-widening peripheral scattering of industry; and socially segregated neighbourhoods. These last are differentiated principally along the lines of cleavage within the prevailing division of labour, i.e. into blue collar and white collar residential areas. At the same time, precisely because urban land is privately appropriated, the derivative land-use system is heavily latent with socially deleterious breakdowns and conflicts. These negative outcomes compromise the efficiency of production and the effectiveness of reproduction. Accordingly, they threaten the city as a system, and, beyond this, the continued success of the entire accumulation process. We may, at this stage, attempt to pinpoint the genesis of these breakdowns and problems.

Urban contradictions and the emergence of urban planning

It has already been pointed out that capitalist society has never spontaneously been able to provide all the necessary conditions for its own existence. The central mechanisms within capitalism consist of price signals, exchange

of monetary equivalents and profitability criteria, in the context of private and individual decision-making. As long as these mechanisms work effectively, the reproduction of society proceeds smoothly. However, they frequently fail at crucial articulations of society thereby threatening institutional stability, and thus calling for responsive collective action. These mechanisms fail in two significant areas in particular. The first area concerns the provision of major infrastructural artefacts and items of collective consumption. The second concerns the predicament-laden course of urban land-use development and the concomitant need for the social control and management of land-use outcomes.

In the first instance, many outputs necessary for effective production and reproduction in urban space simply cannot be produced spontaneously in pure commodity form. On the one hand, many of these outputs (e.g. streets, subway systems, bridges, and so on) are both extremely capital intensive and highly indivisible. The capital input necessary to produce them, in relation to any practicable scale of production prices, could never secure for producers a normal rate of profit. Their production is therefore abandoned by private producers, and they are produced by the State (if they are socially necessary) out of direct and indirect taxes. On the other hand certain outputs (e.g. cheap housing, cultural and recreational facilities, garbage collection, etc.) *can* be privately produced in the commodity form, but, at capitalistically determined price and wage levels, they would never be consumed in quantities large enough to sustain a socially viable process of reproduction. Once again, therefore, the private production of these outputs is frequently subsidized and/or complemented by the direct entrepreneurial intervention of the State. Since the State is able to produce on a large scale, and hence take advantage of internal scale economies in the production process, it often supplies these outputs in the form of large-scale items of collective consumption.¹

In the second instance, since the urban land-use system exists in the form of an integrated assembly of interdependent locations, any event at any point in urban space will eventually have some impact on all other locations in that space. In brief, urban land, viewed as a system of differential locational effects, is produced as the joint output of all land users collectively. For the most part, these differential locational effects are highly beneficial, which is the main reason why cities are created at the outset. But, in addition, many of these effects are negative, in that they impose severe penalties on various categories of land users. Such penalties may take a wide variety of forms. For example, they may be the result of incursions of commercial activities into residential neighbourhoods, thus disturbing established patterns of reproduction; or they may be generated by the persistent intensification of business land uses in central city areas – thus causing congestion, parking problems, overloading of public transport facilities, and so on; or they may result from urban sprawl, drawing municipal governments into increasingly costly investments in infrastructure and services, and giving rise to the augmenting need for upgraded expressway systems – a circumstance which in turn triggers off yet further

problems; and so on. All these problems are in turn complicated by the contradictory dynamic of accumulation (provoking urban growth and change) versus the inertia and slow convertibility of the built environment (resisting urban growth and change).

Further, because of the slow convertibility of built urban forms, spatial errors and irrationalities in the allocation of urban land are liable to be compounded and re-created through time. It must be noted that these problems are not capricious, in the sense that they emerge out of some purely arbitrary process of urban change. Instead, they emerge organically and necessarily from the land-use dynamics proper to capitalist society; and they call urgently for planning intervention. The fact that this intervention frequently exacerbates the very problems it sets out to resolve is only further evidence of the contradictions and constraints that capitalism imposes upon the interventionist tactics of the State.

The emergence of an urban political sphere

The foundations of a viable conception of an urban political sphere in general, and of urban planning activity in particular, have been essentially established in the preceding discussion. Several of the chapters that follow pursue this important theme in detail. What is needed at the moment is a more explicit development of the principal characteristics of collective urban intervention.

The need for collective action

Recall that the structural core of capitalist civil society consists of the institution of commodity production and exchange, together with a set of derivative social forms: the division of labour, the rate of profit, land markets, the family, residential neighbourhoods and so on. This core functions in conformity with a rationality that is based essentially on price signals, market competition, decentralized production decisions, and such legal arrangements as private property, individual rights, and the contractual equality of persons. These legal arrangements are the formal expression of a social system whose behavioural logic is codified within a system of individual decision-making and action. Civil society, then, can be seen as an ensemble of historically determinate social relationships which are actualized by a behavioural process comprised of a largely *privatized* system of calculations. By contrast, urban planning constitutes a sphere of *collective* political calculations, and it fills a vital decision-making gap within the totality of capitalist society.

As capitalist society finds expression in urban form and process, so it encounters limits to its own further development and viability. In the urban system, these limits are due less to external physical restrictions on the progress of society than they are to internal contradictions in the spatial dynamics of production and reproduction. A successfully functioning capitalism requires a geographical foundation in efficient production and reproduction spaces, but its own immanent logic tends to undermine

the essential bases of its success. This logic leads to an urban process that consistently results in multiform breakdowns in production and reproduction space. In short, because of the primacy of individual decision-making in commodity-producing society, a constant stream of pathological outcomes erupts through the urban land-use system. While these pathologies threaten to impair the functional efficiency of society at large, they are nonetheless immune to curative action via the normal (privatized) rationality of civil society. Consequently, when the dislocations, irrationalities and conflicts of the urban system begin to subvert prevailing social relationships, urban planning makes its historical appearance as a means of collectively re-adjusting the spatial and temporal development of urban land use.

Just as the State is a reflection of the political imperatives of civil society, so urban planning acquires and changes its specific goals, emphases and contingent ideologies (planning theory, planning education, professional codes of practice, etc.) in response to specific developments in urban civil society. Hence urban planning is not, and can never be, a simple homeostatic phenomenon (such as an invariant and logical system of decision-making rules and procedures). It is, on the contrary, an ever-changing historical process that is continually being shaped and re-shaped by a broad system of urban tensions. Thus, urban planners in Europe and North America have not turned their attention now to zoning procedures, now to urban renewal, now to expressway construction, simply as a result of the appearance of 'new ideas' within an abstract and self-propelling planning theory. It is only when urban development begins to produce *real* problems and predicaments that planners attempt to counteract them. In summary, planning is a historically-specific and socially-necessary response to the self-disorganizing tendencies of *privatized* capitalist social and property relations as these appear in urban space.

The limits to collective action

The limits of urban planning are set by two inter-related forces. One is the degree of political opposition to, or support for any specific interventionist tactic. The other is the degree of civil disruption engendered by any remedial assault on the functional breakdowns of the urban system. At the same time, planning is an active social force only *within* the prior structures and constraints of commodity-producing society. While planning is undoubtedly necessary to the continued viability of capitalism, it is also constantly resisted by capitalism. Collective control by the State is hence always acquired in a piecemeal and pragmatic fashion, and only with the grudging assent of civil society. Capital, in particular, is perennially unwilling to consent to the extension of state intervention and regulation. Yet, recognizing that its own survival is intimately dependent on some form of collective decision-making, it finally accepts – though always fractionally and only after internal struggle – the curtailment of its own sphere of operations which must occur before planning can function as an effective instrument of public policy.

Thus the reactive and palliative nature of urban planning in capitalism is not simply the result of some technical, analytical or human failure. It is, instead, the inevitable concomitant of a social logic that sets definite barriers around the range and effectiveness of all political action. Urban planning is a response to the imperative of collective action in the urban system, and yet it cannot transgress the very social relationships from which it is derived. It is, in short, a mode of intervention that is only implemented when it serves the specific interests of capitalism.

The conditions under which urban planning is activated or left in abeyance vary as capitalist society evolves through time, and as it encounters new political imperatives. In the early industrial towns, for example, the problems of discordant land uses were largely ignored by the State, with the exception of basic but perfunctory controls geared to matters of public hygiene and the maintenance of social order. At the turn of the century, nothing less than virtually universal zoning could contain urban land-use problems within socially necessary limits. By the 1930s, the State was deeply committed (as a partner of capital in the development of urban land) to massive investments in infrastructure and public housing. At the present time, state control over the process of urban land development is so great that it is virtually everywhere systematized within broad administrative arrangements, such as ministries of planning and/or urban affairs, a body of planning law, the urban general plan, and so on.

At each stage in the unfolding of this historical pattern, planning enters the scene in the form of an indispensable, but always restrained, instrument for overcoming the specific predicaments of the urban system. However, *because it is so limited in its range of operation, planning also emerges as a social phenomenon that compounds the overall problems of capitalist urbanization.* The action of planning itself engenders further rounds of urban predicaments. Thus, housing clearances for urban hygiene purposes in the nineteenth century led directly to the unresolved problem of lodging displaced families; zoning contributed to the overdevelopment of some urban areas at the expense of others, just as it also encouraged urban social segregation; the participation of the State in the physical production of urban land via the provision of complex infrastructure has given rise to the problem of land-use intensification in central business districts, while it has also encouraged uncontrolled outward expansion of cities; and the institutionalization of planning practice within a complex bureaucracy has contributed to the re-politicization of urban planning.

The failures and shortcomings of urban planning in practice are *not*, therefore, the result of a failure of planning research, or the imperfections of planning education, or the professional inadequacies of planners. In the matters of research, education and professional work, established levels of performance are more than equal to the structurally limited tasks that planners are required to perform. The failures of planning in practice are less failures of knowledge than they are inevitable concomitants of collective intervention in a society that at once clamours for and yet restrains such intervention.

Since the political collectivity cannot transcend the structures of civil society (except, of course, by a forced appropriation of the administrative apparatus of the State) it can never secure decisive control over the development of the urban system. Urban planning interventions are, by their very nature, remedial measures generated as reactive responses to urban land use and development pathologies. Planners are frequently able to control the outer symptoms of these pathologies, but they can never abolish the capitalist logic that produces them. Thus, each time that planners intervene to correct a given predicament, so the whole system is carried forward to a new stage of structural complexity in which new predicaments begin to manifest themselves. These, in turn, call for yet further rounds of collective intervention, carrying the urban system forward to a yet more complex state of development, and so on in repetitive sequence.

The urban political sphere

In the capitalist city, the dynamic relationship between civil society and the State assumes the form of an observable private/public partnership in the production and development of urban land. This partnership is the tangible manifestation of the fundamental antithesis between the imperatives of private action (as imposed by the norms and logic of commodity production) and the imperatives of collective action (as imposed by the failures of the institutions of civil society). Furthermore, this partnership between civil society and the State, and, as a corollary, between the market allocation and the political allocation of urban land, is not simply a mechanical relation between two autonomous sets of variables. It is a *dialectical* relation, in the sense that the institutions of civil society give rise, through successive mediations, to the historical need for collective action because they can only reproduce themselves through such collective action; at the same time, however, these same institutions impede and resist the emergence of collective action. In other words, the social and property relations of capitalism create an urban process which repels that on which its continued existence ultimately depends, i.e. collective action in the form of planning. In this way (and notwithstanding the pervasiveness of planning in contemporary cities) the urban system moves forward through time in a pattern of historical development that is ungoverned and, effectively, ungovernable. Beneath the appearance of social control over the evolution of the urban system lies the inexorable dynamic of a complex of land-contingent events that is essentially out of control.

The capitalist State is thus caught up in a constantly escalating spiral of urban interventions. The more it acts, the more it must continue to act. There can be no practical possibility of withdrawing from this process, except at the cost of a dramatic resurgence of those very problems and predicaments that made interventionist tactics necessary in the first place. It therefore seems safe to assume that urban planning, whatever its specific content, will continue to penetrate increasingly into all layers of urban life. This process, however, carries with it severe political penalties. As the State increasingly mediates the process of production and development

of urban land and space, so does it visibly modify the distribution of material benefits and costs accruing to various individuals and groups in the city. Concomitantly, discourses on urban planning begin to lose their utopian and apolitical patina (e.g. the conception of planning as that which 'seeks to promote human growth') and the true political nature of planning emerges with ever greater clarity. The more the State intervenes in the urban system, the greater is the likelihood that different social groups and fractions will contest the legitimacy of its decisions. *Urban life as a whole becomes progressively invaded by political controversies and dilemmas.* These controversies and dilemmas are as much related to geographical and territorial divisions of interest (neighbourhoods, suburban versus central city alliances, and so on) as they are to strict class lines of demarcation. In the contemporary city, political conflicts based on class are permeated and frequently submerged by conflicts based on spatial aggregates. In these conflicts, the role of urban planning as an instrument for regulating the institutions of commodity-producing society becomes increasingly apparent; the ideological confusions and distractions (such as mainstream planning theory) that surround the activity of planning start to drop away, as they are confronted with empirical circumstances that are increasingly inexplicable in terms of the received wisdom; urban planning experiences the same incipient crisis of legitimation that haunts the State as a whole in late capitalist society; and planning begins to emerge in its true colours, as one more administrative formation within a state apparatus that is, in its totality, rooted in the logic and predicaments of commodity-producing society.

Notes

- ¹ Observe, in passing, that these remarks run counter to: (a) Lojkine's (1977) theory of state intervention in urban space, as a mechanism for the devalorization of overaccumulated capital; and (b) Castell's (1977) theory of state intervention, as the socialization of consumption in the interests of accumulation (which is correct in so far as it goes but is unmediated by specific forms of market failure).

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